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# INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

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Meetings Are Still Productive at Golf and Spa Resorts

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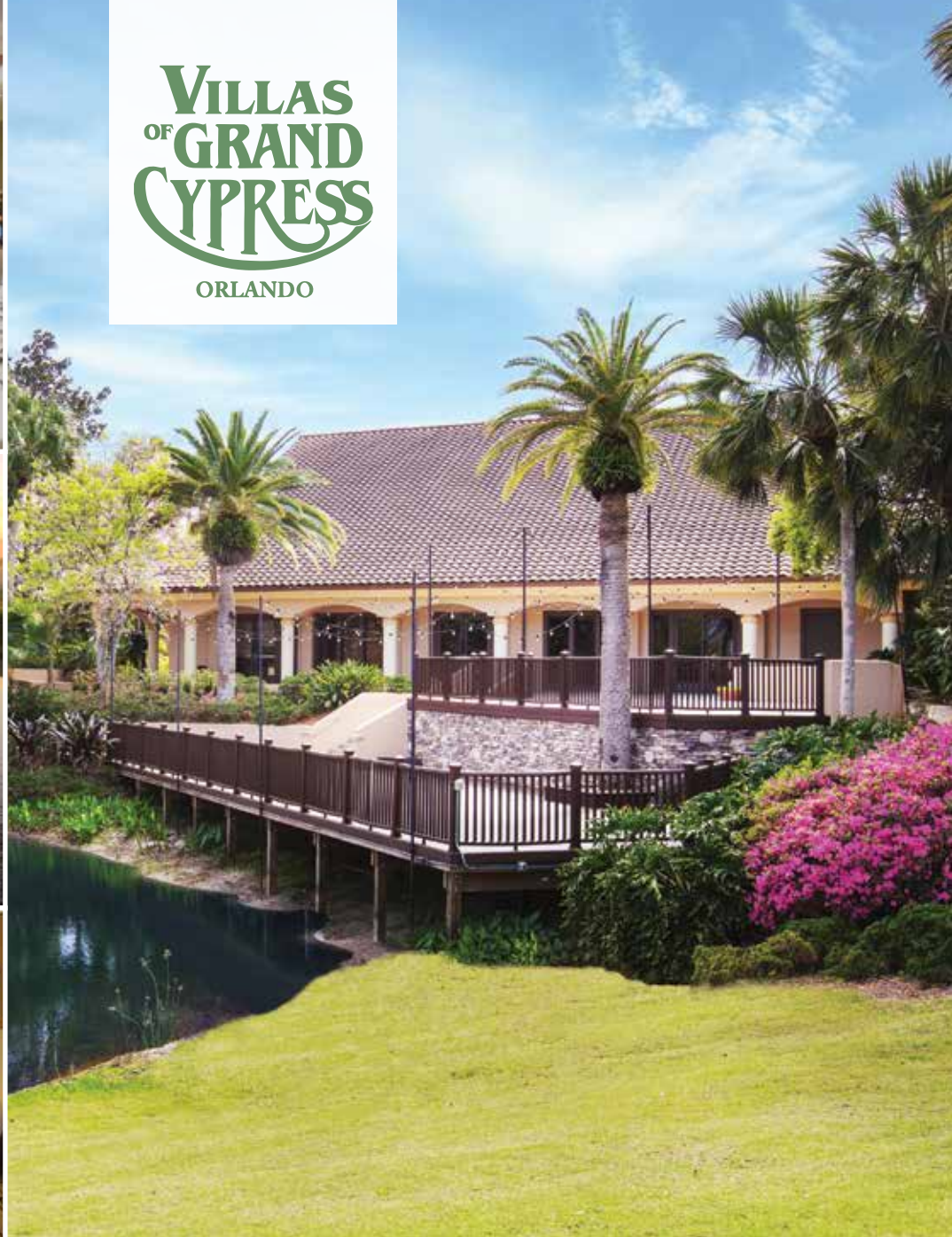
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*Canyon Ranch in Tucson, Arizona, is a luxury spa and wellness resort offering recreational activities such as the high ropes challenge course.*

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## INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

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FEBRUARY 2019

Vol. 26 No. 1

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LIMRA & LOMA's annual conference last year featured a 9-foot by 18-foot interactive engagement wall. **PAGE 32**



Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort offers more than 128,000 square feet of outdoor event space. **PAGE 44**



# Publisher's Message

## Attendees Appreciate Recreation, Relaxation and Healthy Food

Our cover story this month offers meeting and incentive planners a wide variety of options to satisfy attendees' needs for recreation and relaxation thereby creating an atmosphere for more productive meetings. Arizona's Canyon Ranch in Tucson, on our cover, offers a different kind of meeting – a meeting that inspires participants, encourages innovative thinking, reinvigorates their passion and leads to increased productivity. Depending on the time of year, other varied domestic destination resorts offer golf, tennis, boating and hiking while some offer winter activities.



For meeting planners seeking a more intense work atmosphere, many conference centers have listened to planner requests and now offer more flexibility and technological upgrades. Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg, VA, recognizes the importance of connecting with attendees at its conference center. In addition to providing unique and personalized team building experiences, the resort offers tabletop

escape rooms, iron chef competitions and wine and yoga classes.

As planners look at food choices for events, they are finding more menus catering to everyone's dietary needs. Hotels are increasingly accommodating a movement toward healthy foods for buffets during meetings and breaks. Gluten-free request are increasing with many groups. There is no doubt that planners are keeping their attendees health in mind.

As we move forward this year, change will continue to be a major factor for meeting planners.

*Harvey Grotsky*

Harvey Grotsky

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## New Meetings and Events Brand Unveiled by Hilton

MCLEAN, VA – Hilton (NYSE: HLT) recently announced the launch of Signia Hilton, its dynamic, new meetings-and-events-focused brand. The portfolio of hotels is setting out to transform the industry for meeting professionals and sophisticated business travelers



NASSETTA

by infusing state-of-the-art technology and design into every aspect of the guest experience.

The brand further reinforces Hilton's commitment to innovation that meets the evolving needs of today's travelers



and will bring premium experiences to top urban and resort destinations around the world.

"In our 100th year of hospitality, we are more focused than ever on providing exceptional experiences to all of our guests – and that includes evolving those experiences

to meet their changing needs," says Christopher J. Nassetta, president and CEO, Hilton. "We are proud to launch Signia Hilton, which exemplifies our innovative spirit and will raise the bar on what it means to deliver truly customer-inspired hospitality."

Signia Hilton will be a global brand with a carefully curated portfolio of hotels and will include Signia Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek, Signia Hilton Atlanta and Signia Hilton Indianapolis.

As part of Hilton, Signia Hilton guests will enjoy benefits of Hilton Honors, the award-winning guest-loyalty program for Hilton's distinct hotel brands. For more information, visit

[www.newsroom.hilton.com/signiahilton](http://www.newsroom.hilton.com/signiahilton)

## Modern Design Elements Featured in JW Marriott Cancun Resort Redo

CANCUN, MEXICO – JW Marriott, part of Marriott International, Inc., announced the completion of JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa's highly anticipated renovation. The upgrades include an extensive transformation to all 447 lavish ocean-facing guestrooms and suites. The hotel's multi-million-dollar restoration will provide travelers with the highest degree of luxury service, embracing its ideal beachfront location and introduce modern elements complemented by local Mayan flair.

"We are excited to introduce JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa's reimagined look to our guests, offering them an enriching and luxurious experience from the moment they check in," said Mitzi Gaskins, Vice President & Global Brand Leader of JW Marriott. "Situated on the pristine beaches of the Caribbean, the hotel incorporates elements that reflect the calming vibe of the destination allowing guests to feel at ease and at home in the bright and spacious new guestrooms."

It's impressive 4,000 square-foot Presidential Suite features floor-to-ceiling windows, a full kitchen and airy dining room, and is complete with beautiful oak detailing and ceramic tiles curated by renowned Spanish designer Patricia Urquiola.

For information or to book, visit [www.jwmarriottcancun.com](http://www.jwmarriottcancun.com)

## The Venetian Resort Las Vegas Launches Interactive Tool for Meeting Professionals

LAS VEGAS, NV – The Venetian Resort has announced the launch of the Venetian Meetings Virtual Planner®, an industry-leading tool aimed at MICE professionals. The unique application allows prospective customers the ability to customize and research venues prior to contacting resort representatives.



ALLISON

The convenient, innovative tool looks to inspire users to conduct their meetings at the resort by providing a virtual look at event space and a one-stop-shop to requesting a proposal from the knowledgeable sales team on property. In addition to providing the dimensions and capacities, Venetian Meetings Virtual Planner takes users through a virtual tour of each of the venues and provides fly-through videos and photos. Once a user has determined their event space, they are able to design a configuration to their specifications, in two and three dimensions, and attach the customized layout to the RFP

"No matter what an event is seeking to achieve, we like to collaborate with meeting professionals, aligning our knowledge of meeting trends and our extensive capabilities with our clients' goals to co-create truly memorable events," says Chandra Allison, senior vice president of sales at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas.

Use the following link to test the Planner.

<https://sands.virtualplanner.com/V13/VenetianMeetings/>



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## 5 Ways High-Performance Organizations Make Meetings Effective

**E**very organization has to figure out how to make meetings productive. It's a complex challenge. To be effective, each meeting needs to engage the individual talents of the people involved, work to achieve the organization's specific goals for the moment, and do so in a way that's both culturally relevant and contextually sensitive to the world around it. Not an easy feat.

It can be tempting to shy away from the task. Instead of embracing this complexity, many leaders fall back on simple blanket rules that no one really follows — like the leader that declared all meetings in the company could last no more than 20 minutes.

Others delegate responsibility for success, even though they themselves are the most frequent meeting attendees.

Many leaders claim that meetings are a waste of time, and therefore not worth the effort it would take for the organization to make them work well.

These are common traps that keep an organization locked in a cycle of underperforming meetings and endemic mediocrity.

Here are five ways high-performing organizations avoid that fate:

### 1 Set clear expectations for all meetings.

Meeting norms, ground rules, guidelines — these set the foundation for building an effective meeting habit. They often include things like use of an agenda and keeping meetings on time. Whatever your rules, the leadership team must follow them. The way the leadership group meets sets the real standard everyone else follows.

### 2 Document and share meeting results.

Fear of missing out (FOMO) compels people to attend meetings they shouldn't. Organizers don't want to leave people out, so they invite everyone who might possibly want to weigh in. Having irrelevant people in the room de-energizes the conversation and disrupts productivity.

Documented meeting results are the fastest and easiest way to combat meeting FOMO.

Before the meeting, document the meeting purpose and

desired outcomes clearly. Then, send out written meeting results afterward.

When people can see in advance what a meeting is for, then see afterward what happened, they can decide whether they need to attend. This keeps meetings more focused, and it keeps everyone more productive.

### 3 Define "The Way" to meet for all core processes.

There are 16 different types of business meetings, and each has a purpose. A regular team meeting is good for confirming progress and identifying problems, but it's a lousy place to make a big decision. Big decisions demand a dedicated decision-making meeting.

Similarly, the initial meeting with a prospective client (or funder) should look very different from the meeting where

you ink the deal. Each of these pivotal meetings can be optimized to drive the results your company needs.

High-performance organizations know the type of meetings they need to run.

Each meeting gets a name and becomes "the way" that kind of work gets done.

For example, the team's check-in meeting becomes "the huddle." The meeting to impress prospective clients early in the sales cycle becomes a "services briefing." Anything called simply a "meeting" isn't specific enough.

### 4 Train everyone.

Leaders spend up to 80 percent of their work day in meetings, and yet many have never received meeting training. Meetings aren't just conversations with lots of people at work; there are skills and techniques to learn that radically improve meeting results.

High-performance organizations provide skills training to people leading meetings. They also train everyone how to participate in the meetings defined as "the way" to get their job done. Meetings represent an enormous salary

Meetings can be a powerful embodiment of your company's culture and a driver of performance, when designed and run with intention.

investment, and high-performance organizations ensure their people get a good return on that investment.

### 5 ABL: Always be learning!

Once they have "the way" to meet, the organization can experiment. What happens when we meet on Monday instead of Wednesday? If we tweak the process, can we make decisions faster?

High-performance organizations have the process stability they need in order to run conclusive experiments and continuously improve their meeting practices.

Bad meetings are not inevitable. Quite the opposite: Meetings can be a powerful embodiment of your company's culture and a driver of performance, when designed and run with intention.

And the best news: You get to learn from the examples set by high-performance organizations that have already conquered this design challenge.

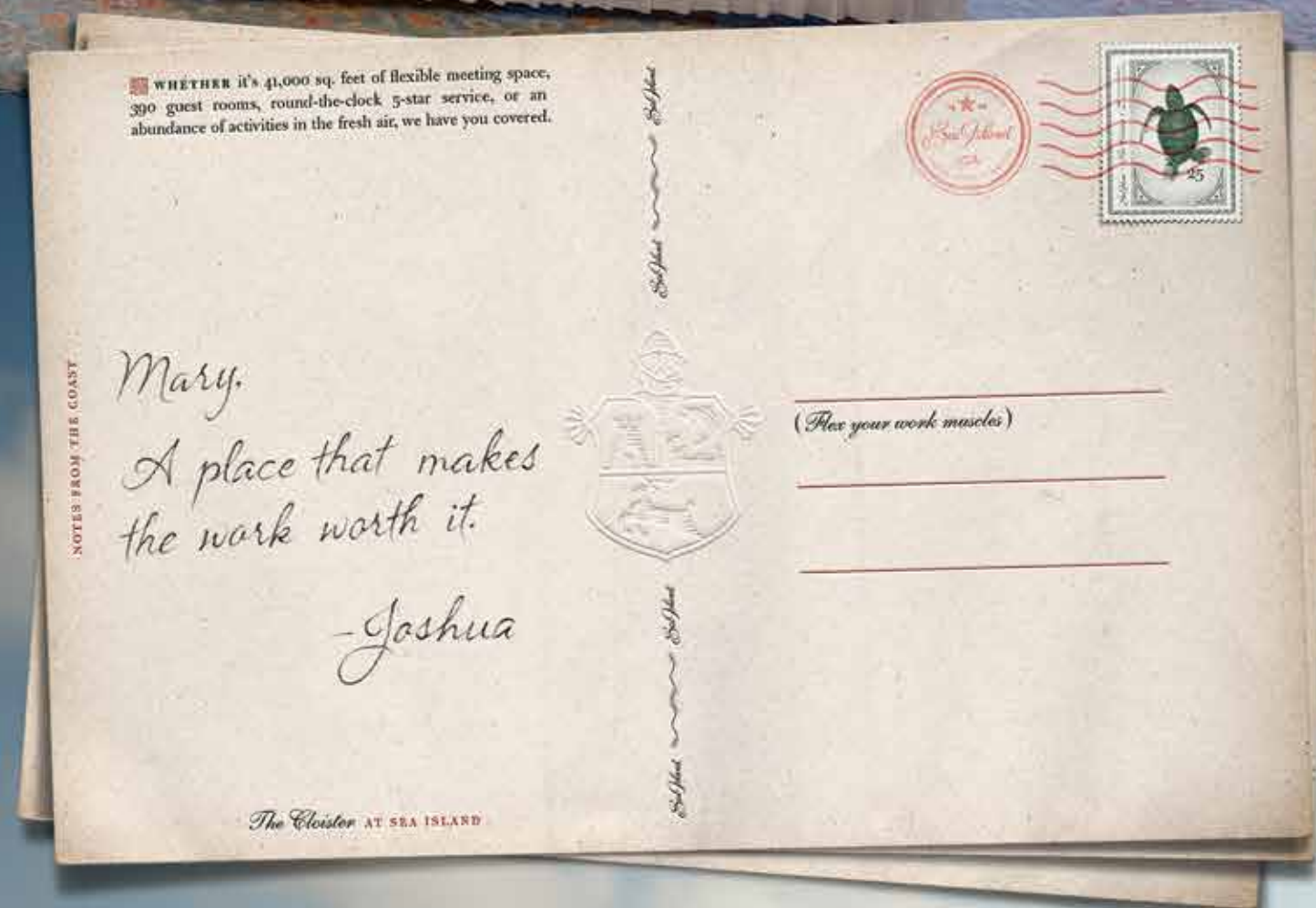
When it comes to meeting design, the adage holds true: Well-stolen is half-done!

**I&FMM**

*J. Elise Keith is the founder and Meeting Maven for Lucid Meetings. She leads their research, publication and product management efforts, constantly seeking the best ways to make it easy for people to enjoy meetings that get work done. Her book, Where the Action Is: The Meetings That Make or Break Your Organization, can be found on [www.lucidmeetings.com](http://www.lucidmeetings.com).*









# Recreation and Relaxation

## Meetings Are Still Productive at Golf and Spa Resorts

By Thomas Rynne

Credit: Canyon Ranch



*Canyon Ranch Tucson offers world-renowned facilities, including Health + Healing, Life Enhancement and Spiritual Wellness Centers.*

The secret's no longer a secret — resorts at which attendees can play golf and indulge at a spa attract a lot of attendees. And these attendees generally have very productive meetings.

It's not hard to figure out why. Resorts with a wide variety of excellent recreational — and indulgent! — facilities are more exciting and more stimulating to attendees. And you don't have to be a meeting planner to know that attendees who are excited and stimulated are

also more productive ... not only at the meetings, but also after they get back to the office.

Not only that, but the shared activities experienced by attendees at these resorts generally stimulates more networking and better working relationships, as well. We don't have to tell you about the amount of great business ideas, for example, generated on golf courses.

Happily for planners, there are

first-class golf and spa resorts all over America with first-class meeting spaces, too. And here are some of the best.

### The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs, Colorado

The Broadmoor Resort, a Medieval Italianate palace in the heart of the West, celebrated its 100th anniversary last year. With 784 guest rooms and 185,000 square feet, it hosts meetings of all sizes. In addition, with a dozen restaurants

(including The Penrose Room, Colorado's only Four-Star restaurant), some two-dozen shops, a world-class spa, a beautiful lake on which you can row or pedal or just relax, three championship golf courses, plus Cheyenne Mountain and Pike's Peak right outside your window, attendees don't need to go offsite for fun. And in a setting like this, inspiration is guaranteed.

Teambuilding is guaranteed, too. The resort's "Soaring Adventure" takes attendees above the thunderous Seven Falls, where they navigate bridges of rope, rappel down a cliff and fly on zip lines offering stunning views of the canyon below.

The golf courses were all designed by legendary names and take advantage of the beauty of the Rockies. Several prestigious tournaments are held here every year, and there's an excellent golf school and pro shop.

The Spa at The Broadmoor, which has a Forbes Five-Star rating, has 40 treatment rooms and innovative therapies offering wellness and restorative treatments in an ambience of natural serenity.

Attendees can also take the Cog Railway on a 14,110-foot, 45-minute trip to the top of Pike's Peak, with dramatic views of gorges, ridges and valleys. The view from the top is even better ... you can see into seven states.

### Canyon Ranch, Tucson, Arizona

Founded in 1979 as a trailblazing luxury resort, Canyon Ranch Tucson redefined health by unifying mind,

body and spirit. Nestled in the foothills of Tucson's Santa Catalina Mountains, the 150-acre property features 166 well-appointed guest rooms, 10,590 square feet of meeting space and world-renowned facilities, including Health + Healing, Life Enhancement and Spiritual Wellness Centers. There are fitness studios and gyms, a full-service 80,000-square-foot spa, aquatic complex, outdoor trails and a high ropes challenge course. Canyon Ranch also offers innovative and healthy culinary options with daily cooking demonstrations and workshops.

Each day, meeting attendees can choose from more than 40 complimentary fitness classes and guided outdoor activities, plus nearly 200 wellness and spa services, including Classic Massage,

Eastern Therapies, Ayurvedic Body Treatments, Restorative Body Scrubs and Wraps, Therapeutic Rituals, Replenishing Facials and Body Care treatments.

"At Canyon Ranch, we plan a different kind of meeting — a meeting that inspires your participants, encourages innovative thinking, reinvigorates their passion and leads to increased productivity," says Lisa Fisher, director of sales, marketing and communications for Canyon Ranch Tucson. "Whether you're looking for a corporate retreat, incentive or board meeting, Canyon Ranch offers extensive teambuilding opportunities, lectures that boost your brain power and an environment that re-energizes attendees and fosters optimism."

Special classes, events or excursions can be customized for groups. Examples of the some of these experiences include:

- A private outing with a Canyon Ranch chef to a local farmer's market or specialty grocery store for tips on selecting the best fresh ingredients, followed by a cooking demo and private lunch featuring the ingredients gathered at the market.
- An afternoon with a Canyon Ranch exercise physiologist. The program can be tailored for topics such as "Exercise: The Fountain of Youth" or "Chasing Your Athletic Dreams at Any Age." Cycling enthusiasts in



*Attendees can get a relaxing foot massage and pedicure in the salon at The Spa at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado.*



Credit: M Resort Spa Casino

*M Resort Spa Casino's Topgolf Swing Suite has a large simulation screen with creative golf challenges for attendees to practice their game.*





Sea Island, just off the southern Georgia coast, is among the greatest golf resorts in the country. The Plantation Course (above) is home of the PGA Tour's RSM Classic.

Credit: Sea Island Resort

the group? Plan an exclusive ride, suitable for all levels.

- Golf the Canyon Ranch way. Work with a PGA pro in the 3,400-square-foot Golf Performance Center, featuring video-enhanced instruction technology: V-1 Video Capture Analysis, Balance Force Plates, Computerized Swing Analyzer.
- Unleash the power of creativity. Arrange a painting or drawing class for novices and seasoned artists alike in magnificent local settings.

"Participants can gain valuable insights through unhurried consultations with board-certified physicians and an integrative team of nutritionists, exercise physiologists, mind-body experts and other specialists," Fisher says. "We strive to provide comprehensive wellness programming by renowned subject matter experts, coupled with the powerful healing of nature, to foster long-lasting and transformative wellness."

#### Sea Island Resort, Sea Island, Georgia

This island resort just off the southern Georgia coast has been one of America's most luxurious hideaways since 1928. Here, the pleasures are simple but beautiful ... in the refreshing sea breezes, in the lush greenery, in the lapping of the waves onto the shore. Sea Island has superb golf, spa and meeting facilities. In fact, it's the only resort in the world to

have won four Forbes Five-Star designations for 10 consecutive years.

Sea Island features five miles of private beach, a Beach Club, tennis and squash centers, Yacht Club and Shooting School. The Georgian Room restaurant is one of the best in the South, and there are six other dining venues and a market.

This is also among the great golf resorts in the country. The Seaside and Retreat Course are longtime favorites of attendees, and the Plantation Course, home of the PGA Tour's RSM Classic, will reopen this fall after an extensive redesign. Meeting attendees can hone their game at the Golf Performance Center.

The sights, sounds and aromas of The Spa will have guests shedding the stresses of the outside world the moment they walk in. There's also a shop with all the spa's products.

With 390 guest rooms and 40,000 square feet, Sea Island can certainly accommodate most meetings.

#### M Resort Spa Casino, Henderson, Nevada

Just outside Las Vegas, M Spa & Casino has 390 guest rooms and 92,000 square feet of meeting spaces with floor-to-ceiling windows offering great views. The M physical plant is nothing if not versatile, with meeting spaces in some interesting (and interestingly named) non-traditional venues, such as the Hostile Grape Wine Cellar.

Forbes Four-Star Spa Mio has 16

treatment rooms, a sauna, steam room and hot tub, as well as a salon. It's the perfect place to work out any after-meeting kinks or stiffness. And for a more strenuous workout, there's a state-of-the-art fitness center.

The eight restaurants include the aptly named View, on the 16th floor, with dramatic views of the Las Vegas skyline. There are also five bars ... and a "Wine ATM."

Attendees can hone their golf game here, at the innovative Topgolf Swing Suite. There's a large simulation screen with creative golf challenges; for example, "play" some of the top courses in the world, among them St. Andrews, Gleneagles and Pebble Beach. Or, perfect your slapshot in the hockey game. Or pitch in a baseball game ... against a team of zombies.

In addition, the Swing Suite is sometimes used as an offsite venue.

#### Grand Geneva Resort & Spa, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin

Located in southeastern Wisconsin, Lake Geneva is often called one of the most beautiful spots in the Midwest, a crystal-clear lake surrounded by forest that turns into a kaleidoscope of brilliant hues every autumn. It was first discovered by Chicago families such as the Maytags, Wards, Sears and Wrigleys in the late 1800s, and they built magnificent summer mansions there. Today, there's a resort that these folks would have liked.

This resort, too, is known for both golf and its spa. The Grand Geneva boasts two beautifully manicured courses, in which the natural beauty of the area plays a big part. In fact, the appropriately named "Brute" course, at more than 7,000 yards, is considered one of the most challenging in the Midwest.

The full-service WELL Spa & Salon has a varied menu of services and a reputation for excellence. The fitness center has top-quality equipment and extras such as a large pool and a basketball court. There are classes in tennis, pickleball ... and even rock-climbing.

Meetings? Grand Geneva Resort &



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*The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples, has two 18-hole championship courses designed by Greg Norman.*

Credit: The Ritz-Carlton, Naples

Spa has 609 guest rooms, 62,000 square feet of meeting space and a multilingual staff. And if you're meeting in summer, take your group out on one of the Old-Time sightseeing boats plying the lake, past the mansions of the great Chicago families.

Joe Petrelli is president of Demotech, a Dublin, Ohio, company that's involved in financial analyses for insurance companies. He brought 250 C-suite insurance executives from all over the country to the Grand Geneva last July for the company's 2018 Super Regional Conference.

"The Grand Geneva meets all of our basic requirements," Petrelli says. "The resort's only 90 minutes from O'Hare

a Sponsors & Speakers Reception so attendees would have a chance to network and really work the room. And we used a mobile app for real-time polling of the attendees about each session, on which each of them could also set appointments with anyone else."

### **The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples, Naples, Florida**

Naples is one of the swankiest towns in America. Accordingly, it's not surprising that there are actually two Ritz-Carltons here: The Ritz-Carlton Naples and The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples.

You'd expect to find great golf at the stately, Italianate golf resort, and you will — two championship courses designed by Greg Norman. (And if you'd like a beach getaway, as well, you can take the complimentary shuttle to the other beachside Ritz-Carlton.)

The golf resort has the typical amenities associated with this brand: 295 luxurious guest rooms, beautifully landscaped and manicured grounds, great views, a fitness center with personal training experts, a well-equipped golf shop, tennis courts and a designated "Florida Green" lodging status.

There are four gourmet eateries and one to-go market. Enjoy dinner or drinks at an outside fire pit or unwind with any number of relaxing, refreshing massage treatments at the spa.

There are 16,500 square feet of meeting spaces, 11 breakout rooms — five of which offer covered terraces

with spectacular views of the Tiburon Golf Club — and all of which have the latest fiber-optic technology for video conferencing.

### **Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa and Casino, Incline Village, Nevada**

Looking for a place where Mother Nature pops out in vivid technicolor? This resort is it. Attendees invariably find themselves going outside just to take it all in ... the mountain air, the snowcapped peaks, the alpine lake and the swirls of constellations against the nighttime sky.

The Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa and Casino sits right on the lake and is surrounded by forest on the other three sides. There are no other hotels — or anything else — close to it; meaning attendees will probably remain on the premises, which facilitates networking opportunities.

There are 422 guest rooms and a 50,000-square-foot conference center, along with outdoor spaces ranging from a beach to water-gardens to a dock. The Stillwater Spa & Salon offers 16 treatment rooms, including two couple's sanctuaries, one with a fireplace and the other with an infinity tub.

"We found the setting inspirational for our attendees, resulting in a very productive meeting," says Dan Bolton, director of conferences and events for Riskalyze, an Auburn, California, technology company servicing the financial sector. Bolton brought 500 attendees from 45 states and three countries to the Hyatt Regency in September 2017 for the company's annual Fearless Investing Summit.

"We're a technology company," Bolton says, "so we certainly use it in our meetings. Our attendees had electronic badges. And we had overhead sensors that read the RFID chips as attendees entered each meeting room, so we had real-time management of the room spacing and the number of attendees in each room. And we're community-minded; we had a Casino Night that raised \$30,000 for local adoption agencies."



*Groups can meet for a healthy lunch at the garden café at Omni La Costa Resort & Spa in Carlsbad, California.*

Credit: Omni La Costa Resort & Spa

### **Big Cedar Lodge, Ridgedale, Missouri**

Just outside Branson, Missouri, in the beautiful Ozark Mountains of southwestern Missouri, sits a "country" lodge considered one of the best wilderness resorts in America.

Accommodations here range from rustic log cabins in the woods to grand lodges with dramatic views of Table Rock Lake. The Grandview Conference Center does, indeed, offer grand views, along with 21,308 square feet of meeting space and a rustic-elegant Great Room with floor-to-ceiling windows showing off those views. In all, Big Cedar has 260 guest rooms.

Attendees will never be bored here; there's a fitness center, ski school, boat rides, fishing guides, horseback riding, hiking, a shooting range and a beautiful sightseeing boat for lake cruises. There are also more than 20 team-building activities available, ranging from chili-cookoffs to team-rodeos to scavenger hunts.

There are four golf courses here, designed by legends like Jack Nicklaus and Tony Fazio, and set amidst lakes, hills and forest. There are also teambuilding and group options in golf. Need to work out the kinks after golfing? The Cedar Creek Spa is 18,000 square feet of world-class "ahhhhhh" in a building with hand-hewn timber ceilings and natural stone floors.

### **Maumee Bay Lodge & Conference Center, Oregon, Ohio**

At this serene lodge (part of Ohio State Parks) just outside Toledo, your meeting can take place abutting the majesty of Lake Erie. And what better

because of its twisting layout and its water hazards.

There's a fitness center, miles of hiking and biking paths with beautiful scenery (and deer), a wildlife refuge and a two-mile boardwalk over the wetlands. There are also around 15 group activities available, along with five "group courses" involving activities, such as geocaching and scavenger hunts.

