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Indianapolis is one of dozens of destinations that have become a favorite for planners looking for value. **PAGE 20**



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Planners can count on Las Vegas for everything their attendees want when it comes to events, venues and more. **PAGE 56**

Publisher's Message

Attendees Connect With Golf Programs

Life on the links, especially at the recently renovated Omni Barton Creek Resort & Spa featured on our cover this month (Page 14), traditionally has been and remains a growing activity for attendees during resort meetings leisure time. While always used to entertain, golf is now an integral part of creating long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. In addition to the game, many golf resorts provide pros to give private group instruction both on and off the course and offer



other educational activities in which attendees of all skill levels can participate. Planning for a successful golf event should begin months in advance, as many popular resort courses fill up quickly during prime playing times. Also, depending on the destination, the weather can be a factor. Golf tournaments make for a memorable event whether the participant wins or loses.

Also featured in this issue are a select choice of Value Meeting Destinations (Page 20) offering planners the opportunity to choose a destination that provides value and first-class service, especially important factors today with shrinking budgets. Planners looking to stretch their budgets need

look no further than these destinations, which offer personalized service based on any planner's needs. These destinations, which have been under the radar for years, are rapidly becoming more popular as they satisfy planners and offer more budget-friendly options for meeting and incentive programs and attendee leisure activities.

Why do some destinations create a sense of place that repeatedly attracts planners and attendees? Check out Legacy Meetings (Page 46) in this issue. Planners generally feel assured that legacy meetings will deliver all they seek to achieve to make the event memorable. The ability of these destinations like New Orleans, for example, has the ability to charm and surprise the attendees and make the difference between a "same old meeting" and one that creates a memorable experience.

As we begin meetings industry scheduled annual events, I hope to see you at the MPI WEC in Toronto, June 15-18. Safe travels!

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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Wild Dunes Resort Announces Array of New Teambuilding Activities for Groups and Corporate Retreats

CHARLESTON, SC — This year, groups searching for a chic beachfront getaway can look no further than Charleston's beloved island resort, Wild Dunes Resort, A Destination Hotel. Wild Dunes has launched a collection of new team-building activities catering to corporate retreats, family reunions, girlfriend getaways and every group in between. Artists, adventure lovers, foodies, health enthusiasts and golfers alike can enjoy quality time together steeped in low-country charm and tradition with a collection of new and themed group activities and experiences. "We are thrilled to reveal Wild Dunes Resort's team-building offerings catering to intimate or larger groups ranging in size from 2 to 250 participants," says Jeffery Payne, director of sales at Wild Dunes Resort. "From adventure to relaxation, families, friends and colleagues will love our new excursions and activities showcasing the Charleston area's beautiful scenery, delicious cuisine, rich history and unique culture."

www.destinationhotels.com/wild-dunes

Hilton's New Signia Brand Will Reimagine Business Travel

As Hilton celebrates its 100th anniversary this year, the company's portfolio already includes 16 globe-spanning brands — from the grand Waldorf-Astoria to the new microhotel-model, Motto. Now the company has announced plans to add a 17th. The dynamic new brand, Signia, will focus



on high-end meetings and events, positioned between the luxury-level Conrad brand and its flagship Hilton properties. With a minimum of 500 guest rooms, each Signia Hilton promises to offer business and leisure travelers elevated experiences all the way from arrival to departure. "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," said Christopher Nassetta, president and CEO at Hilton. Each hotel will feature modern architecture, state-of-the-art technology and lobbies that double as social networking hubs. The first three cities to see Signia developments will be Orlando, Indianapolis and Atlanta, with a strategic expansion throughout the US and internationally. While the first property in Orlando will be a conversion of the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek, almost all other Signia Hilton hotels will be new builds to ensure only the latest materials and technologies are used.

www.newsroom.hilton.com

VisitDallas Names Sam Coats Interim CEO as Board Launches Search for Next Leader

DALLAS, TX — VisitDallas appointed former airline executive and veteran business and civic leader, Sam Coats, as



