

WWW.TheMeetingMagazines.com

INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

**Overcoming
Stage Fright**
Practice Makes Perfect
to Deliver a Great Presentation
Page 30

Let the Good Times Roll in New Orleans

This Louisiana City is Never Short on Fun
Page 44

**CLICK HERE TO
DOWNLOAD/VIEW
TABLET VERSION**

2019 Industry Outlook
With FICP's Steve Bova
Page 12

CVB Update Page 18

All-Inclusive Resorts Page 24

Florida Page 34



YOUR SUCCESS IS OUR BUSINESS.

(866) 770-7268 | wynnmeetings.com

Wynn | Encore
LAS VEGAS



ISSN 1095-9726USPS 012-991

A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

WWW.TheMeetingMagazines.COM

INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

DECEMBER 2018

Vol. 25 No. 6

FEATURES

- 12 **2019 Industry Outlook**
With FICP Executive Director Steve Bova
- 18 **The Culture of Local**
CVBs and DMCs Help Planners Ramp Up ROI With Only-Here Experiences
By Christine Loomis
- 24 **All-Inclusive Resorts**
The Convenience of These Streamlined Properties Lures Planners
By Maura Keller
- 30 **Overcoming Stage Fright**
Practice Makes Perfect to Deliver a Great Presentation
By Maura Keller

DESTINATIONS

- 34 **Florida's Gift Keeps on Giving**
Different "Mini-Destinations"
All Wrapped Up in One State
By John Buchanan
- 44 **Let the Good Times Roll in New Orleans**
Known For Its Food, Music, History and Culture,
This Louisiana City is Never Short on Fun
By John Buchanan

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 **Publisher's Message**
- 6 **News & Notes**
- 9 **Snapshots**
- 10 **Plan Ahead**
5 Backup Hacks to Avoid Event Mishaps
By Heidi Foels
- 50 **CorporateLadder**



2018 FICP Annual Conference

FICP's Executive Director Steve Bova (right) offers highlights from the 2018 Annual Conference in Orlando November 4-7. **PAGE 12**



Credit: Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Maya

All-inclusive resorts deliver business and pleasure to meeting attendees without being nickel-and-dimed along the way. **PAGE 24**



In an industry where presentations are common, planners can work with speakers to overcome their fear of public speaking. **PAGE 30**



Credit: Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront

Jacksonville is emerging as an up-and-coming option on the list of Florida corporate meeting destinations. **PAGE 34**

Publisher's Message

Happy 300th New Orleans!

This year, New Orleans is celebrating its tricentennial! To commemorate its 300th anniversary, the popular meetings destination is recognizing its rich history while creating unique, fun events and ideas to encourage you to bring your meetings and incentive programs here. In "Let the Good Times Roll in New Orleans" (Page 44), recent attendees were treated to events that mimicked a Mardi Gras parade.



According to Terry Epton, president, Hosts New Orleans, a Hosts Global Member, there are endless variations to develop a jaw-dropping program. "We have so many more themes and one-of-a-kind venues that planners must often decide what not to do, because there is so much. Just choosing restaurants here is a wonderful challenge. It is all so delicious.

"Because New Orleans is so walkable, a progressive evening features one or more group second line parades to get from venue to venue. Only in New Orleans do we stop traffic and bow to our parading guests as they find out just how

special New Orleans is for group travel experiences!

"New Orleans is inspirational. Think about it ... Jazz, the root of all modern music, was invented here and is evolving to this day. The cuisine developed here is unique and an integral part of our lives. We don't eat to live here. We live to eat.

"What stands out about New Orleans? Meeting groups who travel here get inspired. This is an added value that you just cannot put a price on!"

Also in this issue, after the successful 2018 FICP Annual Conference in Orlando last month (see Pages 12-13 for pictures), Executive Director Steve Bova, CAE, shared his thoughts with us on the "2019 Industry Outlook" (Page 14). According to the latest FICP Q2 2018 FICP Pulse Survey, the size and number of meetings is increasing. And more good news: Budgets are also increasing, especially in those organizations that are involved with planning incentive travel programs.

As for challenges, he says, "If there's one thing certain in our business, it is that some form of disruption is likely to occur."

This year, members of the FICP Influence Committee identified disruption — not limited to risk management or security — as a key area of focus. "The fact is, in our business, 'it happens,' and 'it' can be just about anything imaginable."

Harvey Grotsky

Follow us on Social Media



instagram.com/themeetingmagazines



twitter.com/themeetingmag

www.TheMeetingMagazines.com INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Harvey Grotsky

harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Mitch D. Miller

mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

MANAGING EDITOR

Bonnie Schultz

bonnie.schultz@themeetingmagazines.com

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR

Debbie Ryan

debbie.ryan@themeetingmagazines.com

DIGITAL CONTENT COORDINATOR

Erika Villalobos

erika.villalobos@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Sophia Bennett

Ron Bernthal

John Buchanan

Sara Churchville

Cynthia Dial

Maura Keller

Christine Loomis

Derek Reveron

Mark Rowh

Patrick Simms

David Swanson

PRESIDENT & CEO

Harvey Grotsky

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS

David 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

MIDWEST STATES

Bob Mitchell

630-541-3388 • Mobile: 630-235-0126

bob.mitchell@themeetingmagazines.com

Insurance & Financial Meetings Management is published bi-monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 N. Military Trail, Ste. 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$10.00 U.S.A.; back copies \$12. Yearly subscription price is \$65.00 in the U.S.A.; \$135.00 in Canada. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Insurance & Financial Meetings Management, 2700 N. Military Trail, Ste. 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Insurance & Financial Meetings Management), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is no way to be construed as a recommendation by I&FMM of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted by or binding upon any corporate/incentive travel planner or agent. Reproduction of any portion of this publication by any means is strictly forbidden. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited photographs or manuscripts. Subscriber: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Dept., Insurance & Financial Meetings Management, 2700 N. Military Trail, Ste. 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Give old and new addresses including zip codes. Enclose address label from most recent issue and allow five weeks for change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2019

www.themeetingmagazines.com



FORT WORTH

YOUR MEETING DESTINATION IN THE LONE STAR STATE.

VISIT
FW FORT WORTH

FORTWORTH.COM/ACF

Harrah's Resort Atlantic City Plans Upgrades for Its Coastal Tower



ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Harrah's Resort Atlantic City has plans for a \$56 million renovation of its Coastal Tower to be completed by summer 2019. The upgrades are part of Caesars Entertainment's total investment of more than \$250 million into its Atlantic City casino-resorts over the last four years. "We are thrilled to announce the news of the Coastal Tower renovation to continue to provide an enhanced experience for our meeting planners, attendees and all guests," says Steve van der Molen, Caesars Entertainment vice president of meetings operation, Atlantic City region.

The 507 upgraded rooms and suites will further complement the resort's destination appeal among business and leisure travelers alike, enhancing the property's profile of first-class dining, entertainment and nightlife. The first phase of the renovation is set to debut in early 2019. www.harrahresort.com

Swan and Dolphin Resort to Construct New Hotel Catering to Groups

LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL — The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort is expanding, with features and amenities catering to meetings and groups. The new tower will be 14 stories tall and include: more than 22,000 square feet of meeting space, including two ballrooms, 12 meeting rooms and a rooftop reception space; 349 guest rooms, including 151 suites featuring separate working and private spaces, built-in AV system, large conference table and other features designed to create the perfect collaboration space; 16,800-square-foot elevated outdoor deck with a fire pit and pool; restaurant and lounge; health club, business center, grab-and-go market and more. Once the tower is completed in the fall of 2020, the resort will offer more than 2,600 guest rooms and 350,000 square feet of meeting space. The new location will be open for group bookings March 1, 2021. www.swandolphinmeetings.com

Hilton Chicago/Oak Brook Hills Resort and Conference Center Unveils Transformation

OAK BROOK, IL — The final phases of the three-year, \$25 million transformation of the Hilton Chicago/Oakbrook Hills Resort and Conference Center are now complete. The Prospera Hospitality-managed property has created a new vision and identity centered on modern design and innovative resort culture. Located just 18 miles west of downtown Chicago in upscale Oak Brook, the Audubon and IACC-certified resort positions itself as an Illinois premier destination for business, leisure and recreation.

"This concluding full-room renovation phase to our 386 guest rooms and suites is the crowning accomplishment to this transformational three-year project," says Hilton Chicago/Oak Brook Hills Resort and Conference Center's General Manager Steven Ellingsen. "Our passion is to provide a resort experience unrivaled in the region."

The mid-century-influenced design is themed throughout the resort, from the public spaces to the guest rooms. The reinvigorated atmosphere and modern design are open and bright by day, dramatic and seductive by night.

With all phases of the transformation finished, the Hilton Chicago/Oak Brook Hills Resort and Conference Center has reinvented its brand. Complete redesigns were made to the lobby, rotunda, 42,500-square-foot IACC conference center meeting space, including the Grand Ballroom and 36 meeting rooms, amphitheater, executive lounge, indoor/outdoor pools, Fitness Health Wellness Centre, Willow Crest GC Learning and Performance Center, Monarch Spa, themed gastro pub "Tin Cup" and signature farm-to-table restaurant "B."

www.oakbrookhillsresort.com

Hilton New Orleans Riverside Finalizes Renovation

NEW ORLEANS — The 1,622-room Hilton New Orleans Riverside, located adjacent to the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, completed a \$5 million renovation to its third-floor meeting spaces, home to the St. James Ballroom, St. Charles Ballroom, Jefferson Ballroom and 16 separate meeting rooms ideal for organic networking, small meetings and medium-sized conferences accommodating up to 1,000 guests.

The newest revamp signals the end of an all-encompassing renovation and restoration initiative to the hotel's meeting spaces, for a total investment of \$14 million.

"These renovations were made to meet the demand for more dynamic meetings and event space and cutting-edge design," says David Piscola, general manager of the Hilton New Orleans Riverside.

Highlights of the renovation include sophisticated new furnishings, grand chandeliers and enhanced sound and optical systems. The new aesthetic continues into the reception area with bold lighting fixtures and rich wood furniture to modernize the community space accommodating up to 650 guests.

The 8,687-square-foot St. Charles Ballroom, with a capacity of up to 1,350 guests, incorporates four crystal chandeliers, intricate crown molding designs and statement wall mirrors. The St. James Ballroom, accommodating up to 700 guests, features lavender accent walls, tiered chandeliers and sleek sconces.

In addition, the second-level Exhibition Center, renamed "Churchill," completed a \$1.8 million renovation along with a new prefunction area. www.hiltonneworleansriverside.com

Hyatt Regency Seattle Opens as Largest Hotel in Pacific Northwest



SEATTLE — Hyatt Regency Seattle recently opened in the heart of downtown, near some of the city's top attractions. With more than 103,000 square feet of meeting and event space and 1,260 guest rooms, Hyatt Regency Seattle is the largest hotel in the Pacific Northwest and the new premier destination for meetings and events in the region. The 45-story hotel is located two blocks from the Washington State Convention Center and adjacent to The Summit, the planned convention center expansion building set to open in spring 2022.

The Columbia and Regency Ballrooms each offer more than 19,000 square feet of space with 24- and 30-foot high ceilings, respectively. The Elwha Ballroom is 7,200 square feet, while Quinault Ballroom has 3,400 square feet of functional meeting space. The Deschutes Executive Boardroom features a private balcony that can accommodate 24 people. Eight prefunction spaces each range from 4,292 to 7,022 square feet, and an additional 46 meeting rooms range from 600 to 1,900 square feet, complete with floor-to-ceiling windows.

www.hyattregencyseattle.com

JW Marriott Nashville Announces Plans for Multipurpose Event Lawn

NASHVILLE — JW Marriott Nashville announced the first-of-its-kind development of a private park in an urban setting named The Green at JW. Upon completion, the 13,000-square-foot event lawn will be open to guests of the 33-story hotel, as well as corporate, social and charity events and concerts. The expansive area will occupy the northwest corner of the property and is a welcomed addition to the 10,000 square feet of outdoor space located on the hotel's pool deck at the Cabana Club.



"We are excited to bring such a unique offering to the guests of JW Marriott Nashville and the residents of Music City," says Lukus Kindlesparker, general manager of the JW Marriott Nashville. "From public outdoor concerts to private event gatherings, we are eager to explore all of the possibilities this impressive outdoor space will bring." www.jwmarriottnashville.com

Grand Hyatt to Open in Nashville in 2020



NASHVILLE — The 24-story, 591-room Grand Hyatt will be one of downtown Nashville's biggest and most luxurious hotels when it opens in 2020. With exceptional food and beverage options, rooftop lounge and pool, world-class spa and one of the largest meeting and event spaces in the city, the Grand Hyatt will be a major asset for Nashville, which welcomed a record-breaking 14.5 million visitors in 2017.

The Grand Hyatt will be located in Nashville Yards, a billion-dollar development spanning more than 16 acres in the heart of downtown. The hotel is expected to attract large group bookings from the types of associations and conferences that might use the property's 65,000 square feet of meeting space. It will also have 24-hour room service and a Grand Club lounge for frequent travelers. www.hyatt.com

Naples Grande Beach Resort Renovates Meeting and Event Spaces

NAPLES, FL — Naples Grande Beach Resort announced a more than \$3 million renovation to its meeting and event spaces. The resort's ballroom level received full enhancements to its design and facilities. The spaces offer the latest upgrades in modern technology, along with a new coastal-inspired design. The 474-room resort is situated on 23 waterfront acres, offering 83,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor space. The resort's largest function space, Royal Palm Ballroom, has 14,442 square feet that can be divided into eight separate meeting rooms and can accommodate up to 1,660 guests reception style. The Orchid Ballroom is a contemporary-style conference facility with 6,435 square feet of space that seats up to 740 guests and is divisible into four sections. The Vista Ballroom offers 5,802 square feet of space, with capabilities for up to 500 people. It is adjoined by outdoor venues Vista Terrace and Sunset Veranda, where guests can overlook the beautiful Naples sky. www.naplesgrande.com

Miami Marriott Biscayne Bay Sets the Stage for Flawless Events



MIAMI — Miami Marriott Biscayne Bay stands out among the most sought-after venues for events, meetings and conferences in the area, with more than 20,000 square feet of event space, backed by breathtaking views of Biscayne Bay through floor-to-ceiling windows creating unforgettable backdrops. Its downtown location puts guests and attendees close to major attractions, museums, sporting events and city events.

The Miami venue has 23 meeting rooms, including the 9,860-square-foot Grand Ballroom that can accommodate up to 1,350 guests and the 2,500-square-foot Bayview Ballroom, offering gorgeous views of the bay. All meeting rooms have both high-speed wired and wireless internet access and the latest audio-visual equipment, as well as custom catering.

Spacious accommodations, some with private balconies, let guests wake up to views of the Miami skyline and Biscayne Bay. Amenities include a state-of-the-art fitness center with floor-to-ceiling windows, a lobby for mixing and mingling and The Catch Grill & Bar, which offers a taste of Florida's freshest seafood.

www.marriott.com

SnapShots



1



2



3



4



5

1 The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club hosted meeting, incentive and event professionals on December 2 at a Florida Encounter Post-Fam, coordinated by the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention & Visitors Bureau. **2** Joining the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Hilton Chicago/Oak Brook Hills Resort and Conference Center transformation event on November 14 are (from left to right): Kevin Kilkeary Sr., Ron Gunter, Peter Knell, Steven Ellingsen. **3** From left to right: Symphony Staff Captain Jeffry Thomaes, Port Canaveral CEO Captain John Murray, Symphony Captain Rob Hempstead, Hotel Director/General Manager Fernando Jorge, Port Canaveral CFO Mike Poole welcomed the world's largest cruise ship, Royal Caribbean's *Symphony of the Seas*, to Port Canaveral for its first stop in North America on November 8. **4** The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort broke ground on its new tower November 27, bringing together representatives from Walt Disney World and Marriott International. From left to right: Fred Sawyers, John A. Vickers, Dan Tishman, Mickey Mouse, Andy Hopkins, Bill Webster, David Marriott. **5** Executives with Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts gathered December 10 to celebrate the opening of Waldorf Astoria Atlanta Buckhead, the first of the luxury brand in Atlanta.



5 Backup Hacks to Avoid Event Mishaps

Those in the wild world of planning and executing meetings, conferences and events have all been there: Your keynote is late, your contact forgot to send you the presentation, catering is early, someone shuffled the name tags, and you ran out of coffee. Relax! Here are five tips for things you can control to ensure your event is smooth sailing from registration to closing remarks.

1 Don't skip on production-related equipment.

I cannot stress how important it is to double- and triple-check that all your equipment is onsite and ready to go at rehearsal — and then again right before showtime. This includes flash drives with ALL show content, laptops, projectors, batteries, microphones and clickers. Always include a backup clicker, microphone and laptop. These are the presenter's bread and butter to giving a successful, impactful presentation. Even if you think you might not need a piece of equipment, bring it. I promise, you won't regret it.

At metroConnections, we always recommend that event planners bring a backup microphone. Once, a panel we were producing insisted on using lavalier microphones after we'd suggested passing a handheld mic so there would be an extra if one failed or if the audience had questions.

Lo and behold, one of the lavaliers failed, and the panelist had to share with the person next to them. Since it was being recorded live, no one at home was able to hear audience questions. We're confident this client will never forget to add a backup microphone to the order again, but we don't want anyone else to learn the hard way.

On the flip side, last summer our team was setting up for an event in 90-degree heat. We worked through rehearsals and setup with no issues.

By the time we opened the doors for attendees, the projector had melted. Yes, melted. Luckily, we had a backup projector in place. Without that, we would have had to produce a four-hour show with one less screen, which was the only visible factor for 200 people on the left side of the room. The client was elated to know that by having this backup on hand, they didn't have to stress about the alternative — keynote dissatisfaction and a potential negative attendee experience.

2 Test, test and test again.

Check (more than once!) that your confidence monitors are working and any teleprompter equipment is hooked up to the correct presentation notes or speech. Avoid keynote tragedy by making sure the presenter has all the information they need right in front of them in working order, ready to go.

Another insider tip we've adopted as the norm is simulating equipment failures during rehearsals. What would

a teleprompter fail look and feel like? Let your speaker practice ad-libbing, stalling and speaking relevantly off-the-cuff, should the worst-case scenario happen during the actual event.

How about a video failing to play — how could that be remedied? Your production team should have a Plan B and C for seamlessly flipping to a new machine or playing a delayed version of the video.

For PowerPoint and other presentation formats, it's imperative that you run through them entirely (twice!) to ensure fonts have been properly transferred, there are no spelling errors, and all the slides are in the correct order.

If your program requires any videos, watch through them multiple times to guarantee there are no glitches and that the audio is there and matches up. Anticipation is the name of the game! And you can never over-test that everything will go smoothly on the big day.

3 Bring extra furniture and signage.

Have an extra panel chair or tables tucked away (out of sight, but easy to access) just in case your executive decides to add a person to a panel or you need an extra table to sit at and work for a few minutes while folks are at a breakout.

Extra signage is another must-have — especially if you're working with materials like foam core or cardboard. It's not difficult for something like that to get damaged from the office to the event venue, so having more than you need is the way to go.

If your budget is tight, or your truck is already full — do yourself a favor prior to show day and research local vendors who can help in a pinch. It wouldn't hurt to give them a call and prep them with the necessary information, including graphic files, fonts, brand booklets, furniture preferences, etc. Do this extra step up front and thank yourself later!

4 Document everything.

If there is information in your brain related to your program, write it down on a piece of paper or type it out in an email.

Anything from the time the keynote speaker needs to get mic'd up, to when the mid-session snacks need to be set out, get absolutely everything you can in writing — it'll make it so much easier to transfer information to others if need be.

You never know if a team member has an emergency on event day, but you can anticipate needing to transfer logistics and other details to anyone by documenting everything.

5 Assemble a solid backup team.

Every meeting, conference or event has the starters: the main venue contact, the main client contact, the main event planner, etc. But just like any major sports team, never underestimate how valuable the backups can be.

Whether it's a secondary venue contact who can open a door when your primary contact is on the other side of the event space, or having a colleague back at the office who can send an email while you're running around prepping the venue, these seemingly simple tasks often end

Anticipation is the name of the game! And you can never over-test that everything will go smoothly on the big day.

up making or breaking the smoothness of event setup and execution.

This may seem like overkill, but trust me, you'll be so grateful you took the time and energy that goes into preventing backup-related mishaps.

If any of these are not already part of your overall meeting, conference or event-planning procedure, it'll take some time to integrate. But after you've done it a few times, they'll be so ingrained in you that bringing extra mics and knowing who your trusted backups are will come naturally.

I&FMM

Heidi Foels is a producer at metroConnections, where she's worked since 2013. She manages clients, executes corporate events and performs detailed project management. Foels has a degree in marketing from St. Cloud State University in Minnesota.





FICP 2018 Annual Conference

FICP's 2018 Annual Conference brought together attendees for education and networking opportunities at Florida's JW Marriott Orlando Grande Lakes November 4-7.

Three keynote speakers covered topics such as achieving breakthrough performance, teamwork and customer service, while a variety of breakout sessions focused on emerging tech, mindfulness, risk management and more.

FICP's 17th Annual Silent Auction raised \$90,029, benefiting Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Florida, Orlando Health – Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children and United Against Poverty. The selection of these organizations is consistent with FICP's long-standing tradition of using Silent Auction proceeds to benefit the local community that not only hosts its signature event, but serves as the home to many of its hospitality partners and members.



2019 Industry Outlook

With FICP Executive Director Steve Bova

FICP is a community of financial services and insurance industry meetings and events professionals dedicated to developing members and advocating the positive impact and value of their work. Executive Director Steve Bova, CAE, offers some insight into the challenges and trends facing this industry in the coming year.

Q Have there been any recent regulatory changes to the financial and insurance industry meetings, and if so, how will they affect the industry in 2019?

A According to the Q2 2018 FICP Pulse Survey, nearly half (49 percent) of respondents said they have not experienced impacts to their meetings due to the uncertainty in the regulatory environment, and an additional 9 percent were not sure. However:

- 23 percent have made rules changes to their incentive program.
- 20 percent have altered the number eligible to receive awards.
- 16 percent have changed the name or description of their incentive programs.
- 14 percent have changed the products included in their sales and incentive programs.
- 10 percent have increased expenses to support compliance initiatives.
- 6 percent have increased staff to support compliance initiatives.

The 30 seasoned meeting professionals attending FICP's first Strategic Leaders Event in Chicago December 3-4, identified and discussed two critical areas of impact:

GDPR: The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) went into effect in May in order to modernize laws that protect the personal information of individuals

within the European Union (EU) and the European Economic Area (EEA). The regulation addresses the export of personal data outside of these areas.

Business processes that handle personal data must be designed and built with consideration of the principles and provide safeguards to protect data, and use the highest-possible privacy settings by default, so that the data is not available publicly without explicit, informed consent.

The meeting professionals said that GDPR is affecting some of their registration processes. For example, attendees need to opt in before being able to register for an event — even if they do not do business in Europe but have attendees that do business there. One person stated that her company does not lay name badges on tables for pick-up because, technically, consent is not provided until the attendee picks up his or her badge.

Clearly, we now live in an age where the risk of data breach is omnipresent. But how far is too far remains to be seen. **The DOL Ruling:** While the Department of Labor Fiduciary ruling has been tabled, at least for now, meeting professionals are asking each other if companies are changing back to the processes they used before the ruling or are holding on to the changes they implemented.

The overwhelming consensus among the group is that companies are staying with what they implemented. Why?

Because the changes were made in the best interests of their clients. The greatest uncertainty about the future lies in

*FICP Executive Director
Steve Bova, CAE*

what the States and the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) will do.

Q What other challenges will financial and insurance meeting professionals face in 2019?

A Disruption: If one thing is certain in our business, it is that some form of disruption is likely to occur.

This year, members of the FICP Influence Committee identified disruption — not limited to risk management or security — as a key area of focus. The fact is, in our business, “it

happens,” and “it” can be just about anything imaginable.

For example, 65 percent of the FICP members polled in the 2018 Membership Needs and Satisfaction Survey stated that they have experienced some sort of event challenges either during the site selection process or during their event. Examples might include attendee health, media or police activity, protest or community event or last-minute speaker cancellation. In the same survey, 58 percent of FICP members responding said they have experienced an act of God in conjunction to a meeting they had planned.

People management: Here is another certain challenge: As long as there are people, there will be people management challenges and opportunities. The planners attending the Strategic Leaders Event made deep dives in five areas related to people management:

- 1. Objectives and Measuring Performance:** How to differentiate performance among employees and how to motivate the most effective contributors in a non-monetary manner.
- 2. Ethics:** Intellectual property of speakers, FAM trips, gifts and attending events and use of reward points.
- 3. Flexible Working Environments:** Teams that have virtual (work from home) employees, flex time, creating a team environment and how to be a successful manager.
- 4. Building a High-performing Team:** Potential disrupters, key areas of opportunity for an organization/manager to focus on, goals/criteria to drive high performance (not all monetary), ways to motivate and provide opportunity and reward to keep performance at a consistent high level and resources available for leadership development.
- 5. Employee Engagement and Morale:** Practices to put in place where there is limited room for advancement, and situations in which an employee does not work well with others.

Two pink elephants in the room were also addressed: sexual harassment and diversity and inclusion. For anyone in a people management role, these are

business necessities to be addressed now. Meeting professionals organize events where each of these highly critical subjects provide an opportunity to create and demonstrate their value to the organization and show leadership.

Q Are the budgets for meetings increasing or decreasing? What steps are being taken to increase security at these events?

A Budgets: Generally, budgets are increasing, especially in those organizations that are involved with planning incentive travel. Generally, there is optimism about the world and the U.S. economy. Despite some recent blips, it continues to grow over the long-term. Optimism about the national economy is more pronounced among U.S. buyers.

According to the new Incentive Travel Industry Index, powered by SITE, the IRF and FICP in conjunction with JD Power, the incentives industry outlook is very good. According to 1,016 respondents from 86 countries (half from North America), 2018 budgets were up. More than half (54 percent) of buyers reported an increase in budgets year over year.

At the same time, two-thirds of corporate users and more than 80 percent of incentive agencies are taking steps toward cost management, such as less-expensive destinations (30 percent), all-inclusive destinations (26 percent) and less-expensive amenities.

The industry has seen an increase in use of all-inclusive destinations from 73 percent of respondents in 2015 to 82 percent in 2018.

Also contributing to the momentum, there were more qualifiers than ever. Globally, 65 percent of all buyers are increasing the number of qualifiers (58 percent in USA, 67 percent in the EU and 73 percent in Asia). The study revealed that per-person average spend for corporate buyers was \$8,151.

Size of meetings: According to the latest FICP Q2 2018 FICP Pulse Survey, the size and number of meetings is increasing, as are the costs for food and beverage (F&B) and room rates. One would hope that they are increasing if only to allow for that growth!

Security: The majority of meeting professionals respondents in the same pulse survey reported an increase in the use of in-house security or security consultants for events in the past 12 months, with 66 percent indicating they used it for international events and 60 percent for domestic. Similarly, hospitality partners reported an increase in security requests for both domestic and international events.

Q What encouraging signs do you see ahead for the financial and insurance services meetings industry?

A In addition to size, there are signs of continued growth in the number



Senior management professionals at FICP's Strategic Leaders Event in Chicago discussed two areas of impact in the industry: GDPR and The DOL Ruling.

FICP Annual Conference

Q How did the 2018 Annual Conference differ from last year?

A The FICP Annual Conference event team increased the number and type of opportunities for attendees to network and develop new connections throughout the event. Replacing The Network – Live — similar to a three-hour tabletop trade show, FICP added the Meeting Zone, which encouraged both impromptu and scheduled meetings through the mobile app. The app featured a new match-making tool that provided recommended connections. A Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) event brought all attendees together in another form of networking, relationship and teambuilding. The activity included teams of meeting professionals and hospitality partners who assembled wagons filled with items, which were later donated to three local charities. A networking lunch included a mix of meeting professionals and hospitality partners at each table to encourage further dialogue with new people.

The recipients of that CSR activity were the same ones as those receiving Silent Auction proceeds, which may be a reason we hit a record-breaking total for auction bids.

Q What are the key takeaways you hope planners received?

A Every year, the event team takes great care to design a meeting that creates unique experiences to maximize learning, idea creation and relationship development. We like to say that everything at FICP is an educational experience — at the main stage and breakout sessions, but also in the room design, décor, event flow, transfer offsite experience and even impromptu connections, such as an elevator ride to meet new people.

Ultimately, we are aiming to create experiences that demonstrate and amplify the impact and value of meeting professionals — first to themselves so they improve in their careers, but also to give them tools that will provide value to their companies, improve their meetings and help them grow as professionals within their companies. Collectively, with the other meeting professionals organizations, our goal is to raise the bar for our industry.

Q What new educational opportunities did FICP offer to its members at the conference?

A There were education sessions and hands-on interactive learning opportunities in the Experience Zone, a dedicated area away from the breakout rooms. Attendees received one-on-one help to improve productivity from Audrey Thomas of Organized Audrey, enhance their personal growth from Dahlia El Gazzar and Nick Borelli of DAHLIA+ and get Cvent-specific questions answered by representatives from Cvent. Other hands-on experiences included flying a drone and putting green practice. Education sessions focused on designing event space and mindfulness leveraged the unique environment as well. Also, the highly popular Meeting Professionals (only) Exchange allowed small groups to discuss a variety of topics simultaneously. Staff took notes, consolidated them and posted them for all meeting professionals attendees to access, as well as to encourage continued idea and resource sharing year-round through the meeting professionals discussion forum.

I&FMM

of meetings. The Economic Significance of Meetings to the U.S. Economy, published this year by the Events Industry Council (EIC), shows that the finance, insurance and real estate industry was responsible for \$141.1 billion in total economic output in 2016, making it the second-most impactful industry from an economic impact perspective, behind the business services industry.

In fact, the study was used to generate the first-ever worldwide study on the economic significance of face-to-face business events, which revealed that this is a \$1.5 trillion industry that supports 26 million jobs! This ranks the sector as the 14th largest in the world, ahead of GDPs of Australia, Spain, Mexico, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. Oxford Economics conducted the worldwide study.

A Focus on Culture: The 2018 Incentive Travel Industry Index revealed a few other encouraging signs. In addition to sales and profitability remaining as the top reasons to hold an incentive program, the option of “better relationship-building between employees and management” jumped from fifth in importance in 2017 to second in 2018. Also included in the top five were “improved employee engagement and morale” and “better relationship-building between employees.” Clearly, there is an added emphasis on workplace culture.

Emphasis on Wellness: The focus on living a healthy lifestyle while traveling is probably moving past the trend or fad phase and becoming a staple of the event experience. Eighty-six percent of buyers feature some form of wellness in their programs, while 73 percent of corporate buyers said they continue to offer a corporate social responsibility (CSR) component to their events, compared to 94 percent in 2017. Popular wellness activities are yoga and healthy meals, for example.

Q In your opinion, what are the biggest new trends for financial and insurance industry meetings in 2019?

A Social media is a topic we often hear in meeting professional conversations. What is surprising is how few refer to specific social media policies that relate to meetings, but there are many common practices.

For example, some companies prohibit posting images from their live events. Some have security in place to remove cameras or phones from people who are seen taking pictures at an event. In fact, LinkedIn and other social media are still blocked at some companies. As an alternative, some companies provide internal mechanisms, such as an app, where they can post images.

I&FMM



MGM RESORTS HAS MORE CONVENTION SPACE IN LAS VEGAS THAN ALL THE CONVENTION SPACE IN MANHATTAN COMBINED.

MGM Resorts is leading the way by continuing to expand their already robust meetings and conventions footprint with innovative and collaborative spaces designed to accommodate client growth. ARIA, Park MGM, Mandalay Bay and MGM Grand will debut an additional 850,000 square feet of space, topping off their Las Vegas citywide presence at four million square feet. MGM Resorts continues to lead the way in “meeting” expectations for groups of all sizes.

Book your Vegas convention today. For more information, please contact Michael Dominguez at mdominguez@mgmresorts.com.



The Culture of Local

CVBs and DMCs Help Planners Ramp Up ROI With Only-Here Experiences

By Christine Loomis

"Meetings are just meetings unless you can make them remarkable," says Falon Veit Scott, CMM, CEO of Evolution Event Solutions in Nashville. "One way to do this is to capitalize on the local atmosphere to fuel networking, creativity, experience and an overall improved ROI. Local flavor improves the overall ROI in that there are more dynamic results including stronger relationships forged, deeper creativity reached and greater attendee happiness."

Every town has something about it that visitors can't find anywhere else. Here are 10 destinations that understand how to capitalize on what they have.

NORTH & EAST New York

What's the best way to give attendees a deep dive into the historic yet ever-changing culture of New York City? Greg Byner, CIS, regional sales manager at PRA New York, worked on the 2018 incentive

program of a national insurance firm to do exactly that.

"New York City has developed a lot and so has this company in terms of its vision, methodology and strategies. It was important for us to align our forward-thinking city to this group, without taking away the historical aspects that are also true identifiers," Byner says.

His team proposed a program that combined experiences that were historical with strong local ties but also

showcased a city that is moving forward with new and innovative offerings.

"It's important, he notes, "for planners to challenge destination partners to come up with creative solutions. For example, because we couldn't arrange fair-priced 'Hamilton' tickets on Broadway, we brought in a 'Hamilton' tribute band to one of the evening receptions. This was a huge surprise to this group, and they were stunned to see a tribute band at their reception. It brought in the local flavor of what's new in NYC without breaking the bank!"

Among the restaurants they chose was River Café in Brooklyn, which has wowed diners for decades yet still provides a memorable experience — especially with arrival by boat.

"That gave attendees a real understanding of the landscape of our city, while also breaking away from Manhattan to explore a different neighborhood," Byner says. "While 10 years ago, Brooklyn may have only been suited for a quick tour, Brooklyn neighborhoods have really come alive for product launches, activation stations and larger meeting compatibility."

Another culinary highlight was a customized "nosh tour" through the Lower East Side that included multiple stops and ended at Katz's Deli.

"The Lower East Side is a hub of historical and unique eateries, as this neighborhood was where the teeming

"Lower Manhattan has come alive since 9/11, and the rebirth of businesses, nonprofits and tech hubs truly portrays the innovation there," he adds. "This, along with the staples of Wall Street,

planners a chance to offer attendees a nighttime nature experience that dazzles the senses.

It all starts with the people, Figueroa says. "We are genuinely friendly, heart-

"Local flavor improves the overall ROI in that there are more dynamic results including stronger relationships forged, deeper creativity reached and greater attendee happiness."

Falon Veit Scott, CMM, CEO
Evolution Event Solutions, Nashville, TN



Trinity Church, the New York Stock Exchange and the memorials of September 11th provided a well-rounded overview of our resilient city. For an insurance company that specializes in retirement, this tour and the program in general gave life and inspiration to a group that will remember this trip for years."

Puerto Rico

Vanessa Figueroa, destination support services director with Discover Puerto Rico, believes it's easy to find authentic experiences on the island. She points to walking tours through Old San Juan, visits to the city's forts and mixology classes at Casa Bacardi. In addition, she notes, there's also walking the trails of El Yunque National

"Guests experiment with ethnobotanical materials to make their own cordage and discover foods and tools they might find in their own backyards."

Anthony Pena, Events & Marketing Specialist
Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Tucson, AZ

masses landed after passing through Ellis Island," Byner says. "Filled with sights and sounds and, most importantly, the smells of ethnic cooking, this customized nosh tour featured all types of native cuisines."

The tour was a huge hit with attendees, as was another that Byner says, "brings to life the three pillars of the Americas: economy, politics and religion. And, it took only a few hours!

Forest, the only tropical rain forest in the national forest system, and the chance to taste interesting local dishes such as mofongo. The cobblestone streets of Old San Juan provide insight into hundreds of years of island history and Spanish, African and Taino Indian influences.

There are only five bioluminescent bays in the entire world and three of them are in Puerto Rico, giving

felt and service-oriented. Our services team is here to anticipate needs and assure that the attendee experience is a memorable one."

Milwaukee

Paul Upchurch, president and CEO of VISIT Milwaukee, sees authenticity across multiple venues and genres.

"Our services team strives to give every meeting planner and convention attendee an authentic Milwaukee experience based on their individual needs. It can be hosting gatherings in a century's-old brewery, exclusive tours of several distinct neighborhoods, a yacht party on the Milwaukee River or VIP access to our world's largest music festival. We work with the unique needs of every convention to create a successful and fun event."

Upchurch refers to his city as "a wonderfully random destination" with no shortage of genuine experiences. "VISIT Milwaukee's convention staff pay homage to the city's brewing history with a beer bar at conventions, create custom printing press souvenirs in partnership with a local printer and serve the city's signature stacked Bloody Marys," he says. "VISIT Milwaukee also likes to send MKE love across the world by offering Milwaukee-themed postcards for attendees to fill out to be mailed by the DMO."

One-of-a-kind venues also abound, including the only Harley-Davidson Museum in the world, a "flying" art museum with wings that open and flap,



Paragon Events in Delray Beach, Florida, organized a bike tour around historic Palm Beach.

historic brewery caves at Miller Brewing Company and beer baron Frederick Pabst's mansion.

The city's waterside setting also creates tour opportunities, he says, "from group kayaking on the Milwaukee River to sailing on Lake Michigan in a 19th-century Great Lakes schooner."

For golfers, Upchurch says there's the possibility of playing the course that will host the 2020 Ryder Cup.

One great cultural experience for groups is Milwaukee Food & City Tours. Caitlin Weitzel, private events and logistics manager, points to the artisans, vendors and venues that make these tours an "only in Milwaukee" adventure.

"Our tours highlight locally owned and family businesses," she says. "For example, we did our progressive ethnic meal through Milwaukee for a financial client. It starts on Old World Third Street with cheese and sausage, where our guide talks about Milwaukee's German heritage. Many in the group were shocked to learn this was the original downtown. From there, it's into the Third Ward and stories about the origi-

"I truly believe authenticity is a product of love, passion and history," Weitzel says. "From our knowledgeable tour guides and drivers to the restaurant partners we work with, we simply want to share our love of Milwaukee's story and tastes with our guests."

Private tours can vary from two-and-a-half to five hours and can accommodate 15 to more than 300 guests. There are around 20 tours available, including a Beers, Brats & Bikes Tour and one that focuses on the history of pizza in the city; all include local history, architecture, culture and multiple restaurants and vendors.

Palm Beach

Even a city that seems defined more by its plethora of upscale resorts and shops than an authentic core culture can surprise visitors.

Renee Radabaugh, CMP, president and CEO of Paragon Events, points to a recent event for a Fortune 500 accounting firm during its annual convention. "Discover The Palm Beaches helped us organize a historic Palm Beach pedal

"While 10 years ago, Brooklyn may have only been suited for a quick tour, Brooklyn neighborhoods have really come alive for product launches, activation stations and larger meeting compatibility."

Greg Byrnes, CIS, Regional Sales Manager
PRA New York, New York, NY



nal Irish and Italian families that lived there. We visit Milwaukee Public Market, a must-do, then head to Polonez, the last authentic Polish restaurant in Milwaukee. Alexandra and George are the couple that own it, and often, she welcomes the group in her thick Polish accent. That's the epitome, in my opinion, of why we do what we do. We bring commerce into businesses that have stories and people who have made our community what it is."

The tour finishes at the lakefront with dessert at Peter Sciortino's Bakery on Brady Street, a time-honored establishment from the Italian era.

tour, which took participants via bikes from PGA National Resort & Spa to seven miles around the Old Palm Beach area," she says.

The group made stops at the Mediterranean Revival palaces, Whitehall Estate and Flagler Museum, all providing insight into the island's deep and rich past. "Everyone was mesmerized by the history and the beauty of the trail," she says, "and people truly gained a sense of this remarkable city."

It just goes to show that a satisfying and revealing cultural experience can come with something as simple as a well-planned bike ride.

SOUTH & WEST Tucson

It's hard not to feel a potent sense of place in Tucson, where the Sonoran Desert impacts every aspect of life — but it's not the only authentic element.

History and art can be found in the 18th-century Mission San Xavier del Bac, still in use today, and colorful downtown murals reflecting the city's heritage. Rich culinary history resulted in UNESCO giving Tucson the first City of Gastronomy designation in the country.

Still, an excellent place to start for a local experience is the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. The 98-acre facility is a zoo, botanical garden, natural history museum and art gallery and can host groups from five to 300. Happenings include animal encounters and demonstrations — including falcon flights — art classes and more.

One program to consider is the Sonoran Supermarket Experience, during which guests step back 500 years and learn how the desert once provided everything for its human inhabitants. Earlier in the year, a financial group tried it out.

"This program explores local resources that native peoples of the Sonoran Desert — Tohono O'odham, Yaqui and Seri — have traditionally used for food, medicines and fibers. Guests experiment with ethnobotanical materials to make their own cordage and discover foods and tools they might find in their own backyards," says Anthony Pena, events and marketing specialist with the museum. There's a tasting portion where attendees try some of the native food sources found, such as palm seeds, acorns and nopales (cactus).

The program lasts about an hour, and it's available for up to 50 guests.

Cheyenne

Like much of Wyoming, Cheyenne offers a quintessential western experience.

"From bison train rides and team rope-tying to chuck wagon dinners and full rodeo experiences, groups can have a one-of-a-kind event in Cheyenne's Wild West," says Darren Rudloff,

CEO of Visit Cheyenne. "With the town's deeply rooted train culture, genuine cowboy charm and easily accessible outdoor adventures, Cheyenne is full of unforgettable experiences for groups of all sizes."

Bison train rides? That's a train ride out to see bison at Terry Bison Ranch — and the only place where attendees are likely to combine "bison" and "trains" in one sentence or experience. The ranch also offers horseback rides, ATV tours, fishing and more.

Palm Springs

Palm Springs is known for many things, including its enviable examples of mid-century modern architecture and a film festival where Hollywood insiders and A-list celebrities want to see and be seen.

But perhaps nothing says Palm Springs like the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, known simply as Coachella, an event at the Empire Polo Club since 1999 and currently drawing some 250,000 attendees.

Not every group can attend the actual festival, and that's where PRA Palm Springs comes in. Beth Daniel, CIS, DMCP, senior national sales manager, works with her team to create the "Fauxchella" experience, including for a large financial group last year. It can be staged at the polo club or onsite at a local resort, though Daniel "strongly



"Discover The Palm Beaches helped us organize a historic Palm Beach pedal tour, which took participants via bikes from PGA National Resort & Spa to seven miles around the Old Palm Beach area."

Renee Radabaugh, CMP, President and CEO
Paragon Events, Delray Beach, FL

encourages" planners to choose the polo club.

"Empire Polo Club can accommodate as few as 25 but also several thousand guests," Daniel says. "The 16,000- to 48,000-square-foot covered spaces allow for weather backup, not generally included when booking an outdoor venue."

She says a Ferris wheel is an impactful element to add, along with hand-squeezed lemonade, craft cocktails and customized bandana stations, as well as mixed seating and a variety of options for chilling and relaxing.

The valley's other local experiences relate to a strong Native American heritage and the fact that Palm Springs produces 85 percent of the dates in North America (trying a date shake is a must). The 750-mile-long San Andreas Fault also runs nearby, and groups can take tours to walk on the famed fault line and learn about the dramatic shifting reality of the California desert.

Tupelo

Tupelo, Mississippi, is celebrated as the birthplace of Elvis Presley. The King may be gone, but his presence is incapable here, and groups can have an experience that showcases the history of the town and its legitimate place as "the cradle of rock 'n' roll."

Elvis spent the first 13 years of his life here, says Neal McCoy, executive director, Tupelo Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"Tupelo is a must-stop for music lovers of all ages to visit his birthplace and see the humble beginnings that gave rise to the greatest entertainer the world has ever known," he says. "Guests can also visit Tupelo Hardware, where Gladys Presley bought her son his first guitar. Visitors to Tupelo gain an authentic experience into what life was like for young Elvis and can fully appreciate the icon once they understand Elvis' Tupelo."

Located in the foothills of northeast Mississippi, McCoy calls Tupelo "the epicenter of America's music where, in 1935, Elvis was born in a two-room shotgun shack. The gospel tunes he sang in his boyhood church, the soulful blues that he heard coming from the juke joints in the Shake Rag District, and the country music that he listened to on the radio from his front porch enabled Elvis Presley to blend the sounds and deliver what we all know as rock 'n' roll to the masses."

A few options:

- A dinner theater package in which planners can customize a catered meal and live



PRA Palm Springs created the "Fauxchella" experience for their attendees at the Empire Polo Club. The event resembled the Coachella Music & Arts Festival, also held in Palm Springs.

entertainment for “An Evening at the Elvis Presley Birthplace.”

- Outdoor functions can be set at the Overlook at the Elvis Presley Birthplace, where Elvis often visited after moving to Memphis to sit and reflect on where life had taken him.
- Events can also be held in Tupelo’s Fairpark, former site of the Tupelo Fairgrounds and Elvis’ 1956 Homecoming Concert, which is commemorated with Tupelo’s most photographed statue depicting a famous image from the concert.
- A driving tour of 13 sites that were integral to Elvis’ life in Tupelo is available via #MyTupelo bus with a guide.
- Tupelo’s cityscape is dotted with guitars decorated in Elvis themes; a walking tour can be put together throughout the historic downtown district.

“Nashville is known for offering authentic, unique experiences, and I believe it has played a part in the growth we’ve seen over the last eight years. Convention attendees want an authentic destination, and we believe Nashville delivers.”

Butch Spyridon, President and CEO
Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp, Nashville, TN

- Excursions can be planned to visit other cities in the Muscle Shoals region with extensive musical heritage.
- Packages can be arranged to attend the Tupelo Elvis Festival in June, which includes music, Elvis tribute artists and great food.
- Self-guided, recreational, Elvis-themed bicycle tour with 12 stops.

Nashville

Can providing authentic, local experiences lead to growth and expansion for a city? Butch Spyridon, president and CEO of Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp, believes so.

“Nashville is known for offering authentic, unique experiences, and



“Empire Polo Club can accommodate as few as 25 but also several thousand guests.... The 16,000- to 48,000-square-foot covered spaces allow for weather backup, not generally included when booking an outdoor venue.”

Beth Daniel, CIS, DMCP, Senior National Sales Manager
PRA Palm Springs, Palm Desert, CA

I believe it has played a part in the growth we’ve seen over the last eight years. Convention attendees want an authentic destination, and we believe Nashville delivers,” he says. “One of those ‘only in Nashville’ experiences is the chance to interact with Nashville’s world-renowned songwriting community. Whether it’s songwriters in the round performing their songs and telling the stories behind their hits, or a group writing a song with a songwriter, it’s something no other city can offer and attendees never forget.”



But as Scott points out, Nashville isn’t just about music. “The friendly culture, ethnic food scene, transformational history and the firm grasp on the future are all reasons to include local flair in your Nashville-based meeting,” she says.

New Orleans

Although many southern cities point to their food, music, history and multicultural roots as defining, New Orleans is in a class by itself. One thing it’s known for is how to throw a party bringing in all of those elements, and that’s what Cindy Hayes, CMP, DMCP, director of sales, PRA New Orleans, drew on to create an authentic New Orleans party, tailgate-style for 1,200

attendees from a major insurance company in May.

“The celebration honored the company’s ‘winners,’ who attended with significant others, spouses and kids. We wanted to be sure everyone had a taste of NOLA, experiencing how we celebrate life — and filled with delicious food and fabulous music in a venue that’s special to residents of New Orleans,” she says.

It all started with to-go cups in hand in the hotel lobby. The drum roll of the high-school marching band kicked in gear, police stopped traffic and guests, escorted by stilt walkers and revelers, followed behind the band to the event location, Champion’s Square, known as tailgate central for New Orleans Saints’ home games.

“Fireworks went off as everyone arrived at the party, and signaling this event was special,” Hayes says. “Flow-tribe, a headliner at Jazz Fest the previous evening, kicked things off. The New Orleans classic cuisine included cochon de lait (roasted pig), crawfish and beignets. In addition to the band, there were caricature artists, alligator handlers, inflatable bounce houses for the kids and games. The evening ended with a fireworks show over the skyline and Superdome that made everyone in downtown New Orleans turn and say to themselves, ‘It must be a special occasion to have fireworks on a weeknight.’”

Regardless of where you meet, going local is important. “Include it — always,” advises Scott. “The way we meet is changing every day, and one of the easiest, most cost-effective ways to make your meeting remarkable — and well-attended — is to use what’s in front of you.”

I&FMM

BEYOND THE BALLROOM



See why Tucson’s one of a kind culture creates an experience that extends beyond the ballroom.
Book now through 2020 and earn up to **\$15,000** OFF your Master Account.

Find out more: TucsonOnUs.com

FREE YOURSELF.®

tucson
VISITTUCSON.ORG



All-Inclusive Resorts

The Convenience of These Streamlined Properties Lures Planners



Credit: Club Med Punta Cana

Groups who attend meetings at Club Med Punta Cana can partake in extensive land and watersport activities (top), as well as spa and wellness treatments.

By Maura Keller

When Amy Abbott, owner of Amy Abbott Events, orchestrates a meeting or event for a financial or insurance audience, one type of destination she always considers is the all-inclusive resort.

"We chose an all-inclusive resort, as the leaders wanted their team to feel pampered and to have everything they could desire right on the property — from food, beverages and amenities with a stunning ocean view."



Amy Abbott
Owner
Amy Abbott Events

Here's why: All-inclusive resorts offer a full range of restaurants, activities, gyms, spas, shopping and, in many cases, excellent food. Meeting rooms are adjacent to the resort, there is no need to leave the property, making it easy on the event planner to keep all of the activities contained in one space.

However, many of the resorts offer offsite excursions, as they are a great way to tour the town or country being visited.

Abbott recently planned a retreat at an all-inclusive resort in Mexico, where the goal was to garner overall morale and teambuilding within the company. "We structured our day with 'mini-meetings' each morning that mostly consisted of quick goal strategizing for the new year. The team showed up for an hour and then went to a teambuilding activity. They were able to choose between several offsite and onsite excursions based on what most interested them," she says.

One of Abbott's favorite events for the retreat was a "kermes night," which in Mexico is a strong family tradition and has a bit of a carnival flare.

They had a Mariachi band, Mexican folklore dancers and excellent Mexican street food that included a grill station with carne asada, grilled baja shrimp and lobster and grilled pulpo in an ajillo pepper rub. Churro stations, aguas fresca station and a mezcal and margarita station allowed the team

to mix and mingle and have fun in an authentic regional environment.

"We chose an all-inclusive resort, as the leaders wanted their team to feel pampered and to have everything they could desire right on the property — from food, beverages and amenities with a stunning ocean view," Abbott says.

Michael Butler, meeting planner and director of strategic accounts at Brightspot Incentives & Events, says that all-inclusive resorts offer conveniences aplenty to both financial meeting and event planners, as well as the clients they serve.

"Planners have the convenience of knowing what their bill is going to be at the end of the program long before they get there," Butler says. "There is no surprise \$10,000 bill from a group that congregated in the pool all day and ran up a big tab. For attendees, they can leave their wallet or purse back in the room's safe and enjoy their experience without thinking about how much a fancy drink at the bar costs, as well as convenient choices of different restaurant outlets where there is no figuring out a tip or signing a check."

Brightspot uses all-inclusive resorts and properties for many of the company's clients' meeting and event trips each year. As such, they've seen a rise in the number of clients converting, or at least considering, all-inclusive options during the past five years.

"All-inclusive brands have become savvy in meeting the needs of more corporate groups, which have different needs than leisure travelers," Butler says.

For example, many now offer a room credit that can be used for an additional activity during the program. Others handle services like VAT rebates that put money back into the program.

"Most of the resorts are new, so they're attractive properties in desirable destinations," Butler says.

Deven Crane, director of travel services at Incentive Solutions, says the all-inclusive is a no-brainer because the total budget is put in front of the prospective buyer; whereas, at a hotel with a European Plan (EP), food and beverage is an additional cost.

"The problem with EP hotels, from the budgetary side, is that the managers from the host organization find themselves 'picking up the tab' at any bar or restaurant, and thus, the organization gets 10 to 15 T&E reports, which wasn't in the budget," Crane says. "All-inclusives make it easy for meeting planners to stay within budget. For attendees, the answer is simple — put the wallet in the safe and forget about it without missing anything at the resort."

Approximately 90 percent of Incentive Solutions clients go to all-inclusive properties because of the



Credit: Julieta, Grand Fiesta Americana Los Cabos

Food and beverages are included, so attendees can leave their wallets in the room's safe and forget about having to pay the tab.



Many planners book meetings at all-inclusive resorts in Cancun, Mexico, so attendees can enjoy the outdoor atmosphere and local flair.

ease to work with and the consistency of the product.

"We last planned a group of 200 at a property in Playa del Carmen, Mexico,

"All-inclusive brands have become savvy in meeting the needs of more corporate groups, which have different needs than leisure travelers.... For example, many now offer a room credit that can be used for an additional activity during the program."



Michael Butler
Meeting Planner/Director, Strategic Accounts
Brightspot Incentives & Events
Irving, TX

and it ran perfectly," Crane says. "We chose this so that the audience could strengthen their relationships with management of the hosting company without having the worry to pay for anything. Everything was included."

The pool bar is the No. 1 amenity guests of all-inclusives enjoy. At night, there are lots of free entertainment options to keep the fun going.

"Also, the days of fly-infused buffets are over," Crane says. "Now, these five-star all-inclusives have award-winning a la carte restaurants to enjoy."

Chelsea Wing, group event management buyer at ITA Group, has hosted many events at all-inclusive resorts.

"The attendees rave about the inclusions and once they've experienced

the all-inclusive concept, they expect it," she says. "It is not possible to provide the same all-inclusive experience at an EP hotel within the same budget. Financially, this drives decisions to continuously use all-inclusive resorts."

According to Tiffany Clark, strategic account buyer at ITA Group, the all-inclusive nature also allows attendees to enjoy networking with colleagues at the numerous restaurants and bars without worrying about who is picking up the tab.

"Some resorts are not only including non-motorized watersports, but now the salon, spa or nearby attractions are included in the rates," Clark says.

"With the value that an all-inclusive adds, planners can even offer additional events, such as an afternoon pool party or higher-quality amenities, only enhancing the participant experience even more."

Amenities Aplenty

For more than 20 years, Sandals Resorts has welcomed groups of every size to the Caribbean.

This all-inclusive resort provides groups with service tailored to their specific needs, offering personalized event expertise and support for meetings, galas, seminars or conferences.

Sandals provides a broad range of meeting facilities from expansive ballrooms to intimately exclusive boardrooms at any one of its 16 locations on six different islands.

In addition, Sandals Resorts offers industry-leading programs and services that feature a variety of inclusions and activities.

Every function and meeting held at Sandals is tailored to a group's specific needs and requirements — from the complimentary use of state-of-the-art equipment and facilities to the exhilarating teambuilding activities that bring groups closer together.

This may include dining at up to 16 gourmet restaurants and up to 12 bars per resort, motorized watersports

"The attendees rave about the inclusions, and once they've experienced the all-inclusive concept, they expect it.... It is not possible to provide the same all-inclusive experience at an EP hotel within the same budget."



Chelsea Wing
Group Event Management Buyer
ITA Group
West Des Moines, IA

including waterskiing, wake boarding and scuba diving, and Robert Mondavi Twin Oaks Wines exclusively for Sandals Resorts.