Maumee Bay has 144 guest rooms and 9,000 square feet of meeting space.

### **Inn and Spa at Loretto, Santa Fe, New Mexico**

This authentic New Mexico inn has been recognized by Condé Nast Traveler as one of their Readers' Choice Top 10 Hotels in the Southwest and West. The well-appointed guest rooms are adobe-style, drawing inspiration from the thousand-year-old Taos Pueblo settlement. Located downtown, the Inn and Spa at Loretto is home to a restaurant serving authentic New Mexico specialties, a year-round heated garden pool and a number of onsite boutiques and galleries.

The historic Loretto Chapel next-door contains the "Miraculous Staircase" — with no visible supports — built in the 1880s by an anonymous craftsman whom the nuns believed had been sent by St. Joseph. The Inn's proximity to the historic Santa Fe Plaza gives attendees easy access to world-class museums, boutiques, galleries,

restaurants, outdoor performances, Indian art markets (the term "Indian" is still used in New Mexico ... including by the Indians) and seasonal events.

The award-winning Nidah Spa features a range of treatments and its own proprietary aromatherapy blends, in a relaxing, traditional Southwestern ambience. The 12,000 square feet of meeting space is high-tech. There are in-house meetings and catering teams, and the 136 guest rooms are bursting with color and New Mexican art pieces.

### **Omni La Costa Resort & Spa, Carlsbad, California**

Now designated an "Official Hotel of the PGA Tour," this resort, just north of San Diego, also has an award-winning spa. And with more than 600 guest rooms and 100,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor spaces, it can host large groups.

There are eight swimming pools in this white, Mediterranean-style resort, along with 17 tennis courts, five eateries and a market. The full-service spa is considered world-class and offers imaginative treatments like Citrus Rain and Coastal Stone, as well as a salon.

Both the Champions Course and the Legends Course are known for two things — natural beauty and challenging golf. There's even a robotic swing-trainer called RoboGolfPro that can help get the kink out of your swing.



*In addition to its golf amenities, Ocean Reef Club features Buccaneer Island, the resort's area for aquatic sports activities.*

Credit: Ocean Reef Club

*The Grand Geneva is "only 90 minutes from O'Hare airport, so it's accessible from anywhere in the country. They have good spaces for the number of attendees we bring .... They have great golf. And the scenery is just beautiful."*



**Joe Petrelli**  
President  
Demotech  
Dublin, Ohio

airport, so it's accessible from anywhere in the country. They have good spaces for the number of attendees we bring ... spaces that enhance networking opportunities. They have great golf. And the scenery is just beautiful.

"Our keynote speaker was Dennis Chookaszian, former head of CNA," Petrelli continues. "And we had





Rosen Shingle Creek's newly renovated golf course was designed by the Arnold Palmer Design Company.

Credit: Rosen Shingle Creek

La Costa has won honors in magazines such as *Golf Week*, *Golf Digest* and *Golf Magazine*, and it's very experienced at hosting golf tournaments ... and arranging corporate ones.

### Ocean Reef Club, Key Largo, Florida

Ocean Reef, a private club at the northernmost tip of Key Largo, has the distinction of having two championship 18-hole golf courses — a rarity in the Florida Keys. The Hammock Course and the Dolphin Course both feature scenic views but offer a different challenge for players of all levels.

The Dolphin Course is the epitome of island golf in the Keys. This 6,600-yard par-71 course allows more margin for error off the tee, with generous fairways that wind past coconut palms and mahogany trees.

The Hammock Course is partially situated in a wildlife sanctuary of mangrove and tropical hardwood hammocks and contains many rare and endangered species of plants for players to observe and enjoy. This 6,100-yard par-71 ocean course has water hazards on 14 of the 18 holes, so concentration is key to a good round.

Ocean Reef also offers The Academy of Golf, featuring two air-conditioned hitting bays, state-of-the-art video equipment, the latest in golf teaching computer software and a staff of fully-trained professionals.

In addition, there is an award-winning pro shop that caters to all the golfing needs of members and their guests. The Golf Shop carries ladies' and men's apparel as well as the latest technology in golf equipment. Services also include club repair,

bag storage and golf shoe re-spiking and polishing.

### The Coeur d'Alene Resort, Coeur D'alene, Idaho

Sitting at the foot of an alpine lake and a beautiful village both also named Coeur d'Alene, this full-service resort completed a top-to-bottom renovation last year. It offers stunning views of the lake and forested mountains from your window. And if you look outside at sunset, you'll see the sun dropping into the horizon beyond them.

The resort has 338 guest rooms and 32,000 square feet of meeting space which includes a lakeside conference center. And it has, as well, a golf course with the world's only floating — and movable — golf green. The "Famous 14th," sitting on a little island in Lake Coeur d'Alene, can actually be moved by computer. Access it via an antique mahogany boat ... and as you do, you'll see some of the 25,000 balls retrieved from the water every year!

The resort has 11 restaurants and lounges — among them, fittingly, the world's only floating restaurant. And The Coeur d'Alene Resort Spa brings the natural surroundings and elements inside.

Attendees can hop into a seaplane for a bird's-eye view extending into Canada. Or, they can board a sightseeing boat for a memorable sunset cruise. There are great teambuilding opportunities here, too, as the mountains are laced with beautiful trails.

The town of Coeur d'Alene has gaslit-style streetlamps, interesting shops and restaurants, and Northwest Victorian homes from the early 1900s.

### Rosen Shingle Creek, Orlando, Florida

With 1,501 guest rooms and 524,000 square feet of meeting space, Rosen Shingle Creek can host sizable meetings ... and attendees don't have to leave the premises to dine, play or exercise.

The newly renovated golf course was designed by the Arnold Palmer Design Company, and there's a noted golf academy. There are 15 dining options ranging from Tuscan to take-out, including the award-winning steakhouse A Land Remembered.

There's a state-of-the-art fitness center to pump you up, and a beautiful spa/salon to help you calm down. Take a walk alongside Shingle Creek, which is actually the headwaters of the Everglades.

Marty Streeper, president of Meeting Management Group, a Tampa-based meeting-planning/association-management company, brought more than 1,000 insurance-industry attendees here for the Windstorm Insurance Conference in January 2018.

"Because of the size of our groups," she says, "efficient, flexible spaces are important to us, and the Rosen Shingle Creek has them. We also look for hotels that lend themselves to networking, and there are so many spaces there in which you can do that. In fact, we had networking events every night.

"We marketed the meeting on our website," Streeper says. "And we also had a mobile app onsite, with attendees' schedules, time of the meeting and materials for each of their meetings. For registration, we used Cvent. And the hotel received very high ratings in our post-meeting survey." **I&FMM**



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# Innovative Conference Centers

## Flexibility, Technological Upgrades and Eco-friendly Endeavors Top the List For Planners

By Maura Keller

For Amanda Houston, director of corporate events at INNOVATX Events, when her clients consider utilizing conference centers today, she knows what they are looking for — namely flexibility and leading-edge amenities and upgrades in both accommodations and meeting spaces.

While the flexibility of conference center meeting space configurations and seating are paramount, many organizations are looking to also produce the best attendee flow for an event.

As well, more and more meeting planners are looking for conference centers that will provide them the freedom to select and use their own vendor sources and the ability to make dynamic networking centers or “downtime sanctuaries” for the attendees.

“Proximity to entertainment and hotel locations also is very important,” Houston says. “We also consider the AV and Wi-Fi technology capabilities of the center, as social media and technology installations have become more and more prevalent in today’s events. How a center has kept up on trends on technology integration and the need for attendees to be connected is a key point of review for these facility sites.”

In addition to corporate entities and financial institutions, Houston says many of the organizations she works with who use conference centers include association conferences and annual user group events,

although specific trade show events can also utilize these centers.

“The events are usually 1,000-plus attendees for small conference center usage and 2,500-plus for large conference center usage — or events open to the public that expect large daily traffic volumes,” Houston says.

### Innovative Trends

INNOVATX Events has had the opportunity to work with conference centers that have taken into consideration attendees’ technology needs and have made social media networking pods that help facilitate networking for any conference that goes into the center.

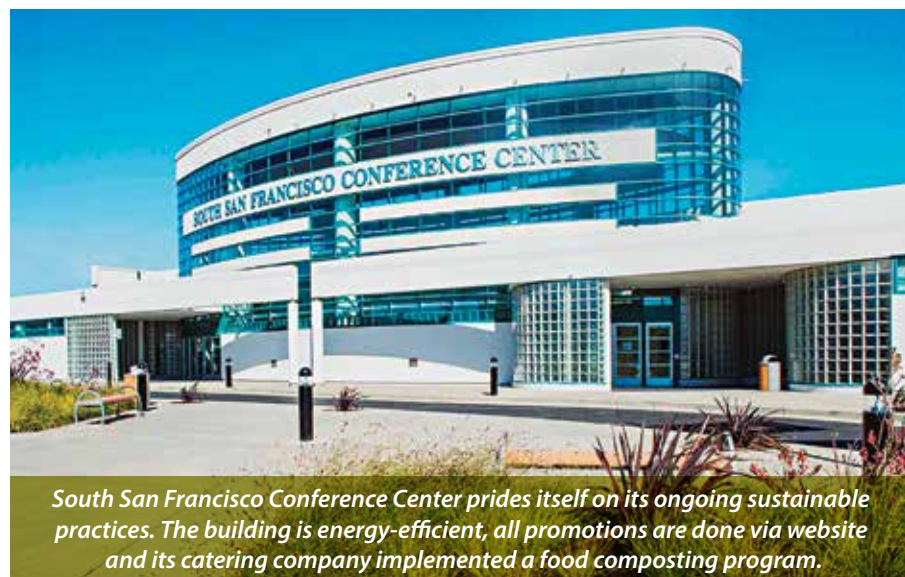
“For the finance and insurance sector, the technology end is becoming

vitality more important,” Houston says. “The ability for a conference to seamlessly integrate technology

*“Proximity to entertainment and hotel locations is very important. We also consider the AV and Wi-Fi technology capabilities of the center, as social media and technology installations have become more and more prevalent in today’s events.”*



Amanda Houston  
Director of Corporate Events  
INNOVATX Events  
Austin, TX



South San Francisco Conference Center prides itself on its ongoing sustainable practices. The building is energy-efficient, all promotions are done via website and its catering company implemented a food composting program.

Credit: South San Francisco Conference Center



Credit: National Conference Center

National Conference Center in Leesburg, Virginia, is a multipurpose venue that can accommodate 18 to 1,800 guests in flexible facilities designed for meetings, events and educational sessions.

components and digital networking capabilities is important. More of our financial industry space is using digital applications to run business and these items need to be showcased in and around an event, so a center’s Wi-Fi capabilities, look and feel, and integration of a future-forward technology space is important in these meeting spaces.”

Event planners also are seeing a lean toward interest in “green meetings” and ecologically friendly conference centers. Houston is seeing importance being put on centers that are striving to reduce their ecological footprint through the use of solar panels, and natural light availability for rooms to reduce drains on electricity, systems to help conserve or reuse water, and catering that uses locally sourced food and provides options for community give back of leftover food resources.

“We are seeing more companies that are saying their company or organizations missions are in line with these environmentally friendly endeavors, and so these are key selling features for a location,” Houston says.

Indeed, the National Conference Center in Leesburg, Virginia, is seen as the leader in educational meetings for more than 30 years. Boasting 265,000 square feet of event space with 250 meeting rooms, the National also has made a name for itself by being Green

Seal-certified by the International Association of Conference Centers. The National hosts eco-friendly events and sustainable meetings and has its own “Green Team” that takes proactive measures to save energy and protect renewable and nonrenewable resources for every meeting help at the National.

In addition, the South San Francisco Conference Center prides itself on its ongoing sustainable practices. The center’s recycling efforts began in earnest in 2002, when the conference center stopped printing promotional materials and instead directs visitors to its website for detailed information about the center. And the conference center’s exclusive catering

company, the California Catering Company, implements a food composting program that captures all organic material from food service operations. Of course, the building’s energy efficiency is a source of pride for the conference center. In 2014, an energy audit conducted by Ecology Action documented energy efficiency gains relative to historic performance, resulting in an estimated cumulative equivalent reduction of 1,381,700 pounds of CO2 since 2008.

Steve Robertson, COO of Eventective, says today’s newest convention centers also boast impressive areas for attendees to come together and socialize and network. Just as social networking online has become a key part of meetings and events, networking in person is also paramount.

“In an increasingly disconnected world, people attending conferences are looking for great interpersonal experiences,” Robertson says. “Additionally, great public displays of artwork have become something that conference centers have been including for attendees.”

Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg, Virginia, recognizes the importance of connecting with attendees at its conference center. In addition to providing unique and personalized teambuilding experiences, Lansdowne offers tabletop escape rooms, iron chef competitions and wine and



Credit: Lansdowne Resort

Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg, Virginia, offers more than 55,000 square feet of flexible meeting space.





*The Farrington Boardroom at The Heldrich in New Brunswick, New Jersey, has floor-to-ceiling windows allowing natural light to illuminate the meeting room.*

Credit: The Heldrich

yoga classes. The resort offers more than 55,000 square feet of flexible meeting space with customized dining experiences. And with the addition of golf and spa, Lansdowne has many options for attendees to utilize in their downtime.

The team at Lansdowne is seeing an increase focus on technology, customized menus, local accents and meeting planners bringing offsite venues onsite, such as wine tastings, beer tastings and food trucks.

Evelyn Warren, a marketing strategist who owns The Strategy Group, Inc., recently planned an event in which her team of marketers, communicators and planners hosted a quadrennial event at a newly renovated and strikingly sophisticated center in Columbus, Ohio. Approximately 6,000 people, the majority being women, attended the event.

"When planning a meeting or event of this magnitude, a great deal of thinking goes into these decisions," Warren says. Due to the fact the organization is highly social justice-minded, mission-based and very ecologically conscience, when choosing venues, Warren had to evaluate:

- ADA compliance of the facility.
- The ease of transport to and from hotel accommodations, with public transportation being highly regarded.
- Healthy food options in the venue.

- No products or benefits provided onsite that are the result of child labor.
- The use of and repository for recycled products.

Four weeks out of the year, The Heldrich in New Brunswick, New Jersey, hosts a financial institution that holds training for entry-level employees of their firm. Their training is heavily internet-based, so the company requires strong Wi-Fi connections and four simultaneous general session rooms for the week.

In addition, the company sponsors one evening reception and one offsite group dinner while the rest of the evenings are open for the attendees to explore New Brunswick's dining options.

In addition to its technology

offerings, The Heldrich's central location, easy access to public transportation and proximity to the surrounding Fortune 500 companies are certainly draws for the hotel.

However, the biggest draw for the property is the Benchmark Conference Plan (BCP).