COATS

the organization's interim CEO. Coats has had a highly diverse career within the airlines industry as a corporate turnaround specialist, lawyer, public servant and civic leader. He has served as CEO of six different companies, including two airlines, Schlotsky's, Inc., and the world's leading provider of revenue optimization software systems for the global airline industry. He served in senior management positions at four airlines, including Braniff, Southwest and Continental. Coats is also a former board chairman of the Dallas Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Sam's expertise in the travel and airline industries, civic service and as a corporate leader make him uniquely suited to lead VisitDallas during this critical transition period," said Mark Woelffer, VisitDallas board chair. "He has a demonstrated ability to act as a stabilizer during times of change, which will serve VisitDallas well as we enter a new chapter for the organization with new leadership. VisitDallas is in good hands while we work to continue to achieve great results for Dallas and identify the organization's new leader." Coats will serve as Interim CEO of VisitDallas until a new full-time chief executive officer is hired by the organization's board of directors.

www.visitdallas.com

Gurney's Star Island Resort & Marina Opens in the Hamptons



MONTAUK, NY — Gurney's Star Island Resort & Marina, the newest waterfront retreat in the Hamptons, has officially opened. Home to the largest marina in the Hamptons, Gurney's Star Island is a luxury resort featuring preeminent guest accommodations, unique dining concepts, including the highly anticipated Showfish restaurant, outdoor amenities and an array of private spaces for events. Its location offers nearly 10,000 sf of meeting space. Owned by George Filopoulos of Metrovest and Lloyd Goldman of BLDG Management, the opening of Gurney's Star Island marks the brand's third resort and second property in Montauk. "Montauk is a market that is important to us personally and professionally, and we are thrilled to unveil a second location that extends the Gurney's experience out to Star Island while introducing a new type of stay in the marina setting," said owner George Filopoulos. "The opening of Gurney's Star Island is a testament to the growth of our brand, and we are committed to delivering an unparalleled resort lifestyle that appeals to hotel guests, visitors and locals alike." www.gurneysresorts.com

Tips & Trends

Top-20 Most Popular Meeting Destinations in 2018

The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) released its 2018 Country Rankings, which marks yet another successful year for the association meetings market.

In an unsurprising turn of events, the U.S.A. remains in the top country spot, unchallenged for over two decades. Germany remains in second place and 2017's No. 3, the United Kingdom, drops to fifth place, overtaken by Spain, which rises to third. After exiting the top 5 last year, France re-enters in 2018 in fourth place. Italy replaces France in sixth place, and Japan and China-P.R. remain in seventh and eighth place for another year. The Netherlands and Canada swap positions, coming in at ninth and 10th, respectively.

Portugal remains in 11th place and the Republic of Korea climbs one position to 12th. Brazil and Poland fall one place to 17th and 19th, respectively, and Switzerland drops to 20th place, while Australia and Sweden climb to 13th and 14th. Austria remains in the top 20 but falls four places to 16th. Newcomer Argentina regains its position in the top 20 after falling to 21st place in 2017, knocking Denmark from 20th to 22nd place.

Here are the Top-20 country rankings by number of meetings organized in 2018.

Rank	Country	# Meetings	Rank	Country	# Meetings
1	U.S.A.	947	11	Portugal	306
2	Germany	642	12	Republic of Korea	273
3	Spain	595	13	Australia	265
4	France	579	14	Sweden	257
5	United Kingdom	574	15	Belgium	252
6	Italy	522	16	Austria	240
7	Japan	492	17	Brazil	233
8	China-P.R.	449	18	Argentina	232
9	Netherlands	355	19	Poland	211
10	Canada	315	20	Switzerland	208

The most respected global comparison of destinations' performance in attracting international meetings, ICCA's annual country and city rankings are highly anticipated by the meetings industry. However, ICCA continuously seeks to emphasize that this annual report is a snapshot of just one segment of the meetings industry, focused on charting the growth of international association meetings. Only those meetings that meet ICCA's stringent assessment criteria — rotating between at least three countries, have a proven attendance of at least 50 participants, and are held on a regular basis — are recorded within the global association's annual statistics.

The full ICCA statistics reports are available now to members in the ICCA Destination Comparison Tool. The rankings for all countries and cities will be released to the public in mid-June. www.iccaworld.org

Choctaw Casino & Resort—Durant Breaks Ground on World Class Expansion Set to be the Largest Resort in Oklahoma



DURANT, OK — Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma proudly broke ground recently on an expansion project at its resort property in Durant. The number of rooms in the luxury hotel will increase by 1,000 making it a total of more than 1,600, the largest hotel room count in the state. The Nation plans to invest more than \$500 million on the project, and this is the fourth expansion since the original casino opened in 2006. In addition to the increased room capacity, the plans feature an expanded

gaming floor and fresh amenities such as new pools and a lazy river, parking garage, retail space, entertainment options and dining venues. The Nation anticipates it will open in spring 2021 and will generate 1,000 more jobs for the city of Durant. “The expansion will go a long way in meeting the demands of our growing customer base by delivering exciting new enhancements and luxury amenities for all who visit,” said Gary Batton, chief of Oklahoma’s Choctaw Nation. www.choctawcasinos.com

The Broadmoor Announces New 110,000-sf Exhibition Hall

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO — The Broadmoor will soon offer the most luxurious trade show and exhibition hall experience in the industry, as the only Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five-Diamond-awarded hotel in the country to operate a large onsite exhibition space. When the newly-announced 110,000+ sf of exhibition space and associated breakout rooms debut in spring 2020, the resort will be able to provide the highest level of service large conference or trade show attendees can receive. The exhibit hall will exclusively be available to multi-purpose exhibits and events held in conjunction with The Broadmoor for multi-day conferences, such as the Space Symposium, the planet’s largest space trade show. “The addition of this new exhibition hall is in response to some of our clients who have sim-



ply run out of space at the resort but want to continue to leverage and engage with the other amenities our unique property offers,” says Barry Brown, vice president of sales and marketing. Together the exhibit hall addition and the existing Broadmoor Hall, International Center, and Colorado Hall will work together to comprise The Broadmoor Event Center. The com-

bined square footage of the entire The Broadmoor Event Center is now more than 300,000 sf. The new exhibit building will be next to Broadmoor Hall and a new 30-foot wide, 180-foot long hallway will serve as a substantial connector — creating a more contiguous space for groups that will utilize both areas. www.broadmoor.com/meetings-events/meeting-at-the-broadmoor

Port Canaveral Welcomes Harmony of the Seas and the Return of Mariner of the Seas for Their “Royal Homecoming”

PORT CANAVERAL, FL — Royal Caribbean International cruise ships Harmony of the Seas and Mariner of the Seas received a “royal” send-off as the giant vessels recently sailed from their new home port of Port Canaveral. Tugboats provided a water salute as the 1,188-foot Harmony, the second-largest cruise ship in the world, glided past hundreds of cheering spectators who gathered at Jetty Park for a “wave-out” event for the port’s newest arrivals. Onlookers held up signs with large letters that spelled out “Bon Voyage” and others waved bandanas. “We are excited to welcome these two magnificent cruise ships to Port Canaveral and proud of our partnership with Royal Caribbean International,” says Port Canaveral CEO Capt. John Murray.



“With record numbers of cruise guests visiting our port year after year, the arrival of Harmony and Mariner shows that Port Canaveral has ensured the

confidence of RCI to accommodate two of the largest and most sophisticated cruise ships in the industry.” www.royalcaribbeanpresscenter.com

JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort Completes \$320 Million Renovation Project

MARCO ISLAND, FL — The iconic JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort has completed its comprehensive \$320 million transformation project, ushering in a new era of luxury in Southwest Florida and beyond. Guests who visit this stunning resort will enjoy the new Lanai Tower with more than 100,000 sf of technologically integrated meeting and event space, exciting culinary concepts, 12,000-sf entertainment center, reimagined historic Lanai Suites and the debut of the “Paradise by Sirene” experience, a curated escape exclusively for adults. The completion of the all-new Lanai Tower was the final stage in a magnificent three-year, multiphase reimagining that touched every aspect of the resort, from an enhanced grand entrance, complete renovations of existing rooms and suites, expansion of pool decks and the addition of new restaurants — Ario, Maia and Kane Tiki Bar & Grill. The new Lanai Tower itself boasts Tesoro: a signature Mediterranean-inspired restaurant designed exclusively for adults; and 10K Alley: a state-of-the-art combination gaming emporium and gastropub. Guests can also immerse themselves in the recently unveiled 94-room Paradise by Sirene experience on floors 6-9, thoughtfully tailored to surprise and delight during each moment of their stay. www.marriott.com

TWA Hotel Opens at JFK Airport



NEW YORK — The TWA Hotel recently opened at JFK Airport, where guests watched New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and Tyler Morse, CEO and managing partner of MCR and MORSE Development, cut the ribbon in the iconic Sunken Lounge. The event celebrated the restoration of Eero Saarinen’s landmark 1962 former Trans World Airlines terminal — which now serves as the heart of the 512-room hotel. The LEED-certified building now has a 50,000-sf events center. “Eero Saarinen’s cathedral to aviation has always looked toward the future,” Morse says. “We restored and reimagined his landmark with the same care that he devoted to his design. No detail went overlooked — from the millwork by Amish artisans to the custom font inspired by Saarinen’s own sketches to the one-of-a-kind manhole covers.” www.twahotel.com

Destination Management Companies Play a Vitally Important Role in Event Planning

By Bob Novak

Nowadays, with the online free resources, the role of Destination Management Companies (DMCs) is strongly evolving. Reserving accommodations, organizing transport, booking restaurants or finding event ideas are just a click away. Does that mean that DMCs are no longer needed? No, that is not the case. Increasingly, DMCs are responding to these changing market dynamics to deliver a service that is very much needed by the client. At AIM Group, our DMC teams have extensive and long-standing experience across 10 countries.

In this white paper we draw on this experience to explore the main reason for choosing a local DMC when organizing a corporate event, and the latest DMCs trends event professionals need to follow in 2019.

What are DMCs all About?

The DMC's role is all about creating a destination experience tailored to each specific project.

By listening to what a client likes and wants to achieve, the DMC is then able to establish how to satisfy each attendee in a way that resonates with them long after the event and to deliver authentic activities, tours and excursions which best reflect the client's needs. So a DMC not only offers a full range of services such as hotel accommodations, dinner organization, venue selection, entertainment, visa procedures, team-building activities, transportation, speaker selection, public relations and so on, but a rich and diverse portfolio of unique experiences.

The reasons for contracting a local DMC are numerous. Working with a DMC means that you can secure a higher return on investment (ROI) and better overall event quality.

Here some key reasons why clients can benefit from DMC services:

- **Saving time.** With a local DMC, detailed and complex information about the destination can be distilled and prioritized by the local experts, saving precious time for the client. And, as every company knows, time is money. All that searching, planning, comparing and negotiating can be left to the experts.
- **Risk mitigation and management.** Due to established relationships with local providers — transportation, hotels, caterers and locations, etc. — a DMC can also

mitigate against potential problems, thus providing the best solutions. In the case of any sudden changes or unexpected issues, related to, for example, the size of the group, timing, flows, etc., the DMC team is at hand to solve problems and guarantee the smooth and successful realization of the event.

- **A one-stop-shop.** Clients have the advantage of liaising with a dedicated DMC project manager as opposed to a long list of various local suppliers. Not only does this save time but it also avoids misunderstandings as the project manager has the overall vision of the event and a full understanding of the client's needs.
- **A local physical office.** The DMC team manages all the logistical aspects during the event, and it is at the client's disposal in case of special needs or emergencies. Using a DMC gives the client peace of mind to focus on their own guests, stakeholders and strategic objectives without the distractions of logistics, pick up times, etc.
- **Extensive local knowledge.** DMCs tailor incentives, events and activities on a daily basis so they are experts in what can be achieved at the destination and how the program should be built in an effective way. DMCs are always honest with clients and inform them if some of their ideas are unfeasible and can offer alternative solutions. Moreover with eyes and ears on the ground, you do not have to rely on "virtual" references, which might not reflect the reality.
- **Economic savings.** With years of experience and trusted relationships with our local providers, DMCs have acquired substantial buying power and can negotiate better rates or service upgrades. Developing strong relationships with suppliers is as important as a good client relationship!
- **Simplified finances.** Having one partner to liaise with all suppliers cuts out administrative activities and simplifies accounting and value added tax (VAT) recovery.
- **Unique experiences.** Only a local DMC has the kind of knowledge that can help find the perfect fit for each client. A DMC has a deep understanding of the variety of unique experiences that reflect the culture and tradition of a given town, city or country. A DMC not only offers a full range of services, but a rich and diverse portfolio of unique experiences.

Which are the Top 2019 Trends?

Event organization is constantly evolving like the other industries influenced by new technologies, social change, new market offerings such as innovative hotels and cutting-edge venues, and so on.

- **Tailored meaningful experiences.** If the direct involvement of participants was the mantra of recent years, with guests transformed into protagonists, now the trend is to find activities with a meaning; with a direct link

team-buildings activities such as building homes for the homeless, restoring social centers, sowing plants and trees, decorating playgrounds, etc. is something that can add a long-term legacy while motivating participants.

- **Ethical food.** Organic, healthy, vegetarian, local food is increasingly a la mode. You need to remember to include these choices on menus and tell the food story to guests. Do not forget to reduce food waste and recycle or donate surplus food.

“By listening to what a client likes and wants to achieve, the DMC is then able to establish how to satisfy each attendee in a way that resonates with them long after the event and to deliver authentic activities, tours and excursions which best reflect the client's needs.”

to the clients' speciality, industry, event objective or local community. So avoid a cut-and-paste approach. We need to design creative experiences that reflect the specific client and event.

- **New places.** Many clients visit major destination cities more than once, so second-tier, emerging destinations or original locations are appreciated to add that bit of spice and variety to DMC programs. It is wise to avoid the predictable choices and instead consider the lesser-known places where you may even benefit from grants and promotional rates offered by lesser-known cities.
- **More corporate social responsibility (CSR).** There is more emphasis on integrating CSR programs into events. Giving back to local communities, for instance, through

- **Social media.** Even when traveling for work, attendees love to share with friends and colleagues their experiences. If the client's policy is open to it, you must promote social engagement among participants. Provide good Wi-Fi, a social media toolkit — with major hashtags and links — and promote social activities, before, during and after the event, such as photo contests, tweet walls and gamification.

- **Short notice.** With clients taking a more active role in planning their own events, it means that DMCs are often contacted at the last minute and need to manage projects in shorter time frames. Flexible teams and procedures could be the right answer.

Is it complex work? Yes, and we love it!

C&IT



Bob Novak

Bob Novak is head of the Corporate & DMC Department of AIM Group International-Prague Office in the Czech Republic. He started his career in the early 2000s in the travel and events industry as specialist in incentive and event organization for international corporate groups in Prague. After having worked for several years at Destination Management Companies, he chose to gain a different experience, and went to work for seven years at Czech Airlines as senior flight attendant. He came back to do incentive and event organization with international clients, which is what he likes the most. Visit www.aimgroupinternational.com

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Life on the Links

For Some Planners and Attendees, an Event is Incomplete Unless it Involves Greens and Fairways

By Maura Keller

For decades, business professionals have recognized the need to connect with each other outside of the conference room. While late night 'wining and dining' is still a prevalent relationship-building tradition, corporate meeting planners are continuing to embrace the greens — incorporating golf programs into their corporate and incentive travel plans.

In fact, golf was always used to entertain, but the level of amusement has gone beyond golf and food and beverage and it is now an integral part of creating long-term, mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships.

Christi Braak, meeting planner and executive administrative assistant at PCL Construction, recently planned a golf program at Shingle Creek Golf Club in Orlando, FL on May 4, 2019.

Approximately 80 attended, however PCL could've had up to 200 people, so picking a course and after-round facility that could coordinate those numbers was important.

"PCL hosts an annual golf tournament for all employees each year," Braak says. "What enticed me to reach out to Shingle Creek is the proximity to our main office and the knowledge we have of the course and the staff."

Shingle Creek Golf Club is onsite at the beautiful AAA Four Diamond Rosen Shingle Creek, which features more than 1,500 guest rooms. In addition, the facility offers more than 490,000 sf of state-of-the-art meeting and event space, including a 95,000-sf, column-free ballroom. The par-72 championship course, redesigned by Arnold Palmer Design Company, lies

along historic Shingle Creek, headwaters to the Florida Everglades.

Shingle Creek Golf Club prides itself on its team building, incentive and appreciation golf programs. Private and group instruction can be provided on the course, off the course, or a combination of both. Groups can foster team dynamics with competitive golf activities on green grass or a carpeted meeting room floor. And Shingle Creek's top golf instructor, Brad Brewer, can demonstrate to attendees the most common swing flaws and how to quickly remedy them so golfers can have more success during their round. Shingle Creek Golf Club's professional instructors provide helpful pointers during pre-round warm up to participants on the range and putting green. In addition, attendees can enjoy a 30-minute computerized swing

analysis session and private lessons to help participating golfers feel better prepared for their upcoming round.

Because the PCL group of golfers features skill levels of all types, PCL created teams that have an A, B, C and D player, and they play scramble ball, allowing for the players to play the best shot.

Plan Ahead

"From my experience with golf events, meeting planners should make

"What enticed me to reach out to Shingle Creek is the proximity to our main office and the knowledge we have of the course and the staff."

Christi Braak, Executive Administrative Assistant
PCL Construction, Orlando, FL



sure they start planning months in advance for the event. Many courses fill up quickly during the prime times of the season, and finding that perfect day and time can be tricky to coordinate," Braak says. "Visit the venue and get a walk through of what happens where. Make sure the guests are clear on where they need to be. If all this is planned from the beginning, the event should run smoothly."

North America's naturally diverse landscape, which includes rolling river valleys, dense forests and glacier-carved lakes, provides the perfect backdrop for numerous golf destinations.

Take Innisbrook, a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort, in Palm Harbor, FL for example. This award-winning resort features four championship golf courses, and was recently one of only six resorts named the "2018 Best Golf Resorts in Florida" by Golf Digest. It is also considered among the top-75 golf resorts in America. Designed by Lawrence Packard, the four courses at Innisbrook offer diverse playing fields, including championship layouts featuring up to 70 feet of elevation change.

Make it Memorable

As the golf arena continues to evolve, golf course owners and operators

recognize the need to customize their offerings to help make golf events memorable for all involved. Set in the Cheyenne Mountains, The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, CO makes a concerted effort to entice all members of a group — golfers and non-golfers alike — to participate in various activities to make a memorable experience for all. The Broadmoor Invitation, which began in 1921, ensures the spouse of the golfer engages in unique

activities throughout the event. These may include menu planning with a Broadmoor chef, pickleball round robin, stair climbing at Seven Falls, falconry, bowling and Bloody Mary's, a farm-to-table picnic, a hike to Cloud Camp, scarf making and mimosas.

Of course, The Broadmoor's two iconic courses are ranked among the best golf courses in the world. Designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and Donald Ross, these award-winning courses are ideal for golfers of all levels. And after

a round or two of golf, attendees can enjoy visiting together in the 185,000 sf of event space within The Broadmoor's exquisite meeting areas.

Many golf aficionados want to experience new or redesigned courses that they may never have played before. That's why more golf courses are upping their game and breathing new life into their long-standing golf courses. For example, the new Phoenician Golf Course at The Phoenician, a Luxury Collection Resort, in Scottsdale, AZ has recently opened after a 10-month redesign. In addition to rerouting the course and developing new holes, the re-contoured fairways and rebuilt green complexes have transformed this golf course into a preemi-

ent course just waiting to be played. Located amidst Arizona's Sonoran Desert, the golf course also features a renovated and expanded 19th Hole dining venue — the perfect place for meeting attendees to gather after a round.

Everything is in front of the golfer, with no surprise bunkers or blind hazards. The course plays to a par-71 and offers four sets of player-friendly tees ranging from 4,594 yards from the forward tees to 6,518 yards from the championship tees. Complementing



The Broadmoor's two courses are ranked among the best in the world. After golf, attendees can enjoy the 185,000 sf of event space within The Broadmoor's exquisite meeting areas.



Pinehurst, known for its Southern charm, has nine courses. The resort's Carolina Hotel offers more than 61,000 sf of indoor meeting space and 22,000 sf of outdoor function space.

it are The Phoenician Golf Shop and locker rooms, which were also renovated and expanded.

Omni Barton Creek in Austin, TX recently underwent an extensive, \$150 million renovation and expansion that started in November 2017, says Todd Raessler, general manager.

"Additionally, taking inspiration from the lush landscape of the Texas Hill Country, the property's overall design highlights the history and sweeping views of this iconic destination, while providing a true oasis that creates a relaxing haven for all guests," Raessler says. "At every opportunity, the design team worked to bring the essence of the outdoors inside with one-of-a-kind artwork featuring local foliage, floor-to-ceiling windows and natural materials embracing the Hill Country landscape."

The work at the 4,000-acre resort wrapped up in May 2019, and its four championship golf courses — one designed by Austin native Ben Crenshaw, another by Arnold Palmer and two by Tom Fazio — are ready to challenge golfers of all skill levels.

In addition to golf, the 493-room resort offers 52,237 sf of indoor meeting and pre-function space with a new Conference Center complete with 16

meeting rooms, the 14,532-sf Brazos Ballroom, the 8,240-sf redesigned Darrell K. Royal Ballroom and a 5,556-sf Pavilion space with retractable windows for a true indoor/outdoor space. Finally, the resort boasts 23,955 sf of sweeping event lawns that allow guests to experience the surrounding scenic views firsthand.

While Florida, California and Arizona are often thought of as the best golf locales, Wisconsin offers golfers of all skill levels an array of inviting, challenging and breathtaking courses. From formidable courses that test skill at every hole to wide-open courses with fairways designed for high-handicap, weekend golfers — the Dairy State has it.

Among these courses, The American Club in Kohler, WI is a historic 100-year-old gem encompassing four golf courses. In fact, the four award-winning, Pete Dye-designed courses — The Straits, The Irish, The River and The Meadow Valleys — offer a wealth of opportunities for golf programs for groups of all sizes. And The American Club's tournament division staff frequently works with meeting planners to help plan a variety of tournament-style events, specialty games and contests.

Of course, Pinehurst in North

Carolina has long been synonymous with "all things golf" and offers the ideal golf getaways for corporate and incentive groups. With nine — that's right, nine — courses, Pinehurst is a golf lovers' paradise and has hosted more championships than any other club in the country.

In addition to hosting traditional types of group golf events, attendees can face off against Pinehurst's finest in contests that pit attendees against one of Pinehurst's golf professionals. For non-golfers in the group, Pinehurst's disc golf program combines golf with Frisbees and offers a unique challenge all its own. Of course, serious golfers in the group can enjoy golf academy lessons, clinics and corporate golf schools. And Pinehurst's professional golf speakers can address corporate and incentive groups to talk about the history of Pinehurst and how to conquer the resort's famous greens.

And when it's time for intimate, large or formal gatherings of the group, Pinehurst offers a plethora of awe-inspiring venues to hold various types of meetings or soirees.

The Carolina Hotel offers more than 61,000 sf of indoor meeting space and 22,000 sf of outdoor function space, while the Holly Inn offers five unique meeting spaces — the Camellia Room, Evergreen Music Room, Gardenia Room, the Library and Magnolia Room.

Choosing the Right Course

If a winter corporate meeting or incentive trip is in the works, there are a slew of winter golf destinations that can satisfy any attendees' need to hit the links. And better yet, many of these golf destinations appeal to a variety of budgets and interests — for golfers and non-golfers alike. As previously established, award-winning courses can be found across the country.

At issue for many meeting planners who want business professionals to hit the links together is finding golf courses that meet the needs of players of all levels. When business professionals golf together, each person has different needs and wants different

challenges. Many resorts offer shorter, executive-type courses ideal for players new to the game. Here, the fairways are not necessarily the flat, open fairways found at traditional par-three courses. Rather, the executive courses have good terrain, including bunkers, water hazards and trees.

Courses are also offering more business-focused amenities. Today's business golfers have access to computers, wireless internet, private dining, lavish locker rooms, catered functions, caddies and/or forecaddies, dual logo merchandise opportunities, fitness programs, concierge services, limousine services and tournament services — almost anything a meeting planner can think of can be provided.

And golf courses are now working hand-in-hand with meeting planners to make golf outings special for attendees. These may include amenities such as a personalized coordinator for group outings, group clinics from PGA professionals, prepaid food and beverage coupons to give to attendees, pro shops with merchandise from a PGA Tour stop, catered meals and personalized prize packages.

According to Craig Dooley, senior vice president at SDI Meetings and Incentives, SDI does a mix of golf-centric and golf-included programs throughout the year in a wide variety of destinations around the globe.

"For example, we have done a number of more golf-centric programs at The Gleneagles Hotel in Scotland. There we have had about 24 golfers in a group, out of about 150-200 total program participants," Dooley says. "Two of their more famous courses are one where the Ryder Cup is held and another where the Scottish Open is held."

Dooley also orchestrated golf events for 100 to 125 golfers in private tournaments at Wailea Golf Club in Maui, one starting at 8 a.m. on a leisure-focused



"When a program is in an area known for golf ... even those less-than-die-hard players want to play for the unique experience that particular course will bring and have a story to tell."

Craig Dooley, Senior Vice President
SDI Meetings and Incentives, Chicago, IL

program, and another occurring in the afternoon after their business meeting concluded.

"Golf was available to attendees throughout the program at their leisure and when schedules allow," Dooley says.

For SDI's clients, every group tends to have a number of die-hard golfers who enjoy the experience of a new course and look forward to the leisure activity while they are on a program.

"When a program is in an area known for golf, such as Scotland, even those less-than-die-hard players want to play for the unique experience that particular

course will bring and have a story to tell," Dooley says.

Not Everyone Plays

SDI accommodates non-golfers by ensuring there are ample alternative activities, such as other sports, local exploration, spa or leisurely enjoying the property.

"For SDI, it's important to know the ins and outs of the specific golf courses we are planning to book, so we personally know what to expect and can educate

and assure our guests ahead of and onsite what the experience will entail," Dooley says. "Meeting planners should know when a course opens its books for future bookings and know its cancellation policies. Also be sure to know the details on course fees, caddy requirements, cart usage and rental club types and fees. As with any program, having firsthand knowledge well in advance ensures you avoid any surprises and deliver the best possible experience."

Ken Schmalz, managing partner at S&A Event Services in New Milford, CT orchestrated a golf event at The Resort at Pelican Hill in Newport Beach, CA for 220 total guests. The guests included 30 internal attorneys, 150 clients and 40 spouses for a client-centric industry conference hosted by a law firm for their clients, investors and developers in the world of global energy and project finance issues. The event included two days of golf as well multiple activity options for non-golfers.

Pelican Hill Golf Club offers programs for a variety of group sizes, from dual course buyout tournaments to smaller corporate groups. The facility's ocean-view golf academy caters to groups by offering custom instruction programs to help golfers improve their game.



Ken Schmalz, of S&A Event Services, selected The Resort at Pelican Hill as the venue for 220 guests. The event included two days of golf as well multiple activity options for non-golfers.

What's more, the Golf Pavilion and Pelican Grill restaurant offer nearby venues for gathering before or after a group golf event.

"The golf component of this event has always been an integral component that helps attract the right C-level demographic," Schmalz says. "We run a one-day tournament and a second day of golfing on their own at a more leisurely approach."

Schmalz says it's important for meeting planners to understand the meeting and networking objectives, including skill levels and the variety of golfers in order to plan the right format, have the appropriate on-course festivities and contests, and determine what sponsorship opportunities might be available and impactful.

"Make it organized but fun," Schmalz says.

"Fun" certainly is the name of the game at French Lick Resort, where attendees can enjoy two world-class golf courses designed by Pete Dye and Donald Ross. And while the exquisite nature of these courses can't be beat, the fun that comes with the various group golf activities makes it a memorable experience for all.

In fact, French Lick Resort's team of golf professionals work with



"The golf component of this event has always been an integral component that helps attract the right C-level demographic."

Ken Schmalz, Managing Partner
S&A Event Services, New Milford, CT

meeting planners to build golf activities into any group or business agenda. From a golf scramble with a cocktail hour to long-drive and putting challenges to goofy golf activities with unique twists on each hole, there is a wealth

of opportunities for meeting planners to incorporate golf into any event at French Lick Resort. Some groups add "bang" to their golf program by pairing a golf scramble with an afternoon at the resort's outdoor shooting range.

Trump National Doral Miami also offers some of the country's most unique golf programs. Located on an 800-acre tropical oasis, Trump National Doral

boasts four distinctly unique courses, including the legendary The Blue Monster — one of the most challenging courses available today. In addition, attendees can enjoy the state-of-the-art LED practice facility, a cutting-edge club-fitting lab and the new Rick Smith Golf Performance Center. Meeting planners can also give group attendees a once-in-a-lifetime Twilight golf experience. Popular with golfers and non-golfers alike, this fun-filled activity gives players the experience of golfing at Trump National Doral with a unique and exciting twist. It is also a great team-building interactive activity that involves a combination of fun and a healthy competition.

Regardless of the location and type of links chosen for a group event, corporate and incentive golf programs are as much about enjoying the surrounding landscape as they are about birdies and bogeys. Nature lovers will enjoy the mountainous views, unspoiled beaches, and pristine countryside found amidst many of the nation's golf courses. Attendees can also take a day off from swinging their clubs and head into one of the culturally rich cities near a number of splendid courses. And when the golf program comes to an end, attendees will leave knowing they tackled the championship courses and journeyed along the paths taken by the great heroes of the past who played the same fairways and conquered the same greens. **C&IT**



Trump National Doral Miami — home of The Blue Monster course and three other courses — offers team-building activities such as its popular Twilight golf experience and more.

Credit: Trump National Doral Miami

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Hidden Gems



Planners Have Plenty of Options to Find the Best Bang for Their Buck

By Derek Reveron

There was a time when planners chose meeting destinations by selecting one of the biggest that offered the most of everything at the best prices.

Not anymore. Finding value in destinations of all sizes is more important than ever as meeting budