

Orlando

MEETING & INCENTIVE PLANNER GUIDE



No. 1 for
Meetings



Orlando No.1 for Meetings

Orlando Continues to Raise the Bar Every Year

For the fourth year out of the last five, in 2016 Orlando ranked No. 1 once again on Cvent's most recent list of the top meeting destinations in the U.S.

"Orlando continues to raise the bar every year," proclaims George Aguel, president and CEO of Visit Orlando.

Home to the country's second largest convention center and the second-largest concentration of hotel rooms in

By David Swanson

Orlando continues to grow, with even more new options each year," says Aguel. "Unique venues such as I-Drive 360,

Pointe Orlando and Mango's Tropical Café combine engaging environments, onsite entertainment and flexible event spaces. And new venues like the Main Event entertainment complex at Pointe Orlando and the coming-soon Topgolf Orlando location provide fresh experiences for attendees such as virtual, interactive and immersive sporting environments.

"Planners want to bring their events to the next level with novel experiences, and venues such as these — and of course our world-renowned theme parks — deliver the variety and creativity to do just that." It's these ingredients, Aguel suggests, that make the destination more desirable to corporate groups. This year, Orlando looks forward to welcoming several new corporations hosting conferences this year, including Microsoft, Walmart, Grainger and Ellucian.

"We continue to see a rise in the combination of business and leisure travel," says Aguel, a combo he refers to as "bleisure" travel. "Our destination offers creative opportunities for attendees to spend time together and network, but with an added entertainment component that really

"Planners may not be aware of how much Orlando continues to grow, with even more new options each year."



*George Aguel, President and CEO
Visit Orlando*

the U.S., Orlando can hardly be said to rest on its laurels. The Central Florida destination continues to seek new ways to stimulate its convention industry, a crucial component of the city's economy. At the Orange County Convention Center, total attendance in 2016 was 1,456,816, an increase of 6.5 percent over the previous year. The number of individual events was up 17.7 percent. The region's hotel inventory has grown 37 percent over the last two decades, with 119,000 rooms today at a variety of price points, from budget to luxury.

And the growth shows no sign of abating. No sooner did Universal Orlando Resort debut its fifth standalone hotel, Sapphire Falls Resort in 2016, than the company announced a sixth — the Aventura Hotel — to open summer 2018. Disney's Coronado Springs Resort — the largest of six convention hotels at the Mouse House — is expanding, with a 15-story tower planned to add 500 rooms to the hotel.

"Planners may not be aware of how much



The Pointe Orlando dining and entertainment district.



The Coca-Cola Orlando Eye.

enhances the overall experience. For instance, instead of hosting a traditional banquet in a hotel ballroom, planners can take their group into a theme park one evening,

virtually taking over an entire attraction, for a truly unforgettable memory.”

Bleisure Business Stepping Up

Vince LaRuffa, senior vice president of resort sales and marketing at Universal Orlando Resort concurs with Aguel.

“Business and leisure can be combined,” suggests LaRuffa. “We’re definitely seeing a boost, and at Universal Orlando we’re really able to allow groups to take advantage. If an attendee wants to bring their family, they can bring them along to enjoy dining and attractions. And this means the planner doesn’t have to plan every minute of an attendee’s day — they have access to water taxi service and CityWalk, and dining at other hotels, regardless of what hotel they stay at.”

One could argue that today’s Universal Orlando is the house that Harry Potter built. In June 2010, at Universal’s

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Orlando No.1 for Meetings



Group events at Universal Studios Florida (l) and The Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

second theme park “gate” Islands of Adventure, the company opened the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Attendance at the park surged — from an estimated 5.9 million in 2009 to 7.7 million in 2010 (and the Potter attraction was only open the latter half of that year). In July 2014, a Diagon Alley expansion of Wizarding World debuted at the adjacent Universal Studios Florida, and attendance at that theme park spiked again, from an estimated 7.1 million in 2013 to 8.3 million the following year. The cash infusion has no doubt prompted parent company NBCUniversal to reinvest in its busy Orlando operation.

“Potter inspired us to improve what was already a pretty incredible destination,” says LaRuffa. “Since 2010 we’ve introduced 25 new guest experiences, and grown more than any other destination that I can think of. There’s been an expansion of CityWalk, with 10 new dining concepts there in 2015-16 alone. We’re opening Race Through New York Starring Jimmy Fallon at Universal Studios Florida in April, and Universal’s Volcano Bay will have a grand opening on May 25.”

While the initial two Universal Studios Florida hotels, Loews Portofino Bay Hotel and Hard Rock Hotel, offered only limited meeting facilities, the company has invested heavily in the meetings sector in recent years.

“We were limited in terms of size of meeting we could accommodate,” says LaRuffa. “But we’ve expanded pretty dramatically.” Universal grew the meeting space at Loews Royal Pacific Resort, opened the adjacent Loews Sapphire Falls Resort, and named the shared convention center between them the Loews Meeting Complex at Universal

Orlando. The combined complex offers 2,000 rooms and 247,000 sf of meeting space, including a 41,000-sf ballroom. In total, the five hotels at Universal Orlando today contain 5,200 rooms overall and 295,000 sf of meeting space — and more is under construction.

“We had several corporate and association meeting planners that had a complete array of meetings but, certain meetings, they couldn’t bring here. We now have the capability to accommodate meetings of all sizes, and to deliver to a broader variety of needs.”

And, of course, Universal Orlando Resort is not your typical hotel and meeting complex, providing the equip-



“We have an incredible team of creative experts that can offer everything from intimate, memorable moments to volunteer experiences.”

*Vince LaRuffa, Senior Vice President of Resort Sales and Marketing
Universal Orlando Resort, Orlando, FL*

ment and professionals to take a program beyond its traditional banquet dinner.

“We’re all about immersion,” adds LaRuffa. “We have an incredible team of creative experts that can offer everything from intimate, memorable moments to volunteer experiences. We’re a powerful combo of Loews hotels, which has a great tradition of hospitality, combined with Universal, an entertainment company. Put that together, and we’re committed to exceeding expectations and providing unforgettable experiences. We really believe that Universal Orlando Resort is unmatched in its ability to provide engaging, inspiring and entertaining experiences.” **ORLANDO**

AN **ALL-NEW** PERSPECTIVE ON MEETINGS AND EVENTS

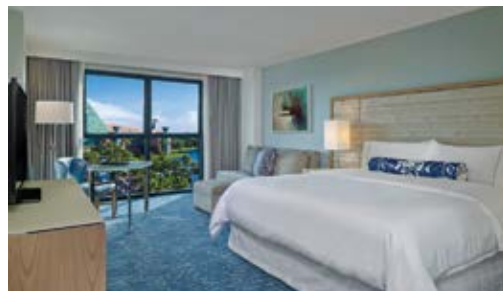


All-New Walt Disney World Dolphin Lobby Concept - *Scheduled for completion in September 2017*

The Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby will undergo a \$12 million re-design, the final stage of a \$140 million renovation project, the largest makeover in the resort's history. It will be completely transformed into a sleek, contemporary space featuring new food and beverage options and offer an inviting area for guests to relax or network. A recipient of the prestigious Meetings & Conventions Hall of Fame Award, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 329,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 84 meeting rooms, and 2,267 guest rooms and suites which feature the Westin Heavenly® Bed. Attendees can also relax in the luxurious Mandara Spa, indulge in one of our 17 world-class restaurants and lounges or enjoy our unique Disney Differences.



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The outdoor demo for Bombardier Recreational Products.

Flexibility Is the Name of the Game

When you do your site inspection of meeting hotels in Orlando, one word crops up repeatedly: flexibility. Finding a venue that can be easily molded into a facility that covers all your needs, but some places deliver it better than others.

For its annual Club BRP event last August, Quebec-based recreational vehicle manufacturer Bombardier Recreational Products (BRP) needed a unique host hotel and meeting space to showcase its 2017 lineup of Sea-Doo watercraft, Can-Am Spyder three-wheel vehicles, and Can-Am ATV and side-by-side vehicles.

"We have very specific site requirements," explains Maryse Messier, BRP's manager, event marketing. The annual event is large enough to involve 27 trucks for hauling gear and equipment, and complex enough that site

owned parking lot, was right next to the hotel — it was perfect for us. The attendees could walk out of the showroom in the hotel right to the space where we showed off our new products."

There also was a Global Product Reveal Show, during which the new lineup is showcased. "We thought of doing it in the demo area, but after further consideration we became concerned about rain in August. So, we looked for a space in the Orange County Convention Center, and, all I can say is, they were a lifesaver. They had space available in the exhibit hall at the South Concourse. It was amazing."

With almost 2,400 attendees, Club BRP used virtually all of the inventory at the 1,641-room Hyatt Regency Orlando (a smaller block of guests was parked at the Rosen Centre Hotel across the street). The Hyatt Regency offers 315,000 sf of meeting space, including 105 breakout rooms, and five pillar-free ballrooms, with the largest being the 55,000-sf Regency Ballroom.

"The Hyatt Regency convention center is very modern and efficient and well thought out, the flow was good. The hotel also helped a lot when we did our product reveal in the convention center by guiding our attendees over. The only drawback was that the distance from guest rooms in the first tower over to the convention center was a little farther than some would have liked. But once they arrived there, it all came together." Messier pointed to the Hyatt Regency's event planning manager Marjorie Trott as being a particular asset to the hotel. "If event planners deal with Marjorie, they're going to have great service."

One disappointment to the BRP team was that the Hyatt Regency's lagoon-like pool area was not available for a closing night-party. "There was an early curfew for the pool, and they wouldn't extend it, even though we occupied 90 percent of the guest rooms. So we ended up doing the party inside. Guests wound up in the pool anyway, though without the music."

BRP also scheduled a "free night," with prepaid debit cards provided to attendees to use anywhere. "Our DMC Hello Florida helped us with coordination of shuttles to

"It's tough to find demo sites that are located next to nice, big hotels. Fortunately, the Hyatt Regency Orlando provided that."



*Maryse Messier, Manager, Event Marketing
Bombardier Recreational Products, Valcourt, Québec, Canada*

visits begin almost two years ahead. "Our dates are very specific as well, all related to production and availability of prototypes. To launch our new product lines, we need 70,000 sf for our showroom alone, plus another 40,000 sf for the global show and another space for meals. Then, we need an outdoor demo site."

Messier says the demo site is a particular challenge. "It's tough to find demo sites that are located next to nice, big hotels. Fortunately, the Hyatt Regency Orlando provided that." The hotel, formerly The Peabody Orlando, also ranks higher than any other in Orlando on Cvent's 2016 list of the top meeting hotels in the U.S.

"In selecting our location the big trigger for us with the Hyatt Regency Orlando was that the demo site, a privately



The Bombardier Recreational Products Global Product Reveal Show.



The Rosen Centre Hotel.

three destinations: Disney Springs, Universal CityWalk and Pointe Orlando. This was a way for our guests to experience the area and discover the city. Everybody was very happy with how it turned out for that night."

What advice does Messier have for meeting planners considering Orlando? "Depending on the complexity of your plans, if there might be a need, hire a DMC. We got away from DMCs for a while, but now we've starting using them again. When it's a good DMC, you can leave your special needs to them, and they will take care of it from beginning to end. Hello Florida was very professional, and they helped so much to take the pressure off."

In planning a meeting for the plant and technology managers at chemicals manufacturer Arkema, Matrix Meeting Solutions' Jeff Garnes reached out to Florida-based Creative Imagineering for his closing-night event. Garnes,

president of the Valparaiso, Indiana-based Matrix Meeting Solutions, says he had terrific results using Creative Imagineering's custom software for a game show.

"Creative Imagineering has custom software and game scoring hardware, and for our meeting we designed the final onsite dinner to take place in the (Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek) plenary session room," saving big bucks on audio-visual, Garnes adds. "They brought in a retired broadcaster/comedian as a game show host and created a custom 'Family Feud' competition. It not only heightened engagement between our participants but created a truly memorable peak to the meeting — they were cheering and howling with delight."

Garnes also recommends tapping into the creative team

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Orlando Meeting Hotels

behind the scenes at Universal Studios. “They’re experts at delivering that unexpected ‘wow’ factor. We’ve worked with them both at their onsite venues and also to bring their concepts to remote events.”

For his 80-person Arkema meeting last October, Garnes used the Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek, a 400-room property located on a unique lakeside setting minutes from Walt Disney World Resort. The Wyndham has more than 32,000 sf of flexible meeting and function space, including the Ponce de Leon Ballroom, which can be divided into seven sections. The resort, which opened in 2011, is one of the few properties both managed and owned by Wyndham; a Wyndham-managed time-share is adjacent — guests of both properties can use the facilities (pools, restaurants and bars) of the other.

Garnes says he was tipped off about the Wyndham by a prior client.

“The group had a very successful meeting earlier in the year and couldn’t say enough about the Wyndham’s high level of service. We gave them a close look and found fresh air in both their sales approach and their focus on delivering high-quality conference service support. We worked with them to obtain a very attractive conference rate. Perhaps one of Orlando’s best attributes for conference participants is the opportunity to share the experience and bring family along, and Wyndham offered pre/post meeting options that gave our participants quality family time to enjoy the many attractions.” (One attribute not common among meeting hotels: 84 family rooms with separate bunk bedrooms for kids.)

While Garnes notes that superior function space isn’t a



Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek.

unique requirement, the arrangements he negotiated with the Wyndham provided the opportunity to deliver an outstanding experience for his client. “The ballroom space we contracted was not only contiguous for meetings, meals and breakouts — enabling our group much greater efficiency with participant movement during intervals between



“Perhaps one of Orlando’s best attributes for conference participants is the opportunity to share the experience and bring family along.”

Jeff Garnes, President
Matrix Meeting Solutions, Valparaiso, IN

events — it allowed us to design the plenary session room more creatively, delivering both aesthetic appeal and even saving on audio-visual equipment costs.

Garnes says the Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek has “more than its fair share” of talented, outstanding meeting pros. “Sales Manager Stan Kaczorwski set the stage, letting us know that — even with a group as small as ours — he was prepared to showcase and deliver a fresh take on how they create and build on the typically over-used word,

‘relationship.’ And Miguelina ‘Miggy’ Urena, the director of catering and conference services, took the ball from Stan and personally oversaw delivery of all aspects of our program. Somehow she seemed to break the laws of physics and be ahead of us before we knew we needed her.

“So often you find a great initial impression diminishes between contract and meeting execution, but with these folks, we found our experience was only amplified,” Garnes adds. **ORLANDO**



The Arkema meeting, held in October at the Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek.

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Angling to take a bigger bite out of the city's ample midsize meeting and convention business, the DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld is in the process of completing a renovation that will add 40,000 sf of conference space to the hotel's existing 60,000 sf of flexible meeting space. The property was acquired in late 2015 by Spire Hospitality, a Deerfield, Illinois-based hotel management company that moved quickly to capitalize on the lush, 28-acre property located within walking distance to the convention center.

"We saw this great resort that had so much to work with," says Bill DeForrest, Spire's president and CEO. "There's demand coming from so many different market segments, but one of the key areas is having the ability to drive meeting and conference business. We looked at it and we thought we could reinvent part of the property so that it would be a strong destination for mid-sized meetings and conferences. We already benefit greatly from our location close to the convention center, but there are a lot of meetings in the 1,000- to 2,000-person size."

The 1,020-room property, built in 1989 and formerly known as the International Plaza Resort and Spa, is being transformed on several fronts. Existing function space at the Palm Conference Center has already been completely refreshed, and a new ballroom with a 25-foot ceiling is being built. The Majestic Ballroom will add 18,622 sf when it opens this summer, providing the hotel's largest single indoor venue.

The existing outdoor Oceans Ballroom is being enclosed and converted into a prefunction foyer, while a new outdoor meeting space, Palm Promenade, will open this summer. Offering firepits and a water feature, this new space will measure approximately 24,000 sf.

Real estate devoted to the resort's spa facility has been



"We're building that executive courtyard, great social spaces, a ballroom with high ceilings, all the latest technology."

*Bill DeForrest, President and CEO
Spire Hospitality, Deerfield, IL*

repurposed into boardrooms. The fitness center has been relocated to a more central site and is now stocked with Precor Fitness Equipment. This fall, the 300 rooms in the Tower Building, a 17-floor structure that anchors the hotel, will get a facelift — the balance of the rooms are in two- and three-story bungalows spread around the property and were renovated recently.

"It is a beehive of activity right now, but we'll be wrapped up by end of July," says DeForrest. "We're building that executive courtyard, great social spaces, a ballroom with high ceilings, all the latest technology — it's a



DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld.





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Orlando New & Renovated Hotels



Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel.

significant change for the hotel, but absolutely the right evolution of this property.”

Other properties are staying in step with major overhauls. In December, the Starwood-managed Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel completed a \$5 million renovation of 329,000 sf meeting space, a refresh designed to update carpet and paint along with installing new technology for the convention facilities. The meeting space refurbishments are part of the iconic resort’s multiyear \$140 million redesign, which includes an up-



Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate.

date for the Dolphin Hotel lobby and a facelift for all 2,267 guest rooms (The Swan Hotel side rooms were finished in 2015; Dolphin side rooms are scheduled for completion in fall 2017).

Designed by noted architect Robert Graves and opened in 1990, the iconic resorts are located next to Disney’s Epcot theme park. Guests of the Swan and Dolphin Hotel enjoy some valuable extras normally availed only to those staying at a Disney-owned property. They can take advantage of extended theme park hours, as each day one of the four Disney theme parks opens an hour early or stays open up to two hours after regular closing. And Disney’s scheduled boat launches and bus transportation throughout the resort are available to Swan and Dolphin guests.

Groups using the Swan and Dolphin meeting facilities are not limited to the resort’s guest rooms. Three adjacent hotels — Disney’s Yacht and Beach Club and Disney’s Boardwalk resorts — are located within walking distance. Companies such as information technology research company Gartner Inc., which has outgrown the Swan and Dolphin complex for its annual IT Operations Strategies & Solutions Summit, now also use the Disney hotels, creating a seamless campus environment. In total, the five hotels in the Epcot Collection offer 422,000 sf of indoor function space and 128,000 sf of outdoor space — 119 meeting rooms in all — and a total of 3,800 guest rooms, including 231 suites.

South of Walt Disney World near Kissimmee, Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate is undertaking its largest major expansion since the property opened in 2004. The \$40 million project includes the addition of 100,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting and event space, as well as a market-style restaurant. A new, 46,000-sf Osceola Conference Center opening this fall will feature six flexible breakout rooms and a new outdoor event space with high-performance pavers, a terrace with a fireplace, promenade, patio space, event gardens and grand lawn. The three ballrooms range up to 28,872 sf in size. In total, the resort will have 128,000 sf of meeting space.

Nearing completion and scheduled to be available for guests in May, the resort’s 15-acre recreational area will see an additional 23,000 sf of tiered deck space and seating, 16 new private pool-side cabanas, 400 additional lounge chairs and expansion of the kid’s pool area and water slides. The facility will feature the Orlando area’s only resort wave pool. This fall also will see the debut of a new three-story building for 93 additional accommodations — guest rooms that can be configured into two-, three- or up to 23 four-bedroom connecting units. On completion, the resort will encompass 813 guest rooms and 49 two- and three-bedroom luxury villas.

The upgrades at Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate are the beginning of a multiphase enhancement to the luxury destination, as the downtown ChampionsGate area is adding a three-building shopping complex with notable retailers and restaurants. Other facilities available include a full-service spa, seven dining options, two championship Greg Norman-designed golf courses and the world headquarters of the David Leadbetter Golf Academy, for private instruction. **ORLANDO**



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Orlando Success Stories



A Kforce meeting at the Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace.

‘Customer Service at Its Finest’

The 498-room Waldorf Astoria Orlando opened in 2009 and has quickly established itself as a player for luxury meetings. The resort — built as a dedicated Waldorf Astoria hotel in 2009 — has almost 42,000 sf of multifunction space that can be sectioned into 13 meeting rooms, two boardrooms and a Grand Ballroom, which offers one of the most elegant prefunction areas this writer has ever seen.

“When you stay in highly rated hotels, the food and service are always good — never a problem or complaint,” suggests Kimberly Mikula, executive assistant at DDR Corp., a real estate investment trust in Beachwood, Ohio. “However, of all the meetings I have planned, I honestly can say working with the staff of the Waldorf Astoria was by far the best experience. From the initial call with the sales group to the valets and front desk upon arrival, to the catering staff, everything was superior — truly customer service at its finest.”

Mikula organized a 14-person meeting of DDR’s board of directors, and she cited Orlando’s location — close to some of the shopping centers DDR owns — as a driving factor for selecting the city. But she was hampered by circumstances that forced her to start the process late. “Our preference would have been to have our meeting in their boardroom, however that was already booked,” Mikula adds.

“But the one thing that sets the Waldorf Astoria apart from the rest is their customer service and genuine interest in wanting your event to be a complete success. This was demonstrated to me as there was another very large group having their national managers meeting. That group filled all the other meeting spaces, and we took the last two rooms available. Not once was I made to feel secondary to this other group. In fact, I truly felt like we were the only group there.

“Anna Rodriguez, event manager, and her team were always checking in with me to make sure our meeting space and catering were seamless. Also impressive was Juan Diaz, sales manager, who stopped in to introduce himself and make sure everything was going well. Both Anna and Juan were only an email away and quick to reply because when you need something, it’s needed immediately.

“When placing my order for catering, the Waldorf Astoria was able to customize meals. We certainly didn’t go outside their menus too much, however, I was able to pick and choose from all their selections to make up my own breakfast

and lunch menus. This did not pose any issues at all for the event team. I also used several of their outside contractors for our meeting — electrical, audio-visual and furniture rental. These contractors dealt with me regarding our specific meeting needs, put quotes together quickly and delivered as promised. Everything was set up as promised and on time — we walked into the meeting space and started the meeting.”

On request, the Waldorf Astoria team also provided a customized room amenity for Mikula’s group. “I like to have a welcome gift for our guests upon their arrival specific to the locale. But instead of the normal itemized list I asked them to put together a Florida Sunshine State-themed amenity, and what they came up with was terrific: Waldorf Astoria’s key lime pie, local tangelo, Winter Park honey and Pleasant Ridge cheese. The presentation was beautiful, and they were also able to work within my budget.”

In the end, Mikula and her board were sold on Orlando. “I



“But the one thing that sets the Waldorf Astoria apart...is their customer service and genuine interest in wanting your event to be a complete success.”

*Kimberly Mikula, Executive Assistant
DDR Corp., Beachwood, OH*

can’t think of one disadvantage,” she says. “In fact, several of our directors expressed that they wouldn’t mind returning to Orlando for another meeting.”

The Waldorf Astoria is actually connected cheek-by-jowl with the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek, which combined avails a substantially greater meeting capacity. The complex overall features 175,000 sf of function space, including an outdoor venue — Signature Island. If the Waldorf Astoria’s 7,945-sf Grand Ballroom isn’t big enough for an event you have in mind, the shared facilities between the two hotels offer two additional ballrooms, including the 35,925-sf Bonnet Creek Ballroom. Recreational needs also are covered: In addition to scheduled transportation to Disney’s theme parks and full-service spa, the Bonnet Creek development is home to a Rees Jones-designed 18-hole golf course.



The Waldorf Astoria Orlando.



The Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace.

Great Airlift Is Always a Factor

For Kforce Inc., a professional staffing services firm based in Tampa, Orlando filled the bill for a sales training event in November attended by 810 clients.

“The Orlando airport provided many options for our attendees, who are coming from all over the United States,” explains Ray Morganti, senior vice president of employee experience at Kforce. The planner cautioned that transfer times to his host hotel — the Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace, Disney Springs area — varied. “The quantity of non-stop flights throughout the day was an important decision for the selection of Orlando. But traffic can be a challenge, depending on the time of day. We used Mears for our transfers, and they were excellent — the average time from the airport was about 30 minutes. But the extensive selection of flight options to and from Orlando made up for the amount of ground transfer time we experienced.”

The Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace, located inside Walt Disney World Resort across the street from Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista, underwent a top-to-bottom renovation, which was completed in February. The hotel has 1,011 rooms, most of which are in a 27-story tower that rises to the highest point inside Walt Disney World, all of which are fresh from a facelift. A separate Island Building overlooking the pool area, connected to the main tower by covered walkway, has 800-sf suites that are usually targeted to the leisure crowd, but can be a good option for VIP guests. As part of the renovations, the pool area also received a complete overhaul, and an adult pool, whirlpool and the main feature pool, the Float lagoon, was added.

“For focused training days involving 12-hour sessions, the Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace had everything we needed,” says Morganti. “Preferred dates, ballroom space for the training event, breakout rooms and an excellent reputation for handling large groups. We had worked with them in the past, and they had the availability. They provided a good rate and were very easy to contract with, and when we met with them, we were very impressed with the level of commitment from the general manager to the F&B team — they really wanted to earn our business. We established a relationship from the first meeting and maintained it well after the event.”

Kforce required a ballroom that could seat 800 in rounds, with significant audio-visual capabilities for training. Additionally, the group needed breakout rooms, plus a second ballroom for meals to be able to move quickly from

the training venue to meals and then back again. The hotel has two ballrooms measuring up to 18,360 sf, along with 42 breakouts and an executive boardroom, making it a perfect fit for a group the size of Kforce.

“The ballrooms were just renovated and worked very well for us,” adds Morganti. “And the in-house PSAV and IT team were an excellent partner for our unique and changing requirements.”

While Morganti expressed appreciation for the entire staff, he particularly heralded the hotel’s leadership. “The sales team, Jared McLaughlin and Frederic Larue, made this deal work in a very short time frame — it was only three months from the time we contacted them to the time the meeting took place. Shannon Butler, our convention services manager, was instrumental in our planning process and made sure we were ready when the sales meeting started. But the entire staff worked so well together — from the valet, bell desk, front desk, housekeeping and food and beverage, making this a very efficient, productive and pleasant training event for our firm.”

And the Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace, which boasts 108,000 sf of event space, can be “stretched” for an even larger meeting by tying in with the 814-room Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista across the street, which has an additional 78,000 sf of flexible meeting space. The hotels’ close relationship with Disney means the Hiltons have access to not only the Disney Springs complex, but to events at the neighboring Disney Institute and inside the theme parks.

Morganti’s experience was most likely not that unusual. Perhaps the only deviation for a meeting planner working well ahead would be the sea of options to wade through. It’s why Visit Orlando’s George Aguel recommends starting with his team.

“We are a planner’s best resource,” suggests Aguel. “Visit Orlando provides a collaborative approach to servicing meeting planners, and we also provide a complete convention staffing service. The destination has changed so much in the last three to five years, and Orlando offers a staggering menu of unique locations — all these choices can sometimes be overwhelming in the quest to plan the ultimate conference. Meeting planners who work with Visit Orlando will engage with a destination expert that becomes an extension of their team.

“We are a partner to help them create a great meeting and ensure their attendees have a truly memorable experience,” he adds.

ORLANDO

Orlando Nightlife & Entertainment

There's Always Something for Everybody

The I-Drive corridor extending from Universal Orlando down to the Orange County Convention Center and SeaWorld is flush with nightlife, entertainment as well as unusual options for offsite venues and incentive destinations.

One of the newer offerings is I-Drive 360, an entertainment complex that offers three distinct experiences “under” one roof. Most prominent is the Coca-Cola Orlando Eye, a giant observation wheel (in the style of the original London Eye), studded with viewing capsules that rise 400 feet above the strip. The 30-minute experience costs \$25 per person, but a private capsule is \$275 (plus tax) for up to 15 passengers. Or planners can rent the entire wheel for three hours for \$1,800 including tickets for up to 100 guests.

At the same site is Sealife Orlando, a marine aquarium attraction geared to families, and Madame Tussauds. For those who associate the latter amusement with tacky tourist zones, know that the possibilities for meeting attendees to pose with an array of familiar characters — the wax figures from presidents to celebrities can all be touched — is endless. Take over the whole facility for a three-hour event for 160 attendees for \$2,500. The I-Drive 360 complex also includes a series of restaurants and shops, and buyouts of the entire complex are possible.

Pointe Orlando has evolved over the last few years into one of Orlando's hottest entertainment areas, with outdoor shopping, dining and entertainment just a few minutes away from the convention center on foot. While the 17-acre site can accommodate a buyout of up to 10,000 people, individual spaces can be rented, including B.B. King's Blues Club (capacity 700 seated or 1,600 for a reception) and restaurants ranging from the 187-seat steakhouse Itta Bena to the 520-seat Lafayette's. Another option is a buyout of part or all of Main Event, Pointe Or-



Blue Man Group at Universal Orlando Resort.

lando's bowling/arcade facility covering almost 50,000 sf. State-of-the-art bowling lanes, arcade games, an elevated challenge course and virtual reality pursuits are accompanied by a full bar-and-grill style menu.

Opened in 2015, Mango's Tropical Café is a dinner theater-style operation featuring music and dancing straight from Miami's South Beach (where the original Mango's is based). While the venue is available nightly to the public for drinks, dinner and dancing, the 55,000-sf space has many components that can be hired separately, from in-

WE'RE
EXPANDING
MORE THAN JUST
HORIZONS.

Opening late spring 2017 through fall 2017, the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate will add new meeting space, a spectacular wedding venue, outdoor event space, room accommodations, a market-style restaurant and expanded pool areas—including Orlando's only resort wave pool. With the completed expansion, there will be more ways to defy convention and even more reasons to celebrate.

GUEST ROOMS: 862
SUITES: 71
INDOOR MEETING SPACE: 248,111
LARGEST MEETING SPACE: 28,800
MEETING ROOMS: 48
THEATER CAP: 3,200
BANQUET CAP: 2,400
CLASSROOM CAP: 2,000
EXHIBIT SPACE: 72,000



MEETING SPACE

An additional 100,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space will be added, scheduled to open this fall. The Osceola Conference Center will feature six new flexible breakout rooms, with a fresh, sleek design. Also included, a 6,500-square-foot Great Room, designed for special events and weddings, and the Great Room Terrace and Patio offers the option of a grand lawn, fireplace and promenade, ideal for outdoor events.

ACCOMMODATIONS

In addition to the 769 guest rooms and luxury two and three bedroom villas, additional accommodations will be added this fall. A new three-story building will consist of 93 spacious, upscale guest rooms. This will bring the resort's total guest room count to 862.