There also are endless ways for groups to be entertained at Sandals, including live shows, beach parties, themed nights, piano bars, swim-up bars, bonfires and more.

Hotel Xcaret Mexico is another ideal all-inclusive resort, especially for financial and insurance companies who might be interested in celebrating the natural beauty and eco-integrative architecture of this unique property. Companies with a focus on sustainability may embrace the sensible approach that Hotel Xcaret México takes to protect and conserve its surrounding magnificent environment.

Meeting attendees can see the Xcaret México Espectacular show, explore the hidden wonder of Xel-Há and its inlet or visit the underground world at Xplor Park.

Others may enjoy venturing along the jungle trails in the Riviera Maya at night in Xplor Fuego. At this park, visitors can drive amphibious vehicles through torch-lit paths, paddle along "lava" rivers and fly above the trees on the highest zip lines of the Riviera Maya.

Or perhaps being a part of the unforgettable Mexican floating fiesta at Xoximilco would appeal to the group. And still other attendees may love the sensory experiences available at Xenses Park.

Not surprising, Club Med's all-inclusive concept throughout its 65 resorts worldwide bodes well for meetings and events.

In addition to dining options for groups of all sizes, Club Med's all-inclusive packages for meetings and events include unlimited premium

beverages. When meetings and work-based sessions are completed for the day, attendees can participate in Club Med's extensive land and watersport activities, including sports programs — from golf, tennis and flying trapeze to waterskiing, sailing and fitness classes.

Groups can also book spa and wellness treatments, including use of the Turkish bath and sauna in a few of Club Med's resorts. For evening entertainment, attendees can enjoy live bands and nightly shows.

"All-inclusives make it easy for meeting planners to stay within budget. For attendees, the answer is simple — put the wallet in the safe and forget about it without missing anything at the resort."



Deven Crane
Director, Travel Services
Incentive Solutions
Atlanta, GA

While corporate meetings and events often have their own spaces for business, they may not have their own areas for activities.

But Club Med prides itself on offering a variety of luxury spaces, including private pools, bars and concierge services.

What's more, Club Med also provides teambuilding activities that inspire collaboration and build group unity.

For those looking for a more private affair, Club Med offers full resort buy-out options, whereby meeting planners can set the schedule, choose the menus and select and organize the activities for the entire group.

The team at the all-inclusive Hard Rock Resorts also understands the benefits that all-inclusives provide meeting and events, especially as a great way to get participants excited about the topics at hand.

Hard Rock offers guests access to luxury accommodations and gourmet food and drink (without reaching into their pockets) and provides a way for meeting and event hosts to make attendees feel well-cared-for.

Currently, Hard Rock has five all-inclusive properties in exotic locales like Cancun, Riviera Maya and Punta Cana. These oceanfront resorts boast white-sand beaches and exclusive salt-water snorkeling.

Accommodations include private balconies and hydro spa tubs, in-room



Gorgeous tropical surroundings create a unique outdoor dining experience at Hotel Xcaret México.

service around-the-clock and a top-shelf liquor.

And each resort offers its own unique amenities. For example, Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Maya encompasses pools, a splash park and waterslide, the Playacar Golf Club and nightly entertainment; whereas, Hard Rock Hotel Punta Cana has nine restaurants and

“With the value that an all-inclusive adds, planners can even offer additional events, such as an afternoon pool party or higher-quality amenities, only enhancing the participant experience even more.”



Tiffany Clark
Strategic Account Buyer
ITA Group
West Des Moines, IA

15 pools. Golf aficionados can enjoy the rolling greens of the resort’s Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course.

Steps to Take

If hosting a financial or insurance meeting or event at an all-inclusive is an option, meeting planners should consider the different brands and what they offer.

“Picking the right destination and property is the first critical success factor,” Butler says. “Also, some all-inclusives are adults-only, while others are family-friendly. Know which your client prefers.”

Before booking the space, it is recommended to have the meeting planner or someone from the company visit the property. That way, they can experience the resort to make sure the food and beverages are on par with their level of expectations.

If a meeting planner chooses an all-inclusive, be sure to take advantage of the food and beverage to its fullest.

Consider giving attendees an extra day around the property or pool to get their fill instead of taking them off-property for another day’s activity.

“If you’re not already using all-inclusive, consider showing your client this option next time. They’ll love knowing the final cost is not an estimate they have to stay up worrying about onsite,” Butler says.

It’s also important to remember that you get what you pay for. If the cost of the all-inclusive is absurdly low, and a meeting planner has high expectations, prepare to be disappointed.

“While all-inclusives are fantastic, some are a bit pricey,” Crane says. “But add up all that you get at the five-star all-inclusive, and the value precedes itself. Consider also additional setup

fees and additional offsite activities — these definitely add to the budget and need to be accounted for up front.”

And planners should have a clear understanding of what is included in the all-inclusive rate and where there are additional costs. Some resorts include taxes in the rate, whereas others don’t.

“A common mistake is assuming that all costs are covered in the one fee; however, in many cases, they do have nominal fees for upgrades or added amenities,” Abbott says. “It is essential to add those in on the bottom line before a resort is selected. The planner will need to make sure to budget for rentals and décor, as what the hotel provides is not always enough to create the ambience the planner and the client are looking for.”

Another slip-up planners make when it comes to hosting an event at an all-inclusive is not scheduling enough downtime for the attendees.

As Crane explains, the real benefit to an all-inclusive is to enjoy the resort. If attendees find themselves constantly going offsite to explore the area, they will miss out on what is right in front of them. And, it’s free.

“There are many activities at the all-inclusive that are included, plus the activity team’s job at the all-inclusive is to entertain attendees,” Crane says. “Use them to stay at the resort and have fun. Again, don’t forget about the setup fees and additional costs involved in group functions. Décor, entertainment and setup fees are not included and must be budgeted for.”

Wing advises meeting planners to determine if all-inclusives are always the best fit for the group.

“All-inclusives are limited to a handful of destinations and depending on the size of the group, if you need a larger ballroom, you may be even more restricted,” she says.

“Furthermore, some destinations may offer an all-inclusive package, but due to the labor rates/taxes in the destination, they may not be able to offer the same level of service as you may find in other destinations.”

I&FMM



HOTEL XCARET MEXICO

ALL-FUN INCLUSIVE™
HOTEL ALL INCLUSIVE + PARKS & TOURS + TRANSPORTATION & AIRPORT SHUTTLE

With the ultimate ALL-FUN INCLUSIVE™ experience, the most amazing eco-parks in the world will become your attendees back yards

An impressive Convention Center and unlimited group access to our Parks: Xcaret, Xel-Há, Xplor, Xplor Fuego, Xoximilco and Xenses, as well as Tours to Xenotes and Xichén

hotelxcaret.com

Overcoming Stage Fright

Practice Makes Perfect to Deliver a Great Presentation

By Maura Keller

When planning meetings for Renasant Bank, John Oxford, CFMP, director of marketing and public relations, senior vice president at Renasant Bank, knows all too well how stage fright can grip presenters and cause a meeting or event to come to a halt. People with stage fright have a tremendous fear of being negatively judged. Like Oxford, many meeting and event planners within the financial and insurance arena understand the issue of stage fright. That's because in this industry, where presentations are extremely common, planners often need to work with speakers on delivering a solid presentation that keeps the audience coming back for more.

Two of the biggest causes of stage fright are inexperience and unpreparedness. "Although even the most experienced speakers still have some stage fright, as with anything, the more you practice it, the better you become and less nervous you are," Oxford says.

Fear of public speaking can happen in front of groups of all sizes. In fact, many people find public speaking easier as the group gets larger.

"A room of 20 people is actually more demanding than a room of 20,000 due to the personalization of the space and close quarters along with the ability to have Q&A sessions, vs. a deep stage and a microphone, which changes the atmosphere," Oxford says. "The larger

the audience gets, the more they become sort of a blur after the first couple of rows."

Public speaking takes many forms. Melissa Forziat of Melissa Forziat Events and Marketing is a public speaker who has shown clients how to use formal speeches, pitches and elevator speeches as a marketing tool for their businesses. As someone who speaks throughout the United States in a variety of business settings, she shares some truths about public speaking. In the majority of situations, the person giving the speech is far more knowledgeable about the topic than anyone else in the room.

"This is a point that I would emphasize," Forziat says. "Chances are that you have done more research and more thinking about your topic, so you are doing them a favor by informing them. When you reframe it like that, it can ease the pressure. Instead of feeling judged, you realize that you are, in fact, providing a service to the people in the room by sharing what you know."

Rich Sturchio, president of Cramer, an event agency with a focus on

financial and professional service clients, has worked with myriad insurance and financial-based clients on perfecting presentation skills and overcoming stage fright.

Sturchio says that great public speakers are genuine. It's easy for an audience to sense when

a presenter has been over-coached because there is often an incongruity in their persona and performance.

"A great public speaker also is comfortable and articulate, with a touch of humor and humility," Sturchio says. "An audience wants to identify with the speaker on some level, so along with their command of the subject matter, they need to reveal a little of themselves so we can believe them and relate to them. I've seen great speakers march around the stage and shout, and I've seen great speakers stand behind a podium and speak almost quietly into their script. In both cases, the speakers were true to themselves. They knew their strengths and weaknesses and made the best of them."

Techniques to Use

There is no magic trick to beating stage fright because each person experiences it in different ways.

That said, Christy Lamagna, CMP, CMM, CTSM, president of Strategic Meetings & Events, says she tells her clients that one of the best ways to ease stage fright and bond with the audience at the same time is to open with a personal story. Here's why: People don't expect it.

"Lower your volume, just slightly at key points," Lamagna says. "People will unconsciously lean forward to hear you, literally bringing themselves closer to you."

Other tips include having presenters bite the tip of their tongue to alleviate dry mouth, wear clothes that they feel confident in, and wear shoes that are comfortable and won't shake if their legs tremble.

"It's important that presenters

"One of the best ways to ease stage fright and bond with the audience at the same time is to open with a personal story."

Christy Lamagna, CMP, CMM, CTSM
President, Strategic Meetings & Events,
Bernardsville, NJ



Forziat suggests that it is not just about memorizing but understanding what you are saying.

"Very often, as you practice, you will come across moments in the delivery that feel unnatural or do not quite follow a logical order in your brain," she says. "Fix them so that

the rhythm feels right. Those moments are the ones you will stress about the most, so address them up front."

There is a second aspect of public speaking — aside from the delivery of pre-developed material — that can be stressful as a speaker: the Q&A. Usually this is a fear of not having the answers to questions and appearing as less than an expert.

"One of my suggestions is to plan out some lines to say in the event a question is asked that you cannot answer in that moment," Forziat says. "Ninety-nine percent of the time it is OK if you do not have an answer to a question. You can say, 'What a great question. You have really made me think with that one. I would like to ... do a little research to make sure I give you the right information. Let's connect after this so I can get your contact details.' If you have a few lines at the ready for this type of situation, you are prepared for the worst-case scenario."

Another good practice is to work on breathing. Inexperienced speakers tend to breathe and talk very fast in their

remember all the presentations they have sat through and realize that the audience is there to listen and learn; they want them to succeed," Lamagna says. "The worst-case scenario is they'll quietly and contentedly check their phones if the presenter doesn't hit the mark."

Oxford stresses that speakers are judged, like meeting a new person, in the first 30 seconds to minute of their speech. Therefore, a strong start wins the audience, as well as eases the nerves. "They must practice to be a great speaker, but if there is one thing to practice the most, it is their opening. And, practice it until they are sick of it," he says.

Oxford advises people who are giving big presentations at meetings and events to practice one hour for every minute of their speech.

"For example, if you have a 20-minute speech, you give it 20 hours of practice," he says. "It sounds crazy, but the ones that took it seriously and practiced this much became excellent speakers, and their nervousness was nonexistent."



Speaking in front of a very large crowd can be less daunting because most of the audience is not up close and familiar.

"Although even the most experienced speakers still have some stage fright, as with anything, the more you practice it, the better you become and less nervous you are."

John Oxford, CFMP, Director of Marketing & Public Relations,
Senior Vice President, Renasant Bank, Tupelo, MS





“Stand up. Command the room. If they can get it in their head that audiences want them to succeed, it’s a huge help.”

Rich Sturchio, President
Cramer, Norwood, MA

opening until they get comfortable. A presenter should try to slow down, take some controlled breaths and do not be afraid to pause before beginning.

“Also mentally realize that the vast majority of the audience is rooting for the presenter to do well and inform, entertain or persuade them of or about something,” Oxford says.

Knowing the audience is the first step to winning them over. Following this, speakers should tactically use one of the methods below for gaining the audience’s attention in their speech. For example:

- Tell a story.
- Ask a question (often rhetorical).
- Recite a brief quotation.
- Arouse curiosity/make a startling statement.
- Provide a relevant statistic or fact.
- Tell a joke.

These methods will work if they are authentic and done with passion and energy. What doesn’t work is a shaky voice, bad breathing rhythm, looking

down and reading the entire time, not being dressed appropriately and lacking energy.

“The best speakers can make a boring topic exciting, while nervous and boring speakers can make the most exciting topic uninteresting,” Oxford says.

Suzanne Bates, CEO of Bates Communications and author of *Speak Like a CEO*, has delivered hundreds of presentations to audiences across the globe and offers the following tips on public speaking:

“Read the audience and be prepared to change it up if they’re not responding well,” Bates says. “I was speaking before an audience of PR professionals

natural, seamless and authentic to their audience,” Bates says.

Stephanie M. Scotti, owner of Professionally Speaking Consulting, says it’s important that speakers share from their heart, not their head. Merely presenting a litany of cold, hard facts is “ho-hum” for the speaker and the audience. After all, why should listeners pay attention when they could easily get the same information online?

“Speakers must make it meaningful by sharing their interpretation of those facts,” Scotti says. “I’ve noticed this effect when listening to sports commentators. It’s easy to tune them out when they merely recite a list of statistics about a player or team. But when they share their own insights about those facts and make predictions about how they may impact the outcome of the game

or even the season, their enthusiasm is inspiring and much more interesting. When you add your own insights to your presentation, your audience will sit up and take notice.”

Speakers or presenters also need to develop a message they believe in.

To state it simply, if the speaker doesn’t believe in the message, neither will the listeners.

As Scotti explains, some speakers make the mistake of relying too heavily on personal charisma, hoping that will be enough to get the audience to buy into the content of the presentation. In reality, that doesn’t work.

“People can sense when something is ‘off,’” she says. “They might not be able to explain it, but listeners know when a speaker is not authentic, and the result is an automatic disconnect. Speakers can’t make it by faking it. It’s passion for the subject and the message that drives delivery. It enables the presenter to convey the message in an animated way that establishes credibility, grabs attention and allows the audience to get it.”

Mistakes to Avoid

For presenters at a meeting or event, there are some key mistakes to avoid.



“One of my suggestions is to plan out some lines to say in the event a question is asked that you cannot answer in that moment.”

Melissa Forziat, Public Speaker
Melissa Forziat Events and Marketing,
Seattle, WA

and, although they were being polite, I could tell that I wasn’t hitting the mark. Immediately, I jumped down from the stage and began walking through the audience to engage [them] in my talk. When it was done, I received high marks in the final evaluation, but had I stayed on the stage, I wouldn’t have.”

And a presenter should know when enough is enough. Even if the audience is hanging on their every word, they need to say what they plan to say and be done. Don’t be the guest that stays too long at the party.

While presenters don’t want to come across as overly-scripted, it’s also important to practice in front of a mirror or in front of some good friends or colleagues so that they are extremely comfortable with their speech and can recognize what comes next without having to glance at notes.

“That way, they will come across as

Improve Public Speaking

Public speaking is both a skill and an art. Like any skill, presenters need to give it the right amount of time and attention. The more they do this, the more they can enjoy the artistry of speaking, which includes spontaneity, sincerity and the willingness to be seen.

To improve, they need:

- **Preparation:** Get a clear sense of who their audience is and what they want. Craft the presentation to match that need.
- **Rehearsal:** Take the time to practice and become very familiar with the content and any technical aspects they want to include.
- **Support:** If they need professional support, hire a good communication coach — not only someone who can help them with technique, but also who can help them understand their fears, cheer them on and applaud when they succeed.
- **Opportunity:** Presenters improve the more they speak. A presenter should challenge himself or herself to speak in meetings or take part on panels. As they get more comfortable in those arenas, they can move onto being a solo presenter. It can be as simple as speaking up at a meeting (when they may otherwise be quiet) to volunteering to speak at an event.
- **Observe others:** Presenters need to observe other speakers. What are they doing that resonates with them? While you can always learn from others, it’s important for a speaker to remember that every presenter has a personal style and something unique to offer.
- **Ask for feedback:** Some presenters don’t ask for feedback, but it is vital to understand what is working and what is resonating with the audience. **I&FMM**



The first is not preparing enough for the presentation, especially when speaking to groups who may specialize or have interest in a specific area of the topic.

Also, some presenters make the mistake of memorizing their speech. By doing this, the speaker becomes more worried about “remembering” than communicating.

“Some presenters make the mistake of not taking the time to visit the venue where they are speaking, even if it is the meeting room right down the hall,” Scotti says. “Planners should go there, and make sure it is set up the way they want it to be. If it can’t be, then figure out how you can make the room more comfortable for them.”

Another common error is trying to relate to an audience and not knowing the subject. Oxford once saw a speaker try to use a golf metaphor.

“They used the incorrect sports terminology, and it was to a room full of bankers, which by default and stereotype knew a lot about golf,” Oxford says. “It instantly took away their credibility as a speaker and after the speech, which was not bad in delivery, all anyone could say was, ‘Can

“Some presenters make the mistake of not taking the time to visit the venue where they are speaking.... Planners should go there, and make sure it is set up the way they want it to be.”

Stephanie M. Scotti, Owner
Professionally Speaking Consulting LLC, Chapel Hill, NC



you believe they thought you scored points in golf?’ So know your topics and your audience.”

Presenters also should avoid telling the audience they are nervous — it seems like they need to put a marker down so they won’t be judged.

“Most of the time, they will never know that you are nervous. If you are a professional there to present, it’s part of your job not to be nervous,” Oxford says.

“For me, I find it helps to eliminate stage fright by talking to someone right up until I speak. It helps take my mind off any nervousness,” he adds. “Others find that they need a quiet place to collect their thoughts. Different things work for different people so find what works for you through lots of practice — especially your opening

— and make sure you know your topic and, most of all, deliver your speech with authentic energy.”

In the end, it is vital that a presenter keeps speaking, regardless of their stage fright. Even in small presentations, they should try to practice all the skills they need with a larger group.

“Stand up. Command the room. Also, if they can get it in their head that audiences want them to succeed, it’s a huge help,” Sturchio says. “Some of the best presentations I’ve seen have been from people who were scared to death to present. Inevitably, they make the big mistake — forgot a word or a concept. They paused, laughed, acknowledged their mistake. There are relatively only a few people in the world who get to speak to large groups of people. Enjoy it.” **I&FMM**



In a large room, it helps to show the presentation on a big screen to keep the audience’s attention.



Florida's Gift Keeps on Giving

Many insurance and financial groups choose the Sunshine State for meetings due to the climate and various destination options available.

"The most important factor, for me as the meeting planner, is that Orlando is a big draw," Dominguez says. "That's because there are so many things to do. For example, our attendees love the theme parks. And, in recent years, we've been marketing the meetings by encouraging attendees to bring their families. We're trying to make it more of a traditional annual 'event' rather than just a meeting. So, we particularly like Florida destinations that will be popular with families, who can enjoy a nice vacation while our attendees are getting some work done. Orlando provides that opportunity."

This year, Dominguez and her attendees returned to the **Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnett Creek**, which they first enjoyed in 2016.

"I originally found the Wyndham Grand through the site selection company Helms-Briscoe," Dominguez says. "After that, my team and I visited the hotel. When I walked in, I realized it's just a gorgeous hotel. It's very modern, and it's very warm and appealing in terms of its décor. That's always important to me because I want the first impression

"The quality of the Ritz-Carlton has a lot to do with the fact we keep going back. The staff at the Ritz and the service standard are always maintained at a very high level."

Michael Seibert, President
Quinwell Travel, Boston, MA

of our attendees to be, 'Wow, look at this.' And, that's the effect you get when you enter the Wyndham Grand. For example, there's a huge glass wall — they call it a 'window curtain' — that looks out to the pool area, and the view is just phenomenal. The lobby is also beautiful."

The resort's accommodations are also exceptional, Dominguez says.

"The rooms are beautiful. I've seen a lot of hotel rooms during my time as a meeting planner, and oftentimes, you don't sleep that well in a hotel. You miss your own bed, or the pillows and sheets aren't that great. I slept like a baby in the Wyndham Grand. The beds are extremely comfortable, and the bedding is spectacular," she says.

One factor that made the resort ideal for Dominguez's group is its size in relation to her meeting.

"It's perfect for the size of our group, which makes it very cozy because we basically take over the entire property," she says. "And that makes the experience very pleasant for our attendees because no matter where you go in the hotel, there's always going to be somebody you know. For us, it feels like you're at summer camp, and that just makes the meeting a lot of fun for everybody."

Different "Mini-Destinations" All Wrapped Up in One State

By John Buchanan

Year in and year out, for the last 50 years, Florida has ranked high atop the list of the most popular and coveted meeting destinations in the country. In fact, the Sunshine State is not perceived as a single destination, but as home to a wide assortment of individual locales that offer an option for every taste and budget. And, it is especially popular with insurance and financial services groups.

Orlando

Known as "the Magic City" and home to a handful of world-famous theme parks, Orlando is the No. 1 meeting place in Florida, as well as one of the most dominant and wildly popular meeting destinations in the U.S. And, it thrives on enthusiastic repeat business.

Nancy Dominguez, managing director of the Miami-based Florida Association of Public Insurance Adjusters, has chosen Orlando for the last four years for her annual three-day, three-night fall conference, held each October for 400 attendees, plus about 200 family members.



Credit: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

The Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa, a former Ritz-Carlton, offers ultra-luxurious accommodations and an exceptional level of service.

Although the Wyndham Grand's food and beverage service is superb, and its meeting space is top-notch, the single most important factor for Dominguez and her attendees is the resort's level of service.

"As a planner, I've seen it all, good and bad," Dominguez says. "And I have to say, in all honesty, the service we got at the Wyndham Grand was the best service we've ever gotten at any hotel. Part of the reason for that, I think, is that we had the same team that we had two years earlier. So, not only did they adhere to a high level of service, but they also knew ... exactly what we needed and wanted."

It was so extraordinary, she says, that she hopes to convince her colleagues to return next fall. "I really want to go back because we had such an incredible experience."

Miami

While Orlando is most revered for its vast meeting-quality hotel inventory and theme parks, Miami is hailed for its international cosmopolitan flair and world-famous beaches.

Sandra Edstrom, CMP, client relations and events manager, at Hannover Life Reassurance Company of America (HLRC), chose Miami Beach as the destination for the company's three-day, two-night underwriting symposium for 85 attendees last February.

In fact, the Miami area is so popular with her attendees that Edstrom has been holding the meeting there every other year since 2012. One of the primary reasons for the repetition is its proven drawing power.

"Our people also love to be on the ocean and sitting outside in the sun with a cocktail," Edstrom says. "The meeting involves a lot of networking, and a destination like Miami is perfect for that. It just offers so much to do, and there are so many great hotels to choose from. The hotels are

beautiful and located right on the ocean. It's also very easy to get into and out of, including from the Midwest, because it's such a popular tourist destination, particularly at the time of year we go."

For this year's meeting, Edstrom selected Miami Beach's **The Palms Hotel & Spa**, located on Collins Avenue, just north of the world-famous South Beach district. It also offers direct access to the beach boardwalk that extends to the southern end of South Beach and as far north as the iconic Fontainebleau Miami Beach hotel.

"We try to go to a different hotel every time we're in Miami," Edstrom says. "It's just fun to always give our attendees a new experience. We chose The Palms Hotel & Spa because of the quality of the response we got to our RFP, and the fact they were able to accommodate some of our specific needs when it came to meeting room setups. The Palms also has very good meeting space, which was an important factor in our decision. It's just an absolutely gorgeous property."

Edstrom particularly liked the hotel's outdoor event space. "That's important to us," she says, "because we like to stage our dinners outside."

She also singled out the hotel's accommodations for praise. "They are very comfortable and clean, and you also don't feel like you're in a typical hotel," she says. "The décor also offers a great representation of Miami Beach. It's very 'beachy.'"

HLRC hosted all food and beverage events at the hotel. "The Palms has really good food, and they're also very creative," Edstrom says. "We do all of our meals buffet-style. They were able to create some really fantastic menus for us."

A highlight of the meeting was its opening-night reception, held outside by the swimming pool.

"We also had dinner out there," she says. "It's a very nice setting. You really get to take advantage of the beach."

During their free time, many of the company's attendees explored the cultural amenities of the Miami area.

Several small groups ventured out to the world-famous Wynwood art district near downtown Miami and visited its acclaimed Wynwood Walls art installation and adjacent galleries. Wynwood is now home to a number of Miami's trendiest and most popular restaurants, such as the art-themed Wynwood Kitchen & Bar.

The group also happened to be in town during the annual South Beach Wine & Food Festival, which offers an opportunity to feast on the best of what local and international chefs prepare.

"We were in the middle of it," Edstrom says. "That's just

WHERE ELEGANCE meets excellence.



THE NEW STANDARD FOR PALM BEACH EVENT SPACE.

Featuring 30,000 square feet of flexible event space re-envisioned in September 2018, your attendees will experience the resort's new-fashioned luxury from the opening session to the final farewell. Combined with the genuine passion and intuitive service from our five-star hoteliers, we curate bespoke events that are as inspiring as they are productive.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT SALES AT 561 540 4806



EAU PALM BEACH
Resort & Spa

Stay. The water's perfect.



100 SOUTH OCEAN BLVD. MANALAPAN FL 33462 #Eaumoments EAUPALMBEACH.COM

another example of why Miami is just a great destination — because there is so much to explore and do. But the best thing about it is definitely the beach.”

Palm Beach

As it has been for the last half-century, Palm Beach, located about two hours north of Miami on the Atlantic Coast, is Florida’s most exclusive destination, a throwback to Florida’s golden age as a getaway for the world’s rich and famous.

Today, Palm Beach boasts one of the most exclusive and critically hailed resorts in the entire state: the Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five Diamond **Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa** — the former Ritz-Carlton Palm Beach, now privately owned — which is situated on a secluded private beach.

In the 2015 *Conde Nast Traveler* “Readers Choice Awards,” the Eau Palm Beach — which also features the Forbes Five-Star Eau Spa — was recognized as Florida’s top resort.

It has more than 30,000 square feet of expanded and updated meeting space.



“We chose The Palms Hotel & Spa because of the quality of the response we got to our RFP, and the fact they were able to accommodate some of our specific needs when it came to meeting room setups.”

Sandra Edstrom, CMP, Client Relations and Events Manager, Corporate Marketing, Hannover Life Reassurance Company of America, Orlando, FL

ferent and unique that you don’t see in many properties.”

The rooms are not only large, she says, but they are also bright and cheerful and feature superb amenities.

“The décor is something that really sets the Eau Palm Beach apart,” Lipinski says. “It’s not just different, it’s very refreshing. There are also great views from the rooms. And, that includes the views of the ocean from the bathtubs in some rooms. That just shows you how much thought and planning they put into the design of the rooms and the experience that they want guests to have.”

In terms of the attention to detail she received on her site visit, she says Eau Palm Beach distinguishes itself as an outstanding property.

“The level of service they give you, as the planner, is exceptional,” she says. “From the minute I arrived, I got incredible service. When I checked in, the person at the front desk started a conversation about Pittsburgh and clearly knew quite a bit about the city. It was obvious to me that they had taken the time to learn who I was and where I was from, and that’s not something you see very often with hotels. They were also incredibly attentive to exactly what my needs were as a meeting planner.”

As a matter of fact, she says, she loved the Eau Palm Beach so much that she made a point of visiting for the weekend prior to this fall’s FICP annual conference in Orlando. “Now, I can’t wait to go back next spring,” she says.

Naples

Less well-known than its sister Florida destinations — but with the unique distinction of being the retirement home of more former Fortune 500 CEOs than any other place in the country — Naples, located on the Gulf of Mexico in the southwestern corner of the state, offers a special intimacy and exclusivity that is particularly appealing to high-end insurance and financial services groups.

Michael Seibert, president of Quinwell Travel in Boston,



Credit: Ritz-Carlton Naples Beach Resort

Ritz-Carlton Naples Beach Resort, located on the Gulf of Mexico, has a unique intimacy and exclusivity that is appealing to everyone.

Bethany Lipinski, director, event planning and promotions, at Pittsburgh-based HM Insurance Group, a Highmark Health affiliate, will host back-to-back incentive groups at the Eau Palm Beach for 200 qualifiers, plus spouses and guests, next spring. The first group will take part in a six-day program for approximately 50 to 60 of the company’s elite “Platinum” qualifiers and their spouses or guests. The second will be a four-day program for the “Diamond” group.

Why Palm Beach? “The parents of my best friend live in West Palm Beach, so I had visited there for leisure, and I always loved the area,” Lipinski says. “It’s just beautiful. Then, when I discovered Eau Palm Beach and learned that it was a former Ritz-Carlton, I knew it would be a property that would fall in line with what our attendees are used to because we have used Ritz-Carlton hotels for these programs in the past.”



INSPIRATION HAS A NEW ADDRESS.

Situated amid 16,000 acres of stunning scenery and hushed seclusion in Central Florida, Streamsong is a one-of-a-kind meeting and incentive resort created in complete harmony with its natural surroundings and deeply committed to the highest aspirations of today’s business elite. Modern meeting spaces, dramatic outdoor special event venues, 54 holes of nationally-ranked golf and so much more. It’s no surprise Streamsong has become the preferred inspiration destination for many of today’s biggest, brightest and fastest-growing organizations.



STREAMSONG® BLUE STREAMSONG® RED STREAMSONG® BLACK

1000 Streamsong Drive • Streamsong, Florida 33834 • 866.595.0935 • streamsongresort.com



Credit: Architectural Photography Inc.

Daytona Beach

Located on the Atlantic Coast in northeastern Florida, Daytona Beach once ruled as the state's most famous and iconic destination.

During the 1950s and '60s, it served as the location for a number of classic Hollywood "beach" movies.

Barbara Watson, executive assistant to the CEO at Foundation Risk Partners, a property casualty and employee benefits insurance company in Daytona Beach, chose the organization's hometown in September to host its two-day sales kick-off meeting, a 125-attendee event that launches its annual incentive travel program for the following year.

It was her first Daytona Beach program since joining the company earlier in the year.

"Despite having had more than 30 years of experience in meeting and convention planning, I was not really familiar with Daytona Beach as a destination," Watson says. "But having planned the September meeting — and working with a property like the **Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach** — really opened my eyes to the area and what it has to offer."

Chief among its most appealing characteristics is its status as an internationally known and timeless Florida beach destination that has been a prized family vacation destination for more than 75 years.

Planning an event or meeting at Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach is ideal, as it's an internationally known, iconic Florida property.

has chosen Naples for a number of his third-party meeting clients for years.

"Naples is one of the nicer destinations in Florida, even though it's not as well-known as Orlando or Miami," he says. "But it's one of the most beautiful and sophisticated destinations in the state. It's very cultured. It also has a great downtown area and great restaurants. And, the beaches are beautiful."

He hosted his last meeting there in May — a five-day, four-night program for 350 attendees at the **Ritz-Carlton Naples**.

"This particular client returns to Naples and the Ritz-Carlton about every three years," Seibert says. "They've been doing that for the last 20 years. The quality of the Ritz-Carlton has a lot to do with the fact we keep going back. The staff at the Ritz and the service standard are always maintained at a very high level. And, the hotel also offers great convenience when it comes to easily getting to the downtown area, where there are so many restaurants and shops."

Given the reputation and prestige of the brand, Seibert says, it's no surprise that the accommodations at the Ritz-Carlton Naples are outstanding.

"The rooms are well-designed and spacious," he says. "There are also top-of-the-line amenities. And that includes all of the major amenities, from the spa to the swimming pool. The restaurants are also excellent. It's a great facility for a high-level executive meeting. That's largely because the level of service is extremely high. The staff is very attentive and consistent in the level of service they offer."

A highlight of this year's meeting was a Kentucky Derby-themed evening that took place on race day. "The staff did a fantastic job of turning the ballroom into the 'Kentucky Derby,'" Seibert says. "It was an exceptional event that was a lot of fun for our attendees."

Due to the quality of the hotel and the sophistication of the destination, Seibert says, Naples has earned its place as an A-list option for planners in the know.



"The décor is something that really sets the Eau Palm Beach apart. It's not just different, it's very refreshing. There are also great views from the rooms."

Bethany Lipinski, Director, Event Planning and Promotions
HM Insurance Group, a Highmark Company, Pittsburgh, PA

In addition, it is even more famous today as the home of the biggest event in NASCAR stock car racing, the annual Daytona 500.

Watson selected the Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach as her venue because of its affinity with Foundation Risk's self-image as an enterprise. "It's cool, and it has a great vibe," she says.

That was an important factor, she explains, given the youthful demographics of Foundation Risk and its workforce. "The Hard Rock perfectly fits where we are as a young and energetic company. So, using the Hard Rock really demonstrated to the rest of the company where we are [in our evolution]. It also has a great location, right on the beach, about 10 minutes to the south of downtown."

As a meeting venue, Watson gave the hotel high marks. She also cited the hotel's excellent service. "It was very good — very hands-on," she says.

"Since the meeting, I have become friends with the

ROSE CAME FOR
A CONFERENCE.

AND LEFT CALMED BY THE
SOUNDS OF THE ATLANTIC OCEAN.



You may be coming to Jacksonville for a convention, but you will leave as so much more. A paddle boarder, shell collector, professional shopper — the activities are endless in Jacksonville. Do what you love or try something new. **Meet yourself in Jacksonville.**

To learn more about hosting your next event in Jacksonville, visit meetinjax.com.

director of sales and marketing. And, I really like the people I met there. They do a great job."

Other top meeting-quality hotels in the area include the **Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort**, **Wyndham Ocean Walk**, **Hammock Beach — A Salamander Resort** and **El Caribe Resort & Conference Center**.

For her meeting, Watson had the advantage of access to a unique offsite venue, a classic American "muscle car" collection owned and operated privately in a warehouse by her boss, the company's CEO.

Jacksonville

Located north of Daytona Beach on the Atlantic Coast, Jacksonville is now emerging as a new option on the list of Florida meeting destinations.

While it has been popular as an association meeting market for decades, the city is now aggressively promoting itself as a corporate meeting destination, notes Katie Mitura, vice president, marketing and communication, at Visit Jacksonville.

"Jacksonville is a historic Florida destination, yet it's also a very modern, innovative meetings destination that is now experiencing a major revitalization," Mitura says. "We want corporate meeting planners to learn more about us and take advantage of our endless miles of beaches, explosion of local dining and cultural options and some of the most unique meetings venues in all of Florida. It will probably come as a surprise to some that we have been constantly ranked as a 'Top 50 Meetings Destination' in the nation."

The city boasts a hotel inventory of more than 18,000 rooms — ranging from oceanfront resorts, full-service hotels along the St. Johns River and charming beachside inns.

"And, our meeting hotels offer some of the most competitive room rates in Florida," Mitura says.

The city's largest meeting-quality hotel is the 951-room **Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront**, which features 116,000 square feet of meeting space. It has completed a major renovation of its lobby and ground level.

Other major meeting properties include the 354-room **Omni Jacksonville Hotel**, with 14,000 square feet of meeting space and the 193-room **One Ocean Resort & Spa**, with 10,500 square feet of meeting space.

The 323-room **Lexington Hotel & Conference Center**, with more than 35,000 square feet of meeting space, has completed a \$20 million renovation. It is located along the Jacksonville Riverwalk.

Mitura also touts the city's thriving and ever-evolving



"The Hard Rock perfectly fits where we are as a young and energetic company. So, using the Hard Rock really demonstrated to the rest of the company where we are [in our evolution]. It also has a great location, right on the beach."

Barbara Watson, Executive Assistant to the CEO
Foundation Risk Partners, Daytona Beach, FL

local dining scene as yet another reason corporate meeting planners should consider Jacksonville.

"We offer restaurants that feature fresh, local ingredients and specialize in seafood and southern flavors," she says. "We truly offer an innovative food scene that is unlike anywhere else in Florida, and it has been powered by award-winning local chefs that have been nationally and internationally trained and recognized."

"Whatever your group's craving might be, you will find the perfect restaurant in Jacksonville, from sophisticated fine-dining to casual fare."

The city also offers an impressive array of offsite venues. Alhambra Theatre & Dining ranks as the nation's longest continuously running professional dinner theater.

Or take a tour of the Jax Ale Trail, 15 locally owned craft breweries, each with unique features and flavor.

The biggest and most modern one is Intuition Ale Works, located in the downtown Sports Complex. The brewery offers some of the best beer in Jacksonville from its rooftop taproom with views of the St. Johns River.

Local museums include the Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville, Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens and Museum of Science & History.

"All we ask of meeting planners is that they take a serious look at Jacksonville," Mitura says. "If they do, we know they will decide that we are one of the most unusual and best meeting destinations in Florida."

I&FMM

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



All-New Walt Disney World Dolphin Lobby

The Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby has undergone a \$12 million re-design, the final stage of a \$150 million renovation project, the largest makeover in the resort's history. It has 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 331,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 86 meeting rooms, and 2,270 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.



Award-Winning Dining



All-New Guest Rooms And Suites



Impressive Meeting Venues



1500 Epcot Resorts Blvd.
Lake Buena Vista, FL, 32830
800.524.4939 | 407.934.4290
swandolphinmeetings.com



Attendees can't get enough of the spectacular view and atmosphere of Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront's rooftop pool reception area.

Credit: Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront

Let the Good Times Roll in New Orleans

Known For Its Food, Music, History and Culture, This Louisiana City is Never Short on Fun



Credit: PRA New Orleans

The Mercedes-Benz Superdome is a popular venue in New Orleans because it is within walking distance of many hotels and attractions.

New Orleans, perennially hailed as one of the country's most popular meeting destinations, has held onto its accolades for so long for two simple reasons.

It is one of the most unique and endearing cities in the world. It also offers an ever-increasing range of options for meeting planners and attendees.

"For meeting attendees, New Or-

leans is a destination that has something to offer to all types of people of all ages," says Cindy Hayes, CMP, DMCP, director of sales at PRA New Orleans.

"There's the French Quarter and the Garden District. There's shopping and dining along Magazine Street. There are great museums and other activities. And, there are unique outdoor activities like tours of the bayou.

"New Orleans is not just Bourbon Street and the party scene. There is so much more to it than that," she says.

And, one of the factors that makes the Crescent City such a successful meeting destination, Hayes says, is that it is eminently walkable.

"That's really one of the things that makes us so popular with meeting planners and attendees," she adds.

By John Buchanan

Discovering the Magic

Evelyn Behrend, a director at global accounting and consulting behemoth PwC in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, chose New Orleans for the first time last November for one of the company's most important meetings, an annual four-day, three-night conference for almost 600 client attendees from around the world.

Why New Orleans? "It was simply a matter of selecting a location that we thought would be interesting for our people to go to," Behrend says. "It was also a matter of going to a destination where we felt there would be fun activities for our attendees."

Most of her attendees pay their own way to the conference, Behrend says, so the drawing power of the destination is also a key factor in her decision-making.

"We alternate between resort-style destinations and city center destinations," she says. "And in this instance, we opted for a city center destination. Part of the reason we selected New Orleans was the relatively warm climate in November. The other, more important factor was the relative value we got for the spend for this conference. And then, of course, we knew that New Orleans was a place where people would want to go."

Citywide Success

Jackie Gee, events director at Alviso, California-based financial services firm World System Builder, also chose New Orleans for the first time, for a four-day, three-night, citywide meeting that attracted 13,000 attendees from the U.S. and Canada in March 2017.

"We're based near San Jose, California, and in the past, we've had all of our meetings there," Gee says. "But by last year's meeting, we had outgrown San Jose, so we started looking elsewhere. We were invited to New Orleans for a site visit by the CVB, and we looked at all the venues, including the convention center and the major hotels. We liked the convention center very much, and we also liked the hotels, so we decided to go there."

World System Builder booked 20 hotels, including the city's major meeting hotels, such as New Orleans Marriott, Sheraton New Orleans Hotel and Hilton New Orleans Riverside. Company staff stayed at the Hyatt Place New Orleans Convention Center, located across the street from the facility where Gee hosted her exhibitors and meeting sessions.

She worked with destination management company Hosts New Orleans, of the Hosts Global network, to plan a spectacular opening night dinner event for 800 attendees at Mardi Gras World, an indoor-outdoor venue that features an outdoor pavilion. Mardi Gras World is home to much of the work done to stage Mardi Gras, including the creation of many of its famous floats. The facility can host groups of up to 5,000.

"That event was really fun," Gee says. "Mardi Gras World is a great venue."

The next night, the company hosted its annual awards banquet at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, widely hailed as one of the best in the country.

On Saturday night, with the help of Hosts New Orleans, Gee staged a sensational Mardi Gras parade through the streets for attendees. "We

"There's the French Quarter and the Garden District.... There are great museums ... and unique outdoor activities like tours of the bayou. New Orleans is not just Bourbon Street and the party scene. There is so much more to it than that."



Cindy Hayes, CMP, DMCP
Director of Sales
PRA New Orleans
New Orleans, LA

had a marching band and floats and everything you'd see at Mardi Gras, which had ended just before we got there," she says.

Hayes notes that such parades, known as "second line" parades, are wildly popular with corporate meeting planners because they epitomize New Orleans culture and tradition.

"In New Orleans, we hold parades for all kinds of things, including funerals," she says. "And a 'second line' parade is the second group that follows whoever is leading the front end of the parade,

Royal Sonesta New Orleans is one of the finest meeting hotels on Bourbon Street with more than 20,000 square feet of event space.



which is typically a band. The second line includes a smaller band that plays New Orleans jazz. It's among the most popular activities for groups because it's so participatory. And, what we do for corporate groups is add all kinds of elements to the parade, such as a high school marching band, stilt walkers or Mardi Gras floats that people can ride. They offer such a unique experience, and they deliver the wow factor."

For meeting groups, the parades typically march from the hotel to a location in the French Quarter, such as world-famous Pat O'Brien's bar or Bourbon Street.

As a planner, one of the things Gee liked most about New Orleans is its convention center.

She used one hall for her 50 exhibitors and another for general sessions and extensive breakouts.

"The convention center is an awesome venue," she says. "The service is amazing. They really stay on top of



The downtown Hilton New Orleans Riverside hotel offers easy access to the French Quarter.

things. And, both the exhibit space and meeting space are excellent."

She also praises the city's vast hotel product, which evolved over decades as a result of the clout New Orleans has in the citywide association meeting market. "All of the hotels were fantastic,"

Gee says. "One of the nice things about New Orleans is that there are so many excellent hotels within walking distance of the convention center and the French Quarter."

She also cited the city's famous dining and entertainment scene as a major factor in the success of her meeting. "After our events were over each night, a lot of our attendees went out on their own," she says. "Among the places I heard the most about were the famous places like Brennan's and Arnaud's restaurants. According to the feedback I got from people, all of the restaurants in town serve really great food and have great service. And, people also liked going to the bars on Bourbon Street. What I can say for sure is that all of our attendees really enjoyed New Orleans. It's just a fantastic destination."

She also praised the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau for the assistance and support it offered.

"The CVB did a great job when I was planning the meeting," Gee says. "During my site visit, they had the people from Hosts New Orleans take us on a tour of the city. They showed us multiple venues as options for our opening night event. They helped us find a great band for our parade. The CVB also gave us a lot of great information that we could pass on to our attendees about all the things to do in New Orleans in their free time. The CVB went all out to make us feel welcome."

Based on her experience in New Orleans, and those of her attendees, Gee credits the destination with making her first venture outside of California with her annual meeting a major success.

"Everyone had an awesome time," she says. "And, because we were arriving two days after Mardi Gras ended, some of our people chose to come in early and experience some of those festivities. They just loved it."

Another First-timer

Behrend's excursion to New Orleans was her first, as well, and every bit as successful as Gee's.

Behrend also worked with the New Orleans CVB from the time the destination came under serious consideration, and she went on a site visit. The level of attention and support she got from the CVB ultimately played a key role in finalizing New Orleans as the destination.

"They were able to provide a lot of great ideas about what to do with people once they got to the destination," Behrend says. "They really know their city. And, that expertise proved to be enormously helpful in planning the conference."

Behrend chose the **Hyatt Regency New Orleans**, located adjacent to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, as her hotel.

"It was just a matter of getting the dates, number of rooms and meeting space we needed, and meeting our budgetary requirements. But another factor was that we also wanted a

hotel that we knew would appeal to our client attendees."

Behrend hosted her opening night event on the pool deck at the hotel. She also staged an offsite event at the National World War II museum, the city's No. 1 tourist attraction. PwC did a partial buyout of the complex, and the facility catered the food and beverage.

"One of the pavilions we bought out was the one with all of the planes so people can walk around and see them, which is amazing," she says. "What's interesting and fun about the museum is that people can walk around in the various pavilions and explore. You learn a tremendous amount about the history of World War II. And, it also provides an excellent opportunity for people to mingle and network."

Like Gee, Behrend also opted for a second line parade that led attendees from the Hyatt Regency to Champignons Square, an outdoor festival space also located near the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. "After the parade, we had

"They [the CVB] were able to provide a lot of great ideas about what to do with people once they got to the destination. That expertise proved to be enormously helpful in planning the conference."

Evelyn Behrend
Director
PwC
Cherry Hill, NJ

a nice dinner that was catered by the hotel," she says. "We also brought in some food trucks and had a band on the stage. It was a beautiful evening, weather-wise, and a lovely event."

DMC Perspective

Although much of the eternal fame, or infamy, of New Orleans is tied

Two Other Gems of Southern Hospitality

New Orleans, despite its worldwide fame, is not the only destination that evokes the unique cuisine, culture and history of Louisiana. Baton Rouge, the state capital, and Shreveport/Bossier City also find favor with meeting planners who seek an experience unlike any other in the U.S.

Located just an hour northwest of New Orleans, Baton Rouge is home to Louisiana State University.

Although less well-known than New Orleans, the city is another sensational exemplar of Louisiana cuisine and culture.

Baton Rouge features three major downtown meeting hotels: the **Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center**, the **Hampton Inn & Suites by Hilton Baton Rouge Downtown** and the **Hotel Indigo Baton Rouge Downtown**. Located near the LSU campus is **The Cook Hotel and Conference Center at LSU**.

On the banks of the Mississippi River is the city's primary meeting and convention venue: **Raising Cane's River Center**, featuring 200,000 square feet of new and renovated space, including a 70,000 square feet exhibition hall that can be combined with an adjacent arena for more than 100,000 square feet of contiguous exhibit space, as well as 17 breakout rooms. The complex also includes a Performing Arts Theatre.

Baton Rouge's most popular offsite venues are its array of plantations, which range from intimate to sprawling, each one with a unique history and distinct ambience.

Another interesting and welcoming Louisiana destination is Shreveport-Bossier City, offering more than 11,000 hotel rooms and the Shreveport Convention Center, built in 2007 and managed by SMG.

The convention center is adjacent to the 313-room, full-service **Hilton Shreveport Hotel**, with use of 350,000 square feet of meeting and exhibit space.

Shreveport/Bossier City focuses on meetings of between 100 and 500 attendees. Its selling proposition is simple: value.

It also offers six casino resorts and a race track casino. The largest casino resort is the 660-room **Horseshoe Bossier City Hotel & Casino**. The area's primary event venue is the 14,000-seat CenturyLink Center arena.

For entertainment, the destination offers multiple spas and Harrah's Louisiana Downs – Casino Slots & Racing, which hosts horse racing from September to December.

The new Shreveport Aquarium recently opened, creating passion for conservation and sustainability by educating through experiences.

Shreveport-Bossier City also offers a thriving dining scene, consisting of locally owned restaurants that specialize in ribs, steaks and seafood.

But what truly makes Shreveport-Bossier City a special place is its small-town flavor and authentic Southern hospitality. **I&FMM**

IT'S WORTH
meeting here

A RESORT-STYLE HOTEL
PERFECT FOR YOUR MEETINGS

OVER 20,000 SQUARE FEET
OF EVENT SPACE

RSNOSALES@SONESTA.COM

ROYAL SONESTA
NEW ORLEANS



Credit: Hosts New Orleans

Hosts New Orleans helped plan a spectacular opening night dinner for 800 attendees at Mardi Gras World (above), an indoor-outdoor venue, followed the next night by a street parade (left).



Credit: Hosts New Orleans

to Bourbon Street — home to one of the finest meeting hotels, the **Royal Sonesta New Orleans** — Mardi Gras and its year-round wild party scene, Hayes counsels meeting planners who are considering the destination that it is much more than that.

“Many groups today are very interested in the unique history and culture of New Orleans, such as the fact that jazz and Cajun and Creole cuisine were created here,” she says. “We’re now celebrating our 300-year anniversary as a city this year. Partly for that reason, and partly because New Orleans is just such a unique place, *The New York Times* recently listed us as the No. 1 tourist destination in the entire world for 2018.”

Among the activities she encourages clients to consider is a morning

or afternoon tour of Magazine Street, a showcase of the city’s history and culture.

“Magazine Street offers one of the most authentic experiences you can have in New Orleans,” Hayes says. “It’s a very long, very old street that runs parallel to St. Charles Avenue. And along the way, you see residences, as well as boutiques, galleries, antique stores and excellent local restaurants.”

She also advises clients to escape the city limits and explore the area. “For example, out on the bayou, you can do boat tours or overflights in helicopters or sea planes. When you go outside the city limits and realize that we are surrounded by water, you realize that there are many things to do in terms of fun and unique outdoor activities.”

Popular outings include swamp tours that allow attendees to see alligators and other local wildlife. Bayou Barn, on the edge of the bayou, is a one-of-a-kind

offsite venue where groups can enjoy a Cajun-style seafood boil and live music, as well as canoe or airboat tours into the swamp.

When it comes to dining options, Hayes says that the city’s time-

honored classical eateries remain the most popular with groups. The holy trinity of French Quarter restaurants are Arnaud’s, Antoine’s and Galatoire’s. Antoine’s, opened in 1840, is the oldest family-run restaurant in the U.S. And Galatoire’s, beloved for its extraordinarily fresh Gulf seafood, has been a local favorite of French Quarter foodies for more than a century.

The other member of the local dining hall of fame is the Garden District-located Commander’s Palace, where celebrity chefs Emeril Lagasse and the late Paul Prudhomme got their starts.

Given its singular history and formidable reputation as a haven of fine-dining and entertainment, it’s no surprise that New Orleans retains its status as a top meeting destination year after year, decade after decade.

“New Orleans is a world-renowned city, known for its food, music, history and culture,” Hayes says. “There is no other place like it.

And, it’s a lot of fun. For meeting groups, it really delivers the wow factor.”

As for why Gee and her attendees liked it so much, the answer is simple. “The Southern hospitality,” she says. **I&FMM**

“One of the nice things about New Orleans is that there are so many excellent hotels within walking distance of the convention center and the French Quarter.”

Jackie Gee
Events Director
World System Builder
Alviso, CA



One Time in New Orleans

I met my Soulmeet.

When the French landed on our shores three centuries ago, they were driven by the promise of new opportunities. New Orleans’ foundation was built on meeting new people, blending cultures, testing new ideas, breaking boundaries and collaborating to build a better future. As it was in the beginning, the heart of our unique culture is still rooted in partnerships and community.

Today, we host millions at exclusive executive functions, major annual meetings,

vibrant corporate initiatives, creative festivals and world-class special events. In the tradition and spirit of our history, New Orleans is a place of new partnerships, collaboration, reinvention and creative inspiration necessary for today’s tomorrow.

Bring your meeting to New Orleans and start your own story with **#OneTimeInNOLA**.

NewOrleans.com/meetings





MCGREGOR

The Allegretto Vineyard Resort in the Paso Robles wine region welcomed **Lee McGregor** as director of sales and marketing. Early in her career, McGregor worked as director of banquet and catering sales, senior sales manager and director of sales and marketing for some of the Central Coast's most prestigious hotels and resorts.

The Ballantyne, A Luxury Collection Hotel, Charlotte (North Carolina) has appointed **Heidi Nowak** as the new director of sales and marketing. Previously, she was director of sales and marketing at The Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman.

Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI) has appointed **Heather Buss** as vice president of sales for the Mid-Atlantic region. She has 18 years of hospitality sales experience. Prior to joining



NOWAK



BUSS

ALHI, she served as director of global sales at Salamander Hotels & Resorts.

Sonesta Resort Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, welcomed **Julianne Dirks** and **Courtenay LaMountain** as senior sales managers. Dirks previously worked with Omni Hilton Head Ocean Front Resort as a sales administrator. LaMountain held roles as conference services manager, sales manager and destination sales executive for Westin Hilton Head.

Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek has appointed **Suzanne Moore** as director of group sales, and **Gustavo Sanchez** and **Hanane Jellouli** as group sales managers for the resort. Prior to this, Moore was senior sales manager at the Omni Orlando Resort ChampionsGate, Sanchez was senior sales manager at Universal Orlando



DIRKS

Resort for Loews Hotels, and Jellouli worked in sales at the DoubleTree Orlando International Airport.

Grand Hyatt Baha Mar has promoted **Braedan Quigley** to director of sales and marketing. Prior director and manager-level positions include roles at: Hyatt Regency O'Hare/Rosemont, Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Resort, Spa, & Marina, Grand Hyatt Denver, Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort in New Mexico, Grand Hyatt San Diego and Atlantis Paradise Island.

Devin Gleason has been named director of sales and marketing at Lake Arrowhead Resort and Spa in Lake Arrowhead, California. Gleason was previously director of sales and marketing for Topnotch Resort in Stowe, Vermont.

I&FMM



LAMOUNTAIN



MOORE



SANCHEZ



JELLOULI



QUIGLEY



GLEASON



PLAN FOR ENDLESS AWESOME.

A little effort goes a long way when you plan your meeting and event at Universal Orlando Resort™. You'll discover a premiere meeting destination with exceptional surroundings and immersive environments that will bring your meeting to life. Whatever your group's size or budget, our compelling meeting solutions make it easier than ever to inspire and engage in remarkable ways.



UOMeetingsAndEvents.com

HARRY POTTER characters, names and related indicia are © & ™ Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Harry Potter Publishing Rights © JKR. (s18) Sapphire Falls Resort TM & © 2018 UCF Hotel Venture III. All Rights Reserved. Universal elements and all related indicia TM & © 2018 Universal Studios. All rights reserved. 18-33303



DISCOVER

L.A.'S COASTAL POINT OF VIEW

FOR YOUR
NEXT
MEETING



Contemporary Hotels. Yacht Receptions. Poolside Networking. Waterfront Views.

Make Marina del Rey your next Southern California meetings destination. Experience 100,000 square feet of total meeting space and an abundance of waterfront dining – just 4 miles north of LAX and minutes from world-famous Venice Beach and Santa Monica.

Marina del Rey is home to six hotels

Marriott | The Ritz-Carlton | Marina del Rey Hotel | Hilton Garden Inn | Jamaica Bay Inn | Foghorn Inn

Contact us to learn how you can save up to \$2,000 in incentives for your next meeting.

visitmarinadelrey.com • 866.650.4567 • groups@visitmarinadelrey.com

MARINA DEL REY®
convention and visitors bureau