The BCP is an all-inclusive conference package which includes: overnight guest room accommodations, meeting space, up to three meals per day, continuous refreshment breaks, basic audio-visual, gratuities and dedicated conference planning support. By utilizing the Benchmark Conference Plan, meeting planners are able to

**Today's newest convention centers boast impressive areas for attendees to come together and network.**

**"In an increasingly disconnected world, people attending conferences are looking for great interpersonal experiences."**



**Steve Robertson**  
COO  
Eventective  
Scarborough, ME

focus on the content and execution of their meeting while the Heldrich's conference team plans and coordinates onsite logistics.



*The Mansion at Glen Cove has 27 technologically advanced conference rooms accommodating up to 280 guests.*

Credit: The Mansion at Glen Cove



Credit: Q Center

*St. Charles, Illinois-based Q Center's 150,000 square feet of IACC-certified space is ideal for meetings and events of all sizes.*

Customization is also a "hot" button for many meeting planners. That's why the National Conference Center is presented as a "blank canvas" that can be molded, shaped and designed specific to each client's unique requirements.

The National currently serves or has recently served a wealth of financial and insurance market clients, including Accenture, EY, GEICO, Grant Thornton, Navigant and PwC. The meeting planners with these financial and insurance entities are primarily looking for a conference centers to deliver what cannot be delivered at traditional hotels, such as a feeling of "exclusivity" or total devotion to one client at a time without the distractions of transient guests.

And the financial and insurance meeting planners are looking for creative culinary programming that is sensitive to the personalization of menu design and variety — from vegetarian to vegan to gluten-free and the many cultural concerns of those attending meetings or participating in multiple-day training programs.

### What to Look For

As new convention centers emerge and existing centers undergo updated designs to meet the new needs of convention center attendees, there are a few things meeting and event planners should evaluate when selecting a convention center.

"Think outside the box about how you can transform a center's locations to produce the best traffic flow for your attendees," Houston says. "Also, ensure there are several branding

opportunities for your event not only for messaging your own conference materials but also for supporting sponsorship branding opportunities within the space."

**"Lansdowne Resort has been a wonderful property to work with. Their staff truly cares about the success of your meeting, and they ensure that your job as a lead meeting planner goes as smoothly as possible."**

**Jackie Warner**  
Administrative Assistant  
American Woodmark Corporation  
Winchester, MA

When Robertson and his team at Eventective hold annual conferences of up to 800 people at convention centers, he considers key factors such

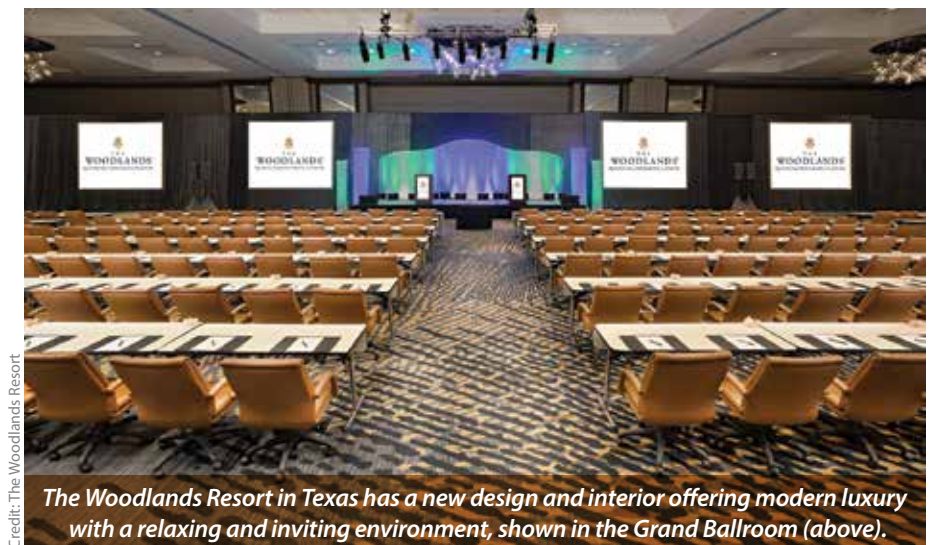
as nearby things to do, accessibility, proximity to the airport, professional environment and appropriate comfort level of the amenities.

"Don't be shy about including a lot of conference centers in your initial search," Robertson says. "Then whittle it down by the basic things (headcount, budget, etc.). Finally, identify something unique that folks will remember."

The Mansion at Glen Cove, located on Long Island's Gold Coast, recognizes the importance of making memorable impressions on conference attendees.

Nestled amidst 55 sprawling acres, the Mansion exudes an air of timeless elegance at every turn. In addition to providing 27 conference rooms within 30,000 square feet of meeting space, the Mansion offers a wealth of activities to allow conference attendees to work some and play some. These activities includes scavenger hunts, game show nights, casino nights, spin classes, wine tasting, bowling tournaments and cocktail academies.

And while St. Charles, Illinois-based Q Center's 150,000 square feet of IACC-certified space is ideal for meetings and events of all sizes, the conference center's sprawling 95-acre landscaped campus allows groups and individuals the space to enjoy organized activities or individual time away from meetings. From basketball tournaments to sand volleyball matches, from biking trails to disc golf, the Q Center has worked hard to incorporate elements that enhance



*The Woodlands Resort in Texas has a new design and interior offering modern luxury with a relaxing and inviting environment, shown in the Grand Ballroom (above).*

Credit: The Woodlands Resort





The American Woodmark Corporation recently held its national sales meeting at Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg, Virginia.

attendees' productivity with relaxing, fun activities aplenty.

Updates in the accouterments and amenities of a conference center are also something that meeting and event planners pay attention to.

The Woodlands Resort in Texas has a new design and interior, featuring Texas architectural elements including steel, wood and stone. The goal of the redesign of the conference center is to offer modern luxury with a relaxing and inviting environment. Located on 28,000 acres of natural forest also means The Woodlands Resort can provide unique outdoor venues for meetings and conferences.

When it opens in 2020, CAESARS FORUM, a \$375 million, 550,000-square-foot conference center in Las Vegas, will accommodate more than 10,000 attendees. Caesars Entertainment Corporation recently announced the setting of the first steel truss for the construction

of CAESARS FORUM. The more than 300-foot-wide and 200-plus-ton truss marks the first of more than a mile of trusses that will be used in the construction. Due to the large scale of each truss, they are built by the manufacturer, cut into several pieces and then driven to the site, where they are rebuilt via crane.

Additional one-of-a-kind features of CAESARS FORUM include:

- 9,500 tons of steel and 2,000 tons of rebar.
- 30,000 cubic yards of concrete footings.
- 390,000 square feet of carpeting.
- 2,200 wall panels and 650 prefab exterior panels.
- 2 miles of airwalls.

"This is an exciting step toward the development of CAESARS FORUM which will redefine the offerings for meetings and events in Las Vegas," says Michael Massari, chief sales officer for Caesars Entertainment.

CAESARS FORUM will provide direct access via skybridge to Harrah's Las Vegas and The LINQ Hotel and Casino; be connected by pedestrian bridge to LINQ Promenade and Flamingo Las Vegas; feature 300,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including two 110,000-square-foot column-free ballrooms, two 40,000-square-foot ballrooms and six state-of-the-art boardrooms; offer more than 100 breakout rooms; feature FORUM Plaza, a 100,000-square-foot outdoor space, ideal for outdoor events, wellness breaks, opening cocktail receptions, meals or entertainment and be located within walking distance to eight of Caesars Entertainment's Las Vegas properties.

When Jackie Warner, administrative assistant at American Woodmark Corporation, recently planned a national sales meeting for nearly 350 people at Lansdowne Resort, one of the areas that she evaluated was the flexibility offered in the planning states, included changes in the meeting set-up, breakouts and the overall meeting space available.

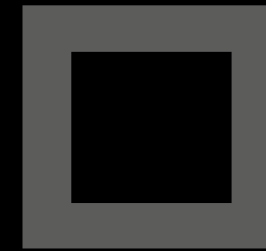
"Listen to your gut instinct when you are touring properties," Warner says. "If you aren't receiving a good vibe from the staff, such as friendliness vs. pushiness, chances are you'll butt heads later on in the planning stages. Lansdowne has been a wonderful property to work with. Their staff truly cares about the success of your meeting, and they ensure that your job as a lead meeting planner goes as smoothly as possible." **I&FMM**



CAESARS FORUM, a 550,000-square-foot conference center in Las Vegas, will accommodate more than 10,000 attendees when it opens in 2020.

Credit: Caesars Entertainment Corporation

M E E T T H E F U T U R E



# CAESARS FORUM



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The New York Hilton Midtown hotel is introducing healthy, protein-rich and sustainable products, such as fresh fruit (left) and lean meat (above), at their food stations.

Credit: Shutterstock (left), New York Hilton Midtown

# Healthy F&B Trends

## Event Menus Cater to Everyone's Dietary Needs

With a new year now upon us, there are a numerous health food trends already taking place that planners can get excited about. While keto diets, golden milk lattes and gluten-free may have made inroads in the meetings industry last year, 2019 will see the rise of many additional healthy food and beverage trends that planners can get excited about.

By Ron Bernthal

Oat milk's growing popularity among consumers last year will get even stronger and will soon appear on hotel and private caterer group menus, especially if producers can increase supply, and new spices from far-flung destinations will appear with greater visibility in convention center kitchens.

"We do a tremendous amount of group businesses throughout our 47,000-plus square feet of meeting

space," says Thomas Harkins, executive chef of Loews Philadelphia Hotel and its signature Bank & Bourbon restaurant. "Recently, we have noticed a movement toward healthy foods for our buffets during meetings and breaks. Meeting planners are now vocalizing guests' dietary preferences and restrictions, like adhering to the keto diet or maintaining a vegan lifestyle. Additionally, gluten-free requests continue to be popular with our guests. We are now building our menus with all these offerings in mind to ensure there is plenty of variety no matter your preference."

"Meeting and conference participants are already requesting healthy food at their events," Harkins continues. "Some healthy dishes we have created for recent groups include roasted carrots salad with quinoa, charred cauliflower

steak with farro and romesco and roasted eggplant with tabbouleh and cilantro curry. Healthy breakfast foods have been increasingly popular as well. We've added healthy baked egg dishes and vegan options like acai bowls. The feedback from all these new dishes have been overwhelmingly positive, and I expect they will continue to be some of our most popular items as we go through 2019."

### Most Popular

Some of the most popular and eagerly awaited healthy food trends this year will include:

- **Oat milk:** Nearly every year for the past decade, there has been an alternative milk product and last year was no different. Oat milk took the world by storm thanks to the fact that it foams

just like dairy milk (perfect for lattes) and it tastes pretty similar. Oat milk's reach will spread much farther than the metropolitan areas it currently has under its spell.

- **Moringa:** If meeting attendees like to start their day with an energizing morning beverage, then moringa might be perfect. Native to India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, moringa is a plant that's entirely edible — from the stems to the leaves to the seeds — and is packed with nutrients like vitamin C, magnesium and potassium. Planners can request it from their F&B contacts.
- **Shelf-stable probiotics:** Probiotics aren't exactly new, but shelf-stable probiotics are. Whole Foods and product distributors in many U.S. markets report that there will be more products containing strains of probiotics like *Bacillus coagulans*. GBI-30 and MTCC 5856 are two strains that will remain safe to eat when stored at room temperature; thus, conference and meeting attendees will start seeing them in granola, oatmeal, nut butters, soups and more. Even beauty brands will be jumping on the trend by incorporating probiotics into things like lotion and sunscreen.
- **Alternative fats:** With keto, paleo and grain-free diets continuing to gain popularity, the demand for dairy-, animal- and grain-free healthy fat sources will continue to rise. The ketogenic diet is a low-carb, high-fat diet that offers many health benefits. Alternative fat sources will increase this year, especially MCT oil (a type of oil extracted from coconut oil), coconut butter and lots of ghee, a kind of clarified butter that has been used in southeast Asian cooking and Ayurvedic medicine for thousands of years.
- **Snacks from the sea:** For those

afternoon breakout sessions, attendees will be seeing new types of snacks that originated in the ocean. These may include puffed snacks made from water lily seeds, plant-based tuna alternatives made with algae ingredients and crispy salmon skins. These healthy products aren't just limited to snacks — perhaps your attendees at an upcoming conference may be served kelp noodles and seaweed butter.

- **Tahini:** The new "almond butter" is a condiment made from ground hulled sesame seeds that has

and more Middle Eastern and North African spices into their food. This includes spices such as harissa, sumac and za'atar. Za'atar is a popular Middle Eastern spice mix consisting of oregano, thyme, sumac, ground sesame seeds and salt, and meeting planners will see a lot more of it on catering menus at hotels and restaurants across the country.

- **Orange wine:** This is said to become one of the new healthy alcoholic beverage trends this year. Made from the same grapes as white wine, orange wine gets its distinct hue from letting the



*"We not only keep our guests' health in mind when making our food selections, but we make a great effort to provide nutritious meals that keep their energy high throughout the day."*

Amanda Sherman, CMP, Marketing Specialist, Corporate Events, Frankenmuth Insurance, Frankenmuth, MI

been used for thousands of years in the Middle East and parts of the Mediterranean. It is a major ingredient in foods like hummus and baba ghanoush. It has a slightly more savory flavor that makes it great for adding to dips like hummus, but it's also perfect in everything from smoothies to baked goods.

- **Frozen treats:** Perhaps 2019 will be the year of avocado popsicles, hummus ice cream and coconut water soft-serve. Planners may want to order pints of ice cream swirled with artisanal cheese; or stretchy, chewy Turkish ice cream; Thai rolled ice cream; or Taiwanese snow ice cream at your next event.
- **Middle Eastern and North African spices:** Professional chefs have been incorporating more

juices of the fruit ferment with its skins and seeds. The wine is often described as having a rich flavor with a hint of honey, apple, orange rind and juniper, all healthy-sounding ingredients even if they are not actually in the wine. Meeting attendees will be pleasantly surprised at its taste.



Meeting attendees can dine al fresco in the organic garden at The Boulders Resort & Spa in Arizona.

Credit: The Boulders



## Organic Gardens

Some hotels are using their own organic gardens to make sure that fresh, healthy vegetables are available for their 2019 menus.

The Boulders Resort & Spa in Arizona “has a certified, 5,600-square-foot organic garden that makes it easy to provide healthy menus for meeting guests,” says Harold Fehr, the property’s director of catering and conference services. “The garden has eight elevated planter boxes that grows seasonal organic vegetables offering the pure quality of the ingredients and flavor across the board, so that we can provide a true, healthy experience that focuses on healthy eating, keeping attendees well-fueled and at their physical best.

“Over the summer the Boulders hosted a major women’s athletic wear group meeting. We provided menus that were all-organic, using healthy salads and lean protein along with water stations,” Fehr continues. “From the onset, they made it clear that they didn’t want the ‘traditional’ buffets with multiple chaffers and a long line. So we separated their healthy buffets into various and distinctive stations around the room. It worked very well and was truly a farm-to-table experience that they really enjoyed.”

For meeting planners from financial and insurance firms, and for independent planners who work with these

sauce, fried and encrusted are found on most banquet menus,” says Amanda Sherman, CMP, marketing specialist, corporate events, Frankenmuth Insurance. “In 2019, we are looking to our trusted chefs to provide grilled options that do not compromise the quality or flavor of the protein offerings. We not only keep our guests’ health in mind when making our food selections, but we make a great effort to provide nutritious meals that keep their energy high throughout the day. Limiting heavy carbs and unhealthy fats allows us to ensure that our guests are returning to the meeting fueled to engage in meaningful dialogue.

“Additionally, we are seeking out flavorful beverages that do not have artificial ingredients, such as flavored sparking waters or infused waters,” she continues. “We also like to see stronger brewed coffee with fair trade coffee beans or with local producers. Buying local and supporting our community is important to our company, and we are simply thrilled when our venues share similar values.”

Sherman says that “meeting attendees are tremendously appreciative of healthy offerings during events we host. Our team and guests travel for a majority of their work, which results in eating out more often than not. We are more than happy to provide them with balanced meals that do not slow them down. For some time, customizing



Avocados are considered a healthy fat, making avocado toast on multigrain bread a popular snack at many venues.

still offer starches, carbs and sweets, but they are no longer taking center stage on our buffets.”

Jennifer Squeglia, CMP, independent event professional at RLC Events is very active in Financial and Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP) and believes that everyone involved in a planned event should be on the same page regarding the F&B selections.

“I understand that new and healthy food and beverage trends are important not only to the planner, but to the participants and venues as well,” she says. “The idea of knowing where the food products are sourced from is not really new, but has been gaining strength each year, and 2019 will not be any different. The chefs especially try to source locally, which makes every meal fresher and healthier and supports local communities. Attendees appreciate this, too. When they are attending events, they tend to eat more than they do at home, so it is important to offer healthy options not only at meals but throughout the day.”

Squeglia says that offering healthy options like fresh fruits at water stations, pop chips rather than potato chips, or mixed nuts are trends that will definitely continue this year.

“There are always new and healthy snack brand options that can be served not only during breaks, but throughout an all-day conference or incentive gathering,” she says. “Venues are well-aware of this and in regions throughout the

country, especially in southern California, fresh, organic and non-GMO trends are well-established, and I expect this trend to continue through 2019 and beyond.”

## Global Flair

For planners seeking a menu with global flair, head to the Caribbean’s Hotel Xcaret Mexico. The property’s 10 restaurants and eight bars, ranging from casual to upscale, offer a tantalizing array of international and Mexican gastronomy, declared by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The resort’s signature restaurant is Ha’ — meaning water in the Mayan language — by Carlos Gaytan, the first Mexican chef to receive a Michelin Star. Attendees can partake in an elaborate seven-course tasting menu, perfectly paired with Mexican fine wines. Gaytan describes his dishes as a meeting of authentic flavors with the finest traditional, locally sourced ingredients. “This is more than just a restaurant. It is a way to taste and experience Mayan and Mexican culture,” he says.

Other dining options include Cantina Los Faroles, with offerings such as duck tacos, grilled beef picanha and cucumber salad with jicama, agave syrup and chia vinaigrette; Fuego Restaurant’s signature dish “Risotto de mi comadre,” a culinary experience that combines mole, shiitake, foie gras and chocolate; and Las Cuevas, a Mexican restaurant cut out of the natural caves below the resort.

## Budgets

Sodexo’s National Director of Culinary Development, Kevin Cecilio, says that many of the F&B selections that planners of all industries order, including those for insurance and financial firms, are driven by price/budget.

“Most of the planners want to offer healthy options, so we must work with them to make sure it works within their required budgets per event. It is a job we take very seriously,” Cecilio says.

He believes that the

following four categories will become more popular with planners and attendees this year.

- **Fermented Foods:** “Building on last year’s rise in popularity, the fermented food trend continues to move beyond traditional foods

ingredient in ponzu sauce, and pomelo, which can be found in drinks and desserts.”

- **Lemon Verbena, Savory and Caraway Flower:** “These three herbs are poised to become household names in 2019. The



**“In 2019, I think the focus on hyper-local, minimal ingredient meals and health-base break options will continue to dominate the meetings space.”**

Victor Wilson, Director of Events  
New York Hilton Midtown, New York, NY

into cocktails, sauces, snacks, frozen treats, kombucha cocktail mixers, miso dressings, hot sauces and more.”

- **Seeds:** “Adding a crunchy, delicious texture to everything from salads to soft cheeses, seeds are no longer what gets thrown away. Roasted, tossed into soup, even mixed with chocolate to make a healthy dessert, seeds provide healthy, omega-3 oils and protein and are a great option for people with food sensitivities or those who maintain a vegan diet.”

- **Exotic Citrus:** “The coming year looks to bring bright citrus flavors from exotic fruits, such as kumquats, pomelos, yuzu, Ugli fruit, bergamot and Meyer lemons. For example, yuzu is an essential

Savory herb has a pungent flavor and pairs well with slow-cooked meats, beets, eggs, potatoes and tomatoes. Lemon verbena provides a lemon flavor and is often used for light marinades, dressings, even chicken and fish dishes. The seeds and leaves of the white caraway flower provide a flavorful addition to a variety of foods, including bread, cheese, cakes and sausage. The leaves can even be cooked like spinach or used in salads.”

At the New York Hilton Midtown hotel, Victor Wilson, director of events, says that for insurance and financial meetings and events, planners will be looking to increase their use of healthy foods.

“As the corporate meetings landscape evolves, we adapt our approach to mirror the needs and wants of the client,” he says. “Our aim is to introduce trending healthy and sustainable products as well as activity breaks that promote balance and wellness. One of our more popular breaks, ‘Yoga and Yogurt,’ is a 50-minute yoga class followed by nutrient-dense power shots — ginger and wheatgrass is the favorite — with others that include kombucha, superfruit, avocado and, of course,



Hotel Xcaret Mexico’s Michelin-star restaurant, Ha’, serves dishes made from traditional, locally sourced ingredients offering authentic flavors.



**“Meeting planners are now vocalizing guests’ dietary preferences and restrictions... We are now building our menus with all these offerings in mind to ensure there is plenty of variety no matter your preference.”**

Thomas Harkins, Executive Chef, Bank & Bourbon at  
Loews Philadelphia Hotel, Philadelphia, PA

industries, it helps that F&B directors and chefs at luxury properties are well aware of the trends regarding healthy food and beverages and are more than happy to create new combinations or use unique ingredients in order to satisfy attendee needs.

“Typically, items that are in a heavy

menus was unheard of and we were left serving heavy menu options that consisted of rich sauces, buttery vegetables, creamy starches and a variety of sugary desserts. We have since moved to lighter fare with lean protein, steamed vegetables and an assortment of flavorful sides that leave our guests satisfied. We



yogurt. In 2019, I think the focus on hyper-local, minimal ingredient meals and health-base break options will continue to dominate the meetings space.

"Meeting planners are diligent about creating events that encompass the attendee needs, as well as cognizant of the footprint their meeting or convention has on the city," Wilson continues. "In 2018, there was an upward trend toward unique, healthy breaks. At the New York Hilton Midtown, we have had planners organize smoothie breaks,

cold salad with roasted vegetables and more root vegetables. An increased use of vegetable alternatives for rice and pasta with various root vegetables is easily able to be 'riced' or spiraled."

Lindenberg says that her attendees definitely appreciate the trend toward healthy F&B, and they let her company know that through surveys.

"Most of our attendees travel frequently, so they don't see the meeting as an opportunity to 'splurge,' and they feel a stronger need to stick to

and gluten-free. Although using kosher food for group dining functions will normally increase your costs, attendees will appreciate the taste and healthy qualities inherent in the product.

"In the marketplace now, all of our clients have been exposed to more high-quality food, and they're looking for that even at the corporate meetings and conferences they attend," says Judy Marlow, owner of Simply Divine, a New York-based event, design and planning caterer that's been in business for more than 20 years and has created kosher dishes for venerable New York venues like Bouley and Blue Hill at Stone Barns, at Olivier Cheng Events, as well as for clients like *Gourmet* magazine and Gucci. "There's no reason why kosher can't be great and stylish, even for our clients that do not normally request it."

"There are more and more requests to offer a broad array of dietary offerings for group attendees, vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free, which I believe will continue," says Michael Barrett, regional vice president for Centerplate, a U.S.- and U.K.-based hospitality firm that works with corporate clients as well as convention centers, sports venues and event organizers. "We realize that our guests are more diet-conscious than ever before, and it is our responsibility to be able to offer something delicious for everyone. In time, as the space grows, the market for plant-based meat will not be just vegans or vegetarians, it will be meat-eaters, too. Working with our joint Sodexo and Centerplate culinary teams, we will always have our fingers on the pulse of the newest trends."

Barrett says that meeting menus really depend on the demographics of the group.

"Millennials, for example, trend toward healthier/small-batch/local offerings. As their buying power and influence grows, so will the frequency of these F&B offerings," he says.

Meeting planners and attendees want more than just hydration from their beverages and more than just nourishment from their food as they are more educated about health and wellness than ever before.

**I&FMM**



***"Most of our attendees travel frequently, so they don't see the meeting as an opportunity to 'splurge,' and they feel a stronger need to stick to their regimen when at our event."***

Sherri K. Lindenberg, Senior Vice President, Marketing Communications, Crump Life Insurance Services, Parsippany, NJ

deconstructed salad bars, as well as protein-rich, regional meals that showcases the range and simplicity of New York-based meat and produce. Not only does this focus lean toward less waste, but it also starts a conversation with the attendees and within their company about sustainability and wellness."

### Making Requests

What types of new healthy foods or beverages will be requested of venue F&B managers or professional chefs? Sherri K. Lindenberg, senior vice president, marketing communications, at Crump Life Insurance Services, says, "We have been using infused waters at most events. It's a nicer presentation than plain water and aside from being healthy, is a cost-saving alternative to sodas and bottled water. We are also seeing more interest in tea than coffee, so this year we are looking to have tea bars with more assorted flavors.

"We are always making sure we cater to the gluten-free, dairy-free and vegan guests, but find it easier to have general meals selected that can work for everyone," Lindenberg says. "Salads are getting more interesting. We are seeing a lot of interest in mixing the traditional

their regimen when at our event," she says. "We get requests for, and positive feedback on, including healthy proteins at breakfast like eggs, turkey sausage, omelet stations, etc. Also, healthier carbs at breakfast, like oatmeal and whole-grain bread, and always having fruit at breakfast.

"We've also learned that going forward into 2019, we are going to do more 'make-your-own-snack' breaks, where people can fill bags with their choice of nuts and dried fruit, and having prepackaged snacks so attendees can have a clearer sense of what they are eating and can control the portions. Obviously, there is much less interest in the traditional cookies and brownies," Lindenberg adds.

Kosher products are now more mainstream than ever. The \$24 billion kosher food market is projected to grow by 11.5 percent by 2025, according to Jacksonville, Florida-based Kosher Network International. Venue F&B directors and caterers see kosher as a quality and healthy certification, seeking out kosher food products that incorporate Mediterranean ingredients, particularly those from Israel, as well as kosher products that adhere to specialty diets, like vegan

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# How Technology Helps Build a Successful Event

*"Technology is the fabric of our daily lives. We have evolved to a place where our expectations have changed in regard to how quickly we have access to information and the types of communication vehicles we use."*



**Jeannie Griffin**  
Vice President, Product & Technology Solutions  
BCD Meetings & Events  
Chicago, IL

execute events and engage attendees prior to, during and after events."

Sydney Wolf, director of sales for metroConnections, a conference and event services company, says technology is still considered modern, cool and trendy, so it needs to be incorporated to elevate the experience to make a meeting feel relevant and cutting-edge.

Her company has helped execute meetings and conferences that attract 3,000 or more attendees, and technology has played a vital role in the registration process through the activation of on-demand badge printing.

"Implementing this technology has essentially eliminated the need for a large amount of staff or volunteers who need to sift through alphabetized badges and puts that experience in the attendees' hands," Wolf says. "From the moment they step into the event space, their experience is elevated, efficient and gives them independence by letting them print their own registration materials onsite. It's made a world of difference for attendees and frees up staff and volunteers for more important onsite roles."

Jonathan Denmark, LIA, CLTC, CISR, CLCS, president and COO of Mountain-One Insurance, says he loves showing videos, infographics and charts at his presentations, and technology has

Today, meetings and events are the second-largest area of spend for most marketing budgets and having the ability to track the progress of interest in products, services and satisfaction with those events all hinges on having technology in place to easily capture the data points one is using to evaluate.

"When you track that detail at an event level, you are enabling online polling, engagement surveys through the app, onsite appointments and, potentially, heat mapping/tracking of the attendee footprint to gain an understanding of interest levels from the attendees," Griffin says.

Beth Lawrence, president & CEO of Beth Lawrence LLC, says technology is an important component of our everyday lives, so meetings and events should follow suit.

## **Modern, Cool and Trendy**

"If we are constantly interacting with one another through digital means, it only makes sense that a technological component of meetings, events and trade shows allow guests to interact with the event host, sponsors, speakers and one another," she says. "Technology is shaping the way that we plan events,

## Financial and Insurance Planners Engage Attendees With Innovative Interaction Techniques

By Keith Loria

**T**he meetings and events industry is not what it used to be, and technology has become a huge factor in whether a meeting or event is successful. It's why experts in the industry have taken the time to understand the role of technology when planning and running events.

"Technology is the fabric of our daily lives. We have evolved to a place where our expectations have changed in regard to how quickly we have access to information and the types of communication vehicles we use," says Jeannie Griffin, vice president, product and technology solutions at BCD Meetings & Events. "More importantly, the value we perceive from hosting and conducting events has changed."



helped him engage the audience and allow attendees to think critically and relate to what they are seeing.

"I recently held my insurance agency's annual meeting, where I shared

**"Technology is shaping the way that we plan events, execute events and engage attendees prior to, during and after events."**



**Beth Lawrence**  
President & CEO  
Beth Lawrence LLC  
Philadelphia, PA

results for the year, set goals for the coming year and presented awards to employees for achievements and years of service," he says. "I started this presentation with a motivation video — something to help ground everyone and level set. Because the presentation is data-driven, charts are critical. I showed a lot of graphs depicting growth in various areas and throughout the presentation, I added more video pictures to emphasize a particular topic."

Katrina Kent, CMP, CMM, director of corporate events at TD Ameritrade, explains we live in an increasingly "phygital" (physical/digital) world, and it all boils down to the fact that technology enables community and connections between people at live events in ways that just weren't possible even a few years ago.

"When tech is used to deepen the meaning and impact of the experience for the attendee, whether it's through an intuitive app that connects you with other like-minded attendees based on specific criteria, or a virtual reality experience that augments the here-and-now at a live event, or a 3D presentation at an event that really drives home the features of a new product, technology is critical," she says.

"I am really excited about the possibilities as we continue to live and work in a phygital world."

### The Meeting Evolution

Today, mobile devices play a huge role in a successful meeting, when less than a decade ago, they were used almost solely for communication.

"Now, the presentations, agenda, trade show map and other experiences are either accessible via an app, or they exist on a responsive website attendees can access at any point," Griffin says. "It's only about five to 10 years ago when attendees were printing out agendas, getting informational folders upon check-in and that was it. Mobile has made a huge difference."

Additionally, she believes that tech has made things different in regards to the attendee experience.

"With the concentrated effort being put forth to know and understand me as an attendee, I can arrive onsite and know my favorite coffee might be served, that for my gift I'd like a donation vs. something provided to me, and again, behind those small movements to ensure I have a terrific experience technology has been involved," Griffin says.

Tech is more of a "need" today than a "nice to have" as it was five to 10 years ago, Lawrence says.

"I would imagine that now, especially for large-scale events and conventions, it would be shocking to attendees to not integrate some type of technology," she says.

Technology is changing so quickly, Denmark says. Sometimes it's the little things like internet connection speed, upgraded Excel capabilities, presentations onto HDTVs rather than projectors.

"These technological advances can make a presentation successful," he says. "At a recent presentation, I was playing a video and my laptop was

hooked into a smart speaker, which provides excellent audio quality, and the sound filled up the room. Even five years ago, I would have had to run the sound through a clumsy PA system to capture the sound quality I got with one high-quality smart speaker."

Wolf notes the biggest technological advance that has changed meetings and events across the board is elevated photography and videography capabilities.

"So many things have been made possible in the last decade, including 360-degree cameras, 3D photos, drone footage, not to mention the significantly heightened capabilities of a simple smartphone camera," she says. "It's changed and drastically improved the way we're able to capture and share meetings and events after the fact."

Lisa Tanen-La Fontaine, CMO and vice president of LIMRA & LOMA, notes technology is important at these events because that's where the industry is

**"From the moment they step into the event space, their experience is elevated, efficient and gives them independence... It's made a world of difference for attendees and frees up staff and volunteers for more important onsite roles."**



**Sydney Wolf**  
Director of Sales  
metroConnections  
Bloomington, MN

going and how companies are evolving.

"It's all about engagement. You really want to engage people with not only what's happening at the event, but all the resources they have behind the event," she says.

"Then you want them to carry forward with them everything they



learned at the event, and technology can help do that successfully."

At LIMRA & LOMA's annual conference in New York City in 2018, a 9-foot by 18-foot-long engagement wall told the company's story.

"People could go up and touch the wall, and things would blossom and show the offerings we had," Tanen-La Fontaine says. "Then from there, you could go off to a kiosk and ask for information. We also have iPads in our booth for attendees."

### Tech in Action

Nowadays, meetings in the insurance and financial arenas are just not held where technology has not been heavily involved — behind the scenes or front and center. However, it can come in at different parts of the event life cycle.

For example, Griffin notes she has had fantastic communications and marketing for upcoming events that use engaging content positioned just for her, which is enabled by marketing automation.

"For another event, the pre-event experience was a bit more vanilla. But when I got onsite, the self-registration/check in process was at a kiosk, the app was easy to download, I provided seed questions and ranked against others

in regards to the general session content and was able to communicate and make one-on-one appointments with attendees easily through appointment schedulers," she says.

Denmark recently attended a conference where he was asked to download the conference mobile app before it started. During one of the presentations, in a live setting, the attendees were asked to answer questions on the mobile app. The answers (results) from the survey were then shown on a large screen in real time.

"You could literally see the results updating as people worked their way through the app to provide answers," he says. "This type of integration is fresh and extremely engaging."

Two events that Lawrence planned this year utilized the event app Socio, something appearing at many meetings these days.

"I helped to build out the interface of the apps for both of these events, including branding, inputting the speakers, schedule, attendees and all other relevant information," she says. "Using the app's technology, we were able to send push notifications onsite when room assignments changed, the schedule

was modified or we needed to draw traffic to a certain session or sponsor. We could also see, from the app's 'connect' feature, who was connecting with whom and real-time feedback and questions."

David Watts, venue director at Enclave in Las Vegas, which offers an extensive fiber optic network to easily stream content between all rooms in real time, says tech is only getting faster and more important.

"We are making a huge impact on events as companies are able to utilize every space in the building while getting the same message across to everyone attending," he says. "Our LED sign right in the front of the building is technology almost all our clients take advantage of. They are able to display their logo or other creative so the venue is branded by them as soon as their guests arrive."

The walls and ceilings at Enclave are acoustically treated and the private boardrooms are fully equipped with LED screens and video teleconferencing. This allows companies to hold meetings with anyone in the world in their own comfortable setting.

### Game Changers

Although some tech will come along and immediately make noise in the meeting industry, it's more common that technology takes a bit more time to have game-changer effects.

For instance, wearables are becoming must-tech at most meetings, but it



**Jonathan Denmark, LIA, CLTC, CISR, CLCS**  
President and COO  
MountainOne Insurance  
North Adams, MA

**"I think that technology will continue to advance and provide a really great value added for teams that cannot always be in the same physical space."**



***"You want to engage people with not only what's happening at the event, but all the resources they have behind the event. Then you want them to carry forward ... everything they learned at the event, and technology can help do that successfully."***

**Lisa Tanen-La Fontaine**  
CMO and Vice President  
LIMRA & LOMA  
Windsor, CT



has taken some time for attendees to be comfortable with it all.

Technology is also critical to data that will help market the conference to specific attendees and draw specific attendees to the sponsors. For example, scanning apps such as Boomset, which allow sponsors to scan attendees at their booths and retrieve information for later marketing purposes.

Behind the scenes, event planners can also utilize the information provided within the apps and ticketing software to see demographics and level within their particular industry to target programming to attendees.

Onsite, event apps can integrate gamification and live polling into events, livening the attendee experience and allowing them to be a part of the conversation.

There are also branded LED bands that can light up in different colors and vibrate on the wrist of the wearer to indicate time for breaks or to move to the next space, and so much more.

Wolf says that virtual reality has steadily become more prevalent and has gained popularity even within the last year.

"It used to be so rare and expensive to come by, but now it feels commonplace at a meeting or event," she says. "Oculus glasses are almost expected,

giving you access to more content and custom experiences that go beyond the physical space that your meeting or event is in. I truly think virtual reality could potentially change the way we meet in the future — being in the same

physical space could become more rare than meeting virtually as the technology continues to advance."

#### **Bugs in the System**

Overall, technology can be a powerful tool that few people recognize if it goes well, but it's when it does not go well that everyone notices.

That's why it's vital to prepare for all contingencies when planning a meeting.

It's good to think about many different scenarios on what could go wrong, and prepare yourself mentally that some things are going to malfunction, as it is inevitable. If you're quickly able to correct things because you have a plan, or even make a light joke about the issue, then people might not even notice.

#### **The Crystal Ball**

Many believe the next big important tech to impact the industry will be chatbots, and the rise of AI and machine learning.

***"I am really excited about the possibilities as we continue to live and work in a 'phygital' world."***

**Katrina Kent, CMP, CMM**  
Director of Corporate Events  
TD Ameritrade  
Omaha, NE



"Recently I was in Las Vegas for a meeting, and I received a text introducing me to my personal concierge," Griffin says. "I could send a text to check out or get my room cleaned. I feel

the beginnings of machine learning are starting to make some interesting changes to my travel experience, and can only see those becoming more sophisticated and insightful as the algorithms develop."

Denmark feels the world of web-based meetings is getting better and is the wave of the future.

"I am often hosting internal sales meetings with employees logged in from different locations," he says. "We occasionally have team members join via web conference from their smartphones. The latest technology allows everyone to see each other, but it's not without bugs. I think that this technology will continue to advance and provide a really great value added for teams that cannot always be in the same physical space."

Lawrence says that even though event chatbots have been around for a few years, she sees this technology evolving to become the future of communication for events, calling chatbots "incredible" when needing to communicate to attendees en masse, via text message or otherwise.

"It allows attendees to interact directly with the bot, and for event planners to keep track of questions asked and answered to improve communication for the following year," she says. "I think it's very smart that companies like this realize that phone storage space is precious, so asking attendees to download an app may not be as effective moving forward. Chatbots interact over text and 'learn' and evolve with new questions that are asked. I think this adaptable, real-time technology is going to be the key for the future."

She also feels voice-first technology will creep in to the event space and really change the game.

"Integrating Alexa into events, Google Home, Siri or a similar technology will only make it easier to interact directly with attendees," Lawrence says. **I&FMM**



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# OH, CANADA!

## From Sea to Sea, Canada Has 5 Sensational Cities to Host Your Meetings

BY THOMAS RYNNE

Our neighbor to the north is a fascinating bundle of contrasts: in languages, lifestyles, topography, cultures and cities. Within its borders, every language in the world is spoken, and every nation and ethnicity is represented.

Canadian cities are a diverse lot when it comes to meetings, as well.

Montréal is the cosmopolitan big city in Québec, a province in which more than half of its population speaks French. Also in the province, of course, is Québec City, with ancient alleys and spires and fleur-de-lis banners and buildings dating from the 1600s.

To the west is Ottawa, a capital city of beautiful continental-style government buildings and stately ceremonies, but also interesting ethnic influences in its cuisine and its culture.

Then, there's Toronto, in the past

considered by some a staid provincial town, but now the biggest city in Canada and an exciting, world-class metropolis.

On the West Coast, in a magnificent setting where mountains, rain forests and the Pacific Ocean all converge, are the towering white towers of Vancouver.

Here, from east to west, are five great Canadian meeting cities.

### QUÉBEC CITY

This city was founded by French explorer Samuel de Champlain in 1608. Old Québec is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, close to the Québec City Convention Centre, hotels, attractions and unique venues. This is a wonderful walking city,

where the echoes of a colorful history reverberate with every step you take.

Québec City has a distinctive joie de vivre. The French language only adds to its charm. (But people in the service and tourism industries speak English, and all signage is also in both French and English.)

Here, there are still city walls with battlements and old cannons. Horses still pull carriages along narrow cobblestone streets, and houses, restaurants, shops and even rooftops burst with color.

Residents flock to the Plains of



The annual FICP Education Forum took place in Vancouver last June with 230 attendees, who enjoyed the city's downtown waterfront after day-long sessions.



Québec City sits on the Saint Lawrence River, giving attendees breathtaking views from their meeting spaces.

Abraham, an urban park with magnificent views of the St. Lawrence River and the opposite shore. And, it's on hallowed ground. It was here, on September 13, 1759, that the fate of Canada was decided in a battle between British and French forces.

Place Royale and Petit-Champlain appear as if they just jumped out of a postcard, with quaint boutiques and restaurants. The Saint-Roch district, on the other hand, is a trendy, revitalized neighborhood with a lot of hotels and eateries.

A short drive from town, there's an island in the St. Lawrence called Ile d'Orleans, with six little villages and beautiful pastoral scenes.

The Québec City Convention Centre is downtown, only steps from Old Québec City, with an outdoor terrace offering great views of this historic neighborhood. The 300,000-square-foot building has large windows letting in the natural light and spectacular views of the Laurentian Mountains. It's the first Canadian convention center to offer free Wi-Fi. In addition, it's a leader in sustainable practices, with a LEED certification and a BOMA BEST from Canada.

Late 2017 saw the opening of the Four-Star **Entourage sur-le-Lac Resort**, on Lake Beauport, just outside town. **Hotel PUR Québec**, the first Canadian hotel to join Marriott's Tribute Portfolio brand, completed a multimillion-dollar renovation of its 242 guest rooms and 12,000 square feet of meeting space in autumn 2017. **Hilton Québec** is slated for a top-to-bottom renovation next year.

### MONTRÉAL

Montréal remains the cosmopolitan center of French-speaking Canada. It's a striking union of European charm and North American can-do, and of the historic and the new, from its architecture to its culinary scene.

It's a city with centuries-old Georgian buildings near the St. Lawrence waterfront and atmospheric little cafés in Old Montreal, on streets not much different than they were 300 years ago.

Yet, it's also an international city. Today, the population of 1.8 million encompasses some 120 distinct ethnic communities, making Montréal a colorful mosaic of cultures. The world's second-largest francophone city after Paris, Montréal's a world leader in aeronautics, information technology and biotechnology, as well as an innovator in medicine, multimedia, the arts and urban planning.

It's a 24-hour-a-day city, a foodie city and a hotbed for creative types, from painters to musicians to a hundred genres of nontraditional artists.

Getting around is easy. Its streets, parks, underground pedestrian network ("underground city," as it's often called), and Métro System are safe and easy to navigate. The city's filled with vibrant neighborhoods with outdoor markets, boutiques, restaurants and local cafés. Many residents speak English.

Visitors can capture the true essence of Montréal at Notre Dame Basilica, a magnificent old church

surrounded by buildings dating back to 1687. They'll also find spectacular views of the city and the St. Lawrence Seaway beyond it atop Mount Royal. And, they can experience cool cafés, galleries and street artists on Place Jacques-Cartier in Old Town.

Numerous companies offer group tours of the city. A must-do is the nighttime Ghost Tours through back alleys and darkened docks.

Attendees can also find the essence of Montréal on a motorized boat trip into the St. Lawrence rapids (be prepared for a great ride!).

The city's hotel scene is a lively one. **Hotel Birks Montréal** opened late last year in an iconic 1879 building with 132 rooms and meeting spaces for up to 140. **Four Seasons Montréal** will open shortly, in a beautiful glass building with 168 rooms and a fifth-floor event space with an outdoor terrace.

**DoubleTree by Hilton Montréal Airport** recently completed a renovation of its 169 guest rooms and 3,250 square feet of meeting space, and **Hotel Le Germain Montréal** is currently undergoing an upgrade (finishing this summer) that will add 35 new guest rooms. **Montréal Marriott Chateau Champlain** is now upgrading the 611 guest rooms and 35,565 square feet of meeting space, while remaining open.

A \$50 million renovation to the **Le Centre Sheraton Montréal Hotel**, including the 825 guest rooms and



*"We had a reception and dinner for a hundred guests at the Hockey Hall of Fame, and they loved the locale. ... Toronto has an excellent meetings infrastructure."*

**Christine Santos**

Senior Communications Specialist, Corporate Programs and Exhibit Management  
FM Global  
Johnston, RI



56,000 square feet of meeting space, is underway. The hotel will remain open throughout.

## OTTAWA

Ottawa is stately, regal ... and cool and fun. It's a city filled with continental-style government buildings and colorful pageantry.

Once somewhat homogeneous, Ottawa's now home to numerous ethnic groups and nationalities.

As Canada's capital city, Ottawa tells the country's stories. Home to national museums and institutions, the city reflects the country in ways both obvious and subtle.

Located in the province of Ontario but bordering Québec, it's a place where you'll hear both English and French. It offers the cultural and culinary amenities you'd expect to find in a G7 capital.

Residents love the outdoors — cycling, paddling, golfing or hiking in warmer weather, and skiing, skating, snowshoeing or playing hockey in winter. It's not hard to find a place in which to do these things — there are some 500 miles of recreational pathways in the region.

Ottawa offers attendees a truly Canadian experience through historic landmarks and engaging museums in



Toronto is a top convention destination with new meeting hotels, a 700,000-square-foot convention center, and many exciting attractions and restaurants.

Credit: Tourism Toronto

a pedestrian-friendly downtown with world-class hotels.

One of the places that really says "Ottawa" is Parliament Hill, with neo-Gothic buildings and copper roofs. So do the many great national museums here, where attendees can get a good insight into the history and culture of Canada. Then, there's the Rideau Canal, North America's oldest continuously operating canal system (since 1832) and a UNESCO World Heritage site. In winter, thousands of residents actually skate to and from work on it!

Some locals, though, say the real face of Ottawa is found in the ByWard Market neighborhood, an eclectic enclave with a famous farmer's market by that name. This is Ottawa's

entertainment district, filled with restaurants, clubs, bistros and boutiques — and outdoor stalls in summer.

In Ottawa, meeting planners can choose among state-of-the-art venues and offsites, where attendees can network and dine among colorful totem poles, old army tanks or even gigantic dinosaurs.

Ottawa also offers access to many expert speakers from the sciences, technology, defense and security, telecommunications and the diplomatic community.

Ottawa's largest meeting place is the stunning **Shaw Centre**, overlooking the Rideau Canal. Only seven years old and offering 192,000 square feet of meeting space with advanced technology, it has huge windows letting the outside in and a LEED Gold Certification. The building is said by some to resemble a giant glass tulip lying on its side, and no two panes are the same shape.

The city's newest hotel, **Le Germain Hotel Ottawa**, just opened last May, with a restaurant and fitness center. Two new, adjoining hotels, **Hilton Garden Inn** and **Homewood Suites By Hilton**, are scheduled to open shortly, with a total of 346 guest rooms and 9,400 square feet of meeting space.

The **Brookstreet Hotel**, 13 miles west of downtown and surrounded by high-tech companies, completed a major renovation in January 2018, tripling the size of its meeting space to 30,000 square feet.

"We meet in Canada frequently,"

says Michelle Koszulinski, meeting planner for Itasca, Illinois-based Captive Resources, one of the largest administrators of member-owned group captive insurance companies in America. "And, we find Ottawa to be a great place for productive meetings."

Koszulinski brought 128 attendees to the Catalyst Insurance meeting at the **Fairmont Chateau Laurier** last October.

"We had originally planned the meeting for the Caribbean," she says, "but because of the hurricanes last fall, we decided at the last minute to switch it to Canada. We did have a pre-convention meeting with hotel security. But, really, hotel staff was so professional ... it was as if we had planned the meeting years ago. Our attendees loved Ottawa. Most had never been there and had no idea about the culture, interesting neighborhoods and this historic hotel ... located practically next to the Parliament building, which is breathtaking. Many of our surveys mentioned that attendees were energized by the site and the city."

## TORONTO

Not too long ago, Toronto was considered somewhat of a quiet provincial town. But no longer. Now it's a thriving multinational metropolis and Canada's biggest city — and top convention destination — with a stunning skyline. Or, as some of the more than 5 million inhabitants call it, "Canada's Downtown."

Toronto blends the best of Canadian inclusiveness with iconic attractions, restaurants, culture and festivals. It's home to North America's second-largest financial services center and third-largest technology sector, as well as Canada's largest life-sciences sector, providing planners with access to industry thought leaders. Connecting with these thought leaders, planners can conduct content-related site inspections, grow industry membership and exchange best practices.

How important are meetings to Toronto? Well, Tourism Toronto even has a dedicated department called Business Events Toronto.

Toronto's "local culture" is no longer just "local" — more than 50 percent of its residents were actually born outside Canada. The city shows off its multi-ethnic culture through its museums (Aga Khan Museum, Royal Ontario Museum), its innovation (Ontario Science Centre, Design Exchange) and its originality (Casa Loma estate, Bata Shoe Museum), as well as some good old Canadian roots (Hockey Hall of Fame).

Places to experience the real Toronto are legion. Try a peameal bacon sandwich (with honey mustard) and a butter tart at the 200-year-old St. Lawrence Market. Ride the 501 "Red Rocket" streetcar along Queen Street, passing through eclectic neighborhoods like Leslieville, Riverside, Queen West and Roncesvalles along the way.

Take the ferry to the Toronto Islands for a day in the parks and on the beaches. Wander the bohemian Kensington Market for vintage finds, organic coffee, Jamaican patties, gourmet cheese, green grocers and Indian spices.

Head to the CN Tower's "SkyPod" observation platform, 112 stories up with incredible views, or down to the underground PATH system, with more than 1,200 shops and restaurants.

The Metro Toronto Convention Centre is Canada's busiest convention/trade show facility, with 700,000 square feet of meeting space, a 1,232-seat theater and more than 11,000 hotel rooms within walking distance.

The city's newest meeting hotel is **St. Regis Toronto**, which opened in December with 258 guest rooms and 12,000 square feet of meeting space — some of which is on the 30th floor.

Also last year, the 404-room **Hotel X Toronto** opened, with 60,000 square feet of event space, a rooftop pool and movie theaters. And after a renovation and re-branding of the previous hotel on its site, Canada's first Kimpton Hotel, the **Kimpton St. George**, opened last July.

There are plenty of new or enhanced attractions, too. The Museum of Illusions opened its first Canadian location in Toronto in November, filled with holograms, optical illusions and unusual rooms.

The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), which has meeting/event space for 300 people, will unveil its newest "dinosaur" shortly, a 76 million-year-old creature that's amazingly preserved.

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), also with rentable space, reopened earlier this year in a former industrial space.

And, the Bentway is a unique public space that transforms a mile-long area underneath the Gardiner Expressway into a new gathering place, with gardens, a skating rink, recreational amenities, markets, art, special exhibi-

*"Our attendees loved Ottawa.*

*Most had never been there and had no idea about the culture, interesting neighborhoods and this historic hotel [Fairmont Chateau Laurier]."*



Michelle Koszulinski  
Meeting Planner  
Captive Resources  
Itasca, IL



Credit: Vancouver Convention Centre

One of the largest meeting spaces in Vancouver is the 466,500-square-foot Vancouver Convention Centre, with a downtown waterfront location.





JW Marriott Parq Vancouver features an Aqua Lounge terrace with a whirlpool that looks out to the park, mountains and ocean. Attendees can use this area to relax after a long day of meetings.

of Fame, and they loved the locale," Santos says. "We also enjoyed working with Convention Centre staff; they're extremely professional. It's a very 'green' city, and so are we as a company. We don't use paper anymore to communicate with attendees; we use mobile apps and social media to let them know where to be, what time to be there, what to bring, etc. Toronto has an excellent meetings infrastructure."

#### VANCOUVER

Vancouver seems almost Oz-like as you approach ... a city of light-colored, sky-piercing buildings set against mountains and forest on one side and Vancouver Island and the vast Pacific on the other.

Vancouver is sassy, sophisticated and outdoorsy. Consistently recognized as one of the world's most livable cities, it's home to 2 million people who enjoy a mild climate, outdoor

adventure and a vibrant cultural life ... all perched on nature's edge. In Vancouver, you can play in the ocean and the mountains on the same day.

It's the second-largest film production center in North America, home to Greenpeace, and its convention center is the first double-LEED Platinum center in the world.

The true essence of Vancouver is found in places like Grouse Mountain Resort — The Peak of Vancouver. This is a snowy wonderland in winter, with skating, snowshoeing, skiing and snowboarding. Summer is for hiking, the Refuge for Endangered Wildlife (with two grizzly bears) and helicopter tours. There's also year-round zip lining, exciting rides and dining at The Observatory.

Another place to find the city's true essence is the Capilano Suspension Bridge, a 450-foot-long swaying, wood-plank bridge in the mountains above the Capilano River.

Along with thrilling views, the park also features ecotours, First Nations cedar carving demonstrations, a treetops adventure and CliffWalk, a cantilevered walkway jutting out over the canyon below.

Attendees can "go local" at Granville Island, with food, local culture and interesting shops. At Railspur Alley, purchase art and locally made sake and gin, and there's also a market with provisions for an on-the-dock picnic.

The Mount Pleasant neighborhood

is one of the coolest new spots for eating, drinking, shopping and people-watching. Lower Lonsdale is North Vancouver's oldest neighborhood, steeped in history and filled with shops and pubs capturing the unique spirit of the North Shore.

Then, of course, there's Chinatown, where the food is great, and the lunar New Year is celebrated with traditional lion dances, festive treats, paper lanterns and cultural performances.

One of the largest meeting spaces is Vancouver Convention Centre, with a downtown waterfront location and a dramatic mountain backdrop, as well as 466,500 square feet of event space.

JW Marriott and The DOUGLAS hotel opened in trendy Parq Vancouver in 2017, with a combined 517 guest rooms and 63,000 square feet of meeting space, eight restaurants and access to downtown's only casino. The Exchange Hotel opened last year, also with meeting space.

Fairmont Hotel Vancouver completed a renovation of its 507 guest rooms last year, and Delta Hotels Vancouver Downtown Suites completed room renovations mid-2017 and will unveil new meeting spaces this year.

Katie Karmowski is events senior manager at Chicago-based Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP). She brought 230 attendees to the JW Marriott Parq Vancouver last June for the annual FICP Education Forum.

"We started planning this in autumn 2017," she says. "We promoted the meeting on email and social media, and we sold out the 230 spaces very quickly. Vancouver's an exciting city with great meeting facilities, and it's a great walking city. Our surveys ... well, the attendees were very positive about the meeting, the hotel and the city. They felt it was a very productive meeting.

"And, the prices are very reasonable for American groups," she continues, "because you can get substantial rebates. Tourism Vancouver will work with you to get rebates on the sales taxes for F&B, hotels, etc." **I&FMM**



Katie Karmowski  
Events Senior Manager  
Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals  
Chicago, IL

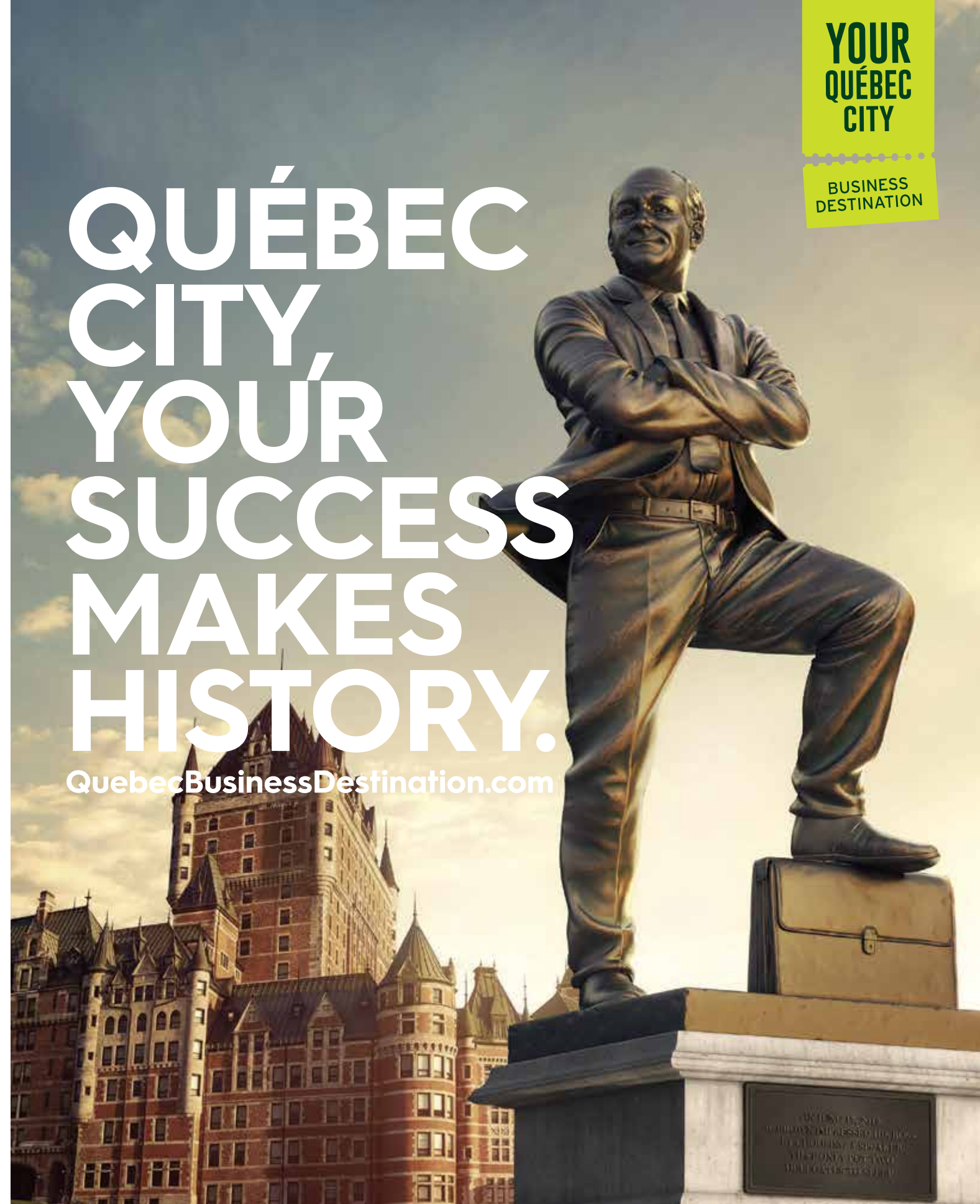
*"Vancouver's an exciting city with great meeting facilities, and it's a great walking city. And, the prices are very reasonable for American groups because you can get substantial rebates."*

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# Always Something New in ORLANDO

Even as Things Change, What Has Long Been Great For Groups Remains the Same

By Christine Loomis

If Orlando could accommodate and impress the 26,000 attendees of the Microsoft Ignite event in September 2017 — and it did — chances are good that it can accommodate and impress attendees from any event and any industry, including those in the financial and insurance sectors, not to mention the planners who put those events together.

There's a reason Orlando is consistently rated as the top meetings destination in the country. In fact, there are many reasons. Microsoft Event Director Vivian Eickhoff points to just four of them in discussing the success of Ignite on Visit Orlando's meetings and conventions-specific website.

"When we announced that Microsoft Ignite was going to be coming to Orlando, the feedback we got right away was unbelievably positive," she says, noting that the city and its facilities perfectly lend themselves to a group's needs in four key areas.

## The Overview

First, there's the travel to, from and within the city. "There is incredible airlift for everyone to be able to get in and out of Orlando," Eickhoff says. That's no surprise. Orlando is served by two airports and offers nonstop service from a combined 40 airlines to more than 175 cities around the globe. Within the city, there are taxis, buses, trains and ride-share services.

Lodging options abound. The city has 120,000 hotel rooms across its more than 450 hotels and resorts, and at all price points. The Ignite event required more than 14,000 hotel rooms on peak, making a request for far fewer rooms undoubtedly very doable.

The Orange County Convention Center (OCCC) easily handled Ignite's requests and needs, and it can handle small groups, too.



*"When we announced that Microsoft Ignite was going to be coming to Orlando, the feedback we got right away was unbelievably positive."*

**Vivian Eickhoff**, Event Director  
Microsoft, Redmond, WA

perfectly located in the heart of the city's tourism district along International Drive, giving attendees easy access to stellar dining, entertainment and nightlife options, not to mention multiple hotels.

Finally, there's the city itself, which goes above and beyond in meeting attendee and planner needs, including those of Microsoft Ignite. Eickhoff points to the dining, entertainment and wealth of activities, all of which gave attendees and partners multiple ways to entertain themselves before and after the event. And, she points out



Planners can arrange a total buyout of Universal Studios Orlando for their event so attendees can enjoy all of the activities. Volcano Bay at Universal Orlando features a 200-foot volcano (top right) and a water coaster ride (bottom right).



that Orlando is the ideal destination for bringing family along as well.

Orlando has more than 5,000 restaurants located throughout the city, meaning planners looking for offsite venues, dine-around options, upscale eateries in which to entertain VIPs or small-group gathering space have plenty to choose from — and there's always something new to discover.

Engaging meeting venues are in abundance. One of the newest is Topgolf Orlando, which makes an ideal setting for small groups as well as those with up to 1,000 in attendance. Its primary activity is as much fun for non-golfers as it is for seasoned golfers. Think of it like darts or bowling; anyone can hit a target at least some of the time. Players stand in bays and hit golf balls toward targets 20 to 215 yards away.



Attendees don't even have to keep score. The system does it automatically thanks to microchips in the balls calculating points based on how close a ball gets to any given target. There are also four distinct event spaces, which can be used individually or together depending on a group's needs, and full-venue buyouts are available as well.

Volcano Bay, a South Pacific-themed water park at Universal Orlando, spans 25 acres and features more than 30 experiences, including pools, slides, rivers, a coaster and the 200-foot Krakatau volcano at its center. Universal Orlando opened its sixth hotel last summer, uber-contemporary Aventura Hotel, with 600 guest rooms and views of all three theme parks.

And although Spaniards traipsing around Florida in days of old never did find the elusive fountain of youth, attendees



Topgolf Orlando is a fun event space that can accommodate large or small groups with players of all skill levels.





Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort (above) offers more than 128,000 square feet of outdoor event space (right).



Credit: Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort

at Loews Sapphire Falls Resort can refresh after meetings with the readily available Fountain of Youth cocktail, made with rum from Florida local St. Augustine Distillery or one of 74 other rums at the resort's Strong Water Tavern.

At Grande Lakes Orlando, comprised of 500 acres, the JW Marriott Orlando and The Ritz-Carlton Orlando, attendees now have a dedicated sports and activities center. The Grand Lakes Sports program takes advantage of the resort's location at the headwaters of the Florida Everglades, providing excursions into Florida's natural landscape. Among the offerings are kayak eco-tours, a nature safari, a new mountain bike trail and seaplane expeditions for sight-seeing or fishing.

Also on tap for Grande Lakes groups, a Farm to Foam experience at the resort's Whisper Creek Farm and the farm's brewery at the JW Marriott Orlando, showcasing the garden's fruits and herbs that fuel onsite beer production, followed by a beer and bites sampling.

With 2,270 guest rooms, Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort features more than 331,000 square feet of meeting and event space, including 86 meeting rooms, two boardrooms and 110,500 square feet of divisible, contiguous convention-exhibit space. There are four ballrooms, including the 55,000-square-foot Hemispheres Ballroom. The Swan and Dolphin also offers 128,190 square feet of outdoor function space. The resort has 17 restaurants and lounges, including four signature fine-dining restaurants — Todd English's BlueZoo, which specializes in seafood; Il Mulino New York Trattoria, which serves Italian fare; Kimonos, which serves sushi; and Shula's Steak House. The resort also boasts five swimming pools, a Balinese-inspired Mandara Spa, two health clubs and two regulation-size volleyball courts.

The AAA Four Diamond Villas of Grand Cypress features a stand-alone 10,500-square-foot Executive Meeting Center, with four meeting rooms divisible up to eight. The facility can accommodate groups up to 240. The top amenities at the hotel include a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course and the Grand Cypress Academy of Golf. The hotel's signature restaurant is The Clubhouse, which serves breakfast, lunch and dinner.

There are a slew of other fun attractions and venues in Orlando as well.

- Andretti Indoor Karting & Games, which includes not

just driving but also a ropes course, zip line, Laser Tag, racing simulators, bowling, arcade games, a theater, dining and more, and offers more than 10,000 square feet of event space.

- Pio Pio Restaurant opened in a new, larger space just off International Drive, and includes significantly more room for events and private parties than ever before, as well as its signature Latin fare.
- Uncle Julio's Mexican Restaurant has private event spaces and custom menus featuring made-from-scratch dishes. Ask about the Chocolate Piñata for dessert — a delicious finish to a memorable meal.
- In 2017, London-based Ace Café made its debut in downtown Orlando, providing space for up to 7,000 attendees in a combo dining-entertainment venue with a motor theme. Spanning three acres, the site includes a dynamic motorcycle collection with vintage, rare and one-off custom motorcycles. There are also multiple bars, three stages, three kitchens, a huge backyard and a wrap-around porch.
- Drive Shack is a three-story, 60,000-square-foot golf-technology-entertainment-dining attraction in the Lake Nona Sports and Performance District, featuring 90 hitting bays, a lounge with classic games, a full-service restaurant and flexible meeting space for events.
- At 450 feet tall, the impressive StarFlyer is the world's tallest swing ride. It is the centerpiece of the Vue at 360, an entertainment center on International Drive.

### The DMC View

While Orlando can hold its own against any city anywhere in terms of the entertainment value and dining options it provides, the core component of any meeting is business, and supporting business efforts is something Orlando also does exceedingly well.

Jane Scaletta, DMCP, CIS, former general manager of PRA Orlando and now president of DMC representation company Dolfin Destinations, worked with a financial group in January 2018 on its annual sales conference. Based at the Orlando World Center Marriott, the lodging option selected by the client, the conference drew 1,500 attendees.

"Orlando is the perfect fit for the client's annual sales

conference," Scaletta says, "because of the nonstop airlift from over 100 cities, the near-perfect weather of 65 to 75 degrees during the winter months and the wide variety of offsite venues and restaurant choices at affordable prices. And Orlando is still considerably cost-effective compared to other large cities of this size."

Scaletta took advantage of one of the city's well-known restaurants, Morimoto Asia, for a function for the company's top executive VIPs.

"Chef Masaharu Morimoto is a Japanese chef, best-known as an Iron Chef on the Japanese TV cooking show 'Iron Chef' and its spinoff 'Iron Chef America.' Morimoto Asia is the first pan-Asian concept from Chef Morimoto. We negotiated a full-restaurant buyout of Morimoto Asia for cocktails and dinner for the program," she says.

"The attendees were shuttled from the hotel to [the restaurant] with black-car service for the VIPs and upscale newer motor coaches. Curb-side, the group was greeted by Asian-dressed attendants and guided on a short walk to the restaurant from the drop-off point," she says. "Once at the restaurant, attendees walked into a stunning Asian-themed venue with beautifully designed furniture, spiraling chandeliers of illuminated glass bottles and black-and-white photos covering one wall. The flow of conversation, great networking and general fellowship followed for a successful event."

There was also engaging entertainment related to the food and Japanese culture in general.

"Guests experienced roaming origami artists, Japanese calligraphy artists, Asian entertainers spinning plates and ribbon dancing, along with an array of specialty food and beverage stations. There were sushi demonstrations and Saki tastings," Scaletta notes, "and there were stations featuring Dim Sum and Orange Peking Duck, to name just two of the many delicacies offered to appeal to many different palates."

In addition to Orlando's impressive airlift and typically pleasant winter weather, Scaletta says the OCCC and the high number of lodging options are among the city's prime draws.

"Orange County Convention Center is the second-largest convention center in the United States," she says. "We also

have the second-largest number of hotel rooms and a large variety of hotels, resorts and convention hotels. We have a tremendous amount of opportunities to keep a group active with tours, attractions and our famed theme parks."

With a local's view and knowledge, a DMC can easily take on the planning of any event in Orlando, a city so crammed with good options, it can be overwhelming to planners from elsewhere or those with less experience bringing groups to the city.

Scaletta says there are many things a DMC can help with that a planner might have trouble accomplishing on his or her own.



Jane Scaletta, DMCP, CIS, President Dolfin Destinations, Orlando, FL

*"Orlando is the perfect fit ... because of the nonstop airlift from over 100 cities, the near-perfect weather of 65 to 75 degrees during the winter months and the wide variety of offsite venues and restaurant choices at affordable prices."*

"What many planners may not know is that PRA can buy out a theme park and add a once-in-a-lifetime experience with Harry Potter or the Marvel Super Heroes or other popular characters. A DMC can also set up a group in a private venue or viewing area to watch fireworks and other shows, and we know all the attractions and venues in and near the city that can benefit groups but that a planner may not know about."

She says the city is not all about fantasy and make-believe. "We have real-life outdoor experiences that are excellent for teambuilding, such as trekking in the trees via a ropes course, zip lining through the Florida swamps and riding an airboat past alligators. And we have top-of-the-line golf courses, both indoor and outdoor," she adds.

"We can arrange a fantastic event where you remain in Orlando, but see as far as Cape Canaveral on ICON Orlando, a 400-foot observation wheel. And Orlando is a foodie paradise, with award-winning restaurants and renowned celebrity chefs who consistently surprise guests with innovative



Credit: PRA Orlando

PRA Orlando has arranged private events at ICON Orlando (above) and the Orlando County Convention Center (right).







Villas of Grand Cypress features a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course (above) and an Executive Meeting Center (right).



Credit: Villas of Grand Cypress

tastes from around the world. We have just about every taste for any palate."

About the Orlando World Center Marriott, Scaletta says, it has "450,000 square feet of flexible meeting facilities and is just 1.5 miles from theme parks and only minutes from many Orlando attractions. It's an excellent choice for planners who want to keep the main portion of their meeting on property."

As a representative of a DMC, Scaletta has a particular viewpoint in terms of planners working with a DMC, but her points are well-taken.

"DMCs have the local knowledge that can help a planner save time, assist with projects, provide support staff and offer local suggestions that can make the difference to your program," she says. "DMCs will partner with you and help

***"Compared to some other convention center areas globally, Orlando really gets it right with a true downtown feel of pedestrian walkways, shopping, restaurants, a high-end movie theatre, nightlife and a variety of large and small hotels to fit every budget."***



**Nell Nicholas**, Senior Director, Global Accounts  
HelmsBriscoe, Cornwall, CT

you reach your objectives. They can guide you through the maze of which venues to use and what attractions are right for certain groups, and they can provide realistic, knowledgeable estimates regarding city traffic patterns and travel times. In addition, they can help with risk management, and they understand the nuances of the destination."

#### The Planner View

Nell Nicholas, senior director, global accounts, with HelmsBriscoe, also points to weather, airlift and pricing as good reasons to consider Orlando for a meeting.

"Competitive pricing across the board, from the flights to the hotel costs, has added to the success of my clients' meetings in Orlando," she says. "International attendees especially appreciate the ease of getting in and out of

Orlando and always spend a few extra days pre- or post-meeting vacationing and shopping."

Good hotels within a short distance from the airport are another plus. "Not to be overlooked is the distance from the airport to conference hotels," Nicholas says. "Some high-end and/or large conference properties are as close as 20 minutes to the airport, and the farthest I have used in the past was a 40-minute commute. With the Orlando ground transportation experts, it was seamless."

For many of Nicholas' clients, the preferred destination within the city is the convention center district. "Compared to some other convention center areas globally, Orlando really gets it right with a true downtown feel of pedestrian walkways, shopping, restaurants, a high-end movie theatre, nightlife and a variety of large and small hotels to fit every budget."

Some groups want what a resort brings to the mix — but with accessibility to all that the city offers.

"Among more campus-style resorts," Nicholas says, "Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek has been identified by clients as a top choice for its location, proximity to the city's offsite shopping and restaurants, and its spa, golf and flexible meeting space. One client who was on a site inspection at Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek during a complete buyout got to see every inch of space utilized for branding, receptions and hospitality, which gave her some great ideas for her own conference."

And there's the CVB, Visit Orlando. "The CVB does an excellent job of assisting in matching the needs of the client with the appropriate hotel," Nicholas says. "Orlando as a destination can be overwhelming with so many suppliers to choose from; however, the CVB makes it easy. They are absolutely the best in the business when it comes time for the site inspection."

Proving the point that Orlando is a superb meeting destination, even for a company whose business is meetings, Nicholas notes that HelmsBriscoe's own annual conference was held at the new Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal Orlando.

"Everyone was really excited to experience the newest jewel in the Orlando crown," Nicholas says. **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.



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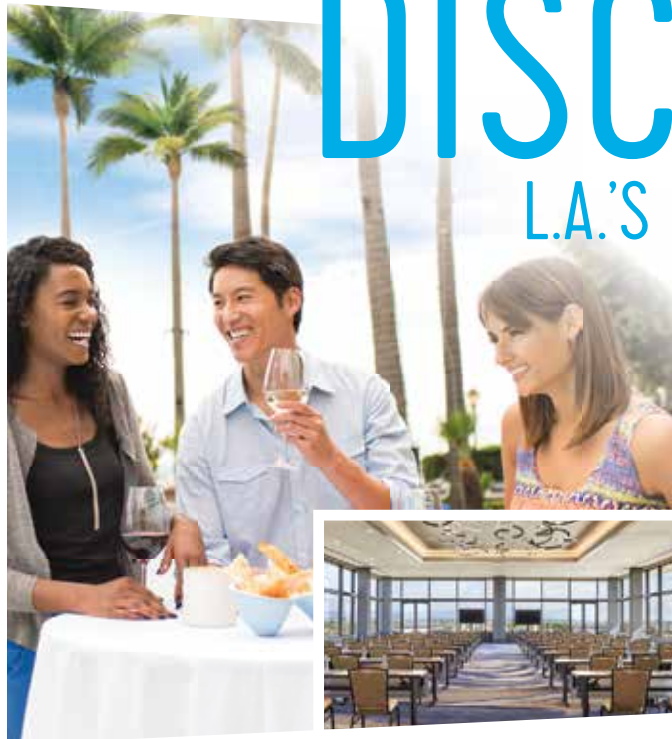
**LOBBAN**

Sonesta Resort Hilton Head announced the hiring of two sales managers; **Courtenay LaMountain** and **Julianne Dirks**. LaMountain joins as a senior sales manager and Dirks as sales manager. LaMountain will handle group sales in the South Carolina market and ConferenceDirect accounts. Dirks will handle booking small meetings, wedding room blocks, golf groups and all government/military groups.

Omni Hotels & Resorts announced the appointment of **Dan Boyer** as director of sales and marketing for Omni Oklahoma City Hotel. Boyer will oversee all sales and marketing efforts including managing, developing and implementing sales and marketing strategies for the convention center property set to open in 2021.

Ocean Reef Club, Key Largo, recently

promoted **Rudy Gonnella** to director of conference sales. Previously, Gonnella handled the Mid-Atlantic region as well as national accounts. Sonesta International Hotels Corporation has announced two new appointments. **Michael Fruin** has been named vice president of operations and **Georgia Lobban** has been appointed as senior director of global sales. **I&FMM**



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