DINING AND F&B

Eight on-site restaurants are available, including our new Market-Style restaurant.

SPECIAL AMENITIES/INCENTIVES

In early summer 2017, expanding the already impressive 15-acre recreation area, Omni Orlando Resort will unveil 24,000 square feet of additional deck space, Orlando's only resort wave pool, 16 additional private cabanas and an expansion of the kid's pool area and water slides. ChampionsGate is also home to the Greg Norman designed National and rejuvenated International Course, and the David Leadbetter Golf Academy World Headquarters.

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Orlando Nightlife & Entertainment



The Planet Hollywood Observatory is now open.

dividual rooms with their own bar (and separate sound system) for 150 to 300 guests reception-style, up to taking the entire second floor, which can accommodate 350 seated or 1,000 for a reception.

International entertainment phenomenon Blue Man Group has been performing in the custom-built Blue Man Group Theatre at Universal CityWalk since 2006. With 1,000 seats, a 30-foot Blue Man façade and plenty of paint,

opening May 25. From daring water adventures to moments of peaceful relaxation, guests will be granted the powers of the TapuTapu wearable to hold a place in the ride lines and much more.

When Topgolf debuts this fall on Universal Boulevard near the convention center, golfers will have their own Dave & Buster's-style play area. The 65,000-sf facility marries the sport with 21st century technology, hundreds of high-definition TVs, and a food and beverage menu — potentially a great target for an offsite incentive activity (the facility includes 3,000 sf of private event space). Golf balls are embedded with microchips to track driving range play, allowing guests to compete from the comfort of 102 climate-controlled hitting bays.

SeaWorld's second "gate" Discovery Cove offers a nifty alternative to buying out an entire theme park for a private event. It's much smaller, accommodating up to 500 people for evening events, which can be booked year-round. Discovery Cove's typical evening event might be their Luau offer, with covered outdoor seating for up to 250 guests (and total seating of 400) against a backdrop of white sand beaches and dolphin lagoons. Along with the meal, Discovery Cove provides a lei greeting, a Polynesian trio for music, a DJ and a fire-knife dancer. An F&B minimum of \$75 per person applies, against a \$15,000 guarantee. In winter months, when the park is only open on weekends, the park is available for daytime



Universal's new water theme park, Volcano Bay, will open May 25.

Blue Man Group at Universal Orlando Resort offers audiences a fun-filled experience like no other.

The award-winning Blue Man Group show, performed in more than 20 countries and seen by more than 35 million people worldwide since 1991, is a dynamic combination of art, music, comedy and technology. The show's celebration of human connection has universal appeal for a broad range of age groups and cultural backgrounds, thus making it ideal for corporate groups as well. The show is continually refreshed with new music, fresh stories, custom instruments and state-of-the-art technology. In addition to Orlando, Blue Man Group has permanent theatrical productions in New York, Las Vegas, Boston, Chicago, Berlin and a World Tour.

Universal's Volcano Bay is an all-new water theme park

events during midweek — and groups of up to 1,000 — for dolphin swims and other swimsuit-ed activities.

Now open, the reimagined Planet Hollywood Observatory located in the heart of Disney Springs, boasts extraordinary event space for groups of all sizes.

With the building's exterior reminiscent of a turn-of-the-century observatory with a modern design aesthetic, the interior will feature four stories of space-age design and some of Hollywood's most unique memorabilia. There are five different event spaces available that include Stargazers bar, which touts 20 different taps with an eclectic selection of Florida craft brews, and nightly live entertainment; an expansive main floor; and two outdoor patios. There also is an interactive DJ spinning the hits nightly on the main floor.

ORLANDO

WHERE MEETING PLANNERS BECOME **HEROES.**



MEETINGS & EVENTS

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Rosen Shingle Creek.

Teeing Up Golf for a Meeting

Although the number of golf courses in Orlando has been on somewhat of a decline since 2001, the sport remains a prime draw for many visitors. It's one reason some owners are steadily reinvesting in their greens.

Shingle Creek Golf Course occupies much of the 255-acre Rosen Shingle Creek resort, and a redesign of the 18-hole course was completed in December by Arnold Palmer Design Company. Overseen by senior golf course architect Thad Layton, three holes were completely revamped on a new 25-acre parcel, while the balance of the course was updated with new hazards and extra-long par 4s and 5s. Fairway-cut surrounds and runoff areas were incorporated to inspire strategy and provide golfers of all levels better forgiveness and recovery options. Rounding out the golf club is a 70,000-sf driving range and 15,000-sf



"I don't believe I've ever visited Shingle Creek without seeing (owner) Harris Rosen moving around to make sure the service quality is amazing."

*Mark McDonald, Director, Customer Relations and Events
Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, Cuyahoga Falls, OH*

practice area, along with the Brad Brewer Golf Academy, providing swing analysis and game improvement technology at indoor hitting bays.

That's not the end of improvements at the 1,501-room Rosen Shingle Creek, which features 490,000 sf of meeting space. Technology upgrades throughout the hotel provide more opportunities to recharge electronics, while all guest rooms, the hotel's grand lobby and many of its retail, restaurant and lounge spaces have been refreshed with a more contemporary Spanish revival-style design. A new open-air, covered pavilion has been built for "19th hole" events, and other restaurants at the property have been expanded or received a facelift.

The recent upgrades were enjoyed by an incentive group of 100 overseen by Mark McDonald, director, customer relations and events for Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio.

"Rosen Shingle Creek has some of the largest and most flexible convention space in the U.S.," explains McDonald. "It's very important to us to keep everyone in the same hotel that is attached to the convention center — it promotes great networking with our participants. Their flexibility of meeting space and their banquet food quality are both fantastic — they are very creative in putting on a great event around food and beverages."

The quality of food and comfortable sleeping rooms stood out for McDonald, who added that the hotel "makes you feel at home." But he also cites a couple of "it" factors that particularly resonated, starting with "welcome home" mats placed outside rooms for repeat visitors.

"I don't believe I've ever visited Shingle Creek without seeing (owner) Harris Rosen moving around to make sure



The National at Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate.



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HOTELS & RESORTS

The newly transformed AAA Four Diamond Rosen Shingle Creek is a destination unto itself, set on 255 lush acres featuring 1,501 elegant guestrooms and 195 suites. Ranked a Top 25 U.S. Meeting Hotel by Cvent, it offers everything under one roof: 490,000 square feet of meeting and event space, 15 on-site restaurants and lounges, a full-service spa and the lavish new golf course redesigned by Arnold Palmer Design Company. Add in extensive stunning renovations to guestrooms and the lobby, plus brand-new restaurants and enhancements including expanded seating in select dining outlets. These exciting changes and a convenient location near I-Drive and Orlando International Airport make for an even more exceptional Orlando experience.



Orlando Golf & Spa



(Top and above) The Grand Cypress Golf Club, which wraps the Villas of Grand Cypress.

the service quality is amazing. We keep on thinking we should go to a new location, but Orlando continues investing in the future for meetings.”

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate boasts two championship 18-hole golf courses designed by accomplished architect and legendary golfer Greg Norman and a lighted nine-hole, par-3 golf course. Golfers also like the convenience of walk-out golf with a continuous golf cart shuttle to and from the golf course and the David Leadbetter Golf Academy.

The recent rejuvenation project of the International Course yields improved playing conditions with a complete restoration of 18 greens and all green-side bunker complexes. Picking up more than 42,000 sf of greens surface allows for several new pin positions that test players of all skill levels. A number of fairway bunkers also were removed for this rejuvenation project to allow for cleaner sight lines off the tee. The course still boasts a raw design of a rustic “down under” style of a coastal links course from Greg Norman’s homeland, but with new turf surfaces that allow conditions to be firm and fast for longer drives and provide more challenging putting experiences on larger, more undulating greens.

The International Course was recently ranked No. 9 in the top overall ranked courses by Golf Advisor.

With its traditional American-style design, the National Course at Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate chal-

lenges golfers through 18 holes that wind through 200 acres of secluded woodlands, wetlands and former orange groves.

The Grand Cypress Golf Club, which wraps the Villas of Grand Cypress, offers some of Florida’s most acclaimed links. The North, South and East Nines provide three different sets of challenges — nine holes each — that can be combined three different ways for a memorable 18-hole experience. Next door, the New Course is a loving tribute to Scotland’s famed Old Course at St. Andrew’s, designed by Jack Nicklaus. Players find stone bridges and walls, double greens, and 150 pot bunkers up to 12 feet deep, with 18 holes that ramble through open meadows.

With just 146 “keys,” the Villas of Grand Cypress is ideal for intimate, upscale meetings. The property’s meeting center was refurbished in fall 2015 — the new décor is lighter and emphasizes the ample natural light — and includes 7,200 sf of indoor space plus an outdoor terrace. A former 2,400-sf restaurant space in the resort’s clubhouse is being converted into additional event space. In all, meetings of up to about 100 attendees work well at the resort, and guests have access and room-charging privileges for the facilities of the adjacent Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress. Villa guest rooms received a \$100,000-per-bedroom facelift in 2013, and the smallest room category — Club Suites — start at 600 sf, making them Orlando’s largest entry-level accommodations.

ORLANDO



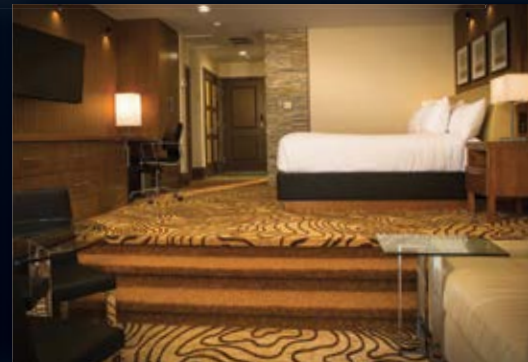
VILLAS OF GRAND CYPRESS

ORLANDO

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Bridget W

July 1 at 8:50pm • iOS

This conference has been a “transformative” experience for the whole team. So glad we made the trip to Orlando! Title of today’s team-building event: Management Secrets from a Master Chef. And for dinner? As I type, we’re strolling to a seaside Italian village! #ThisMeetingRocks #OrlandoMeeting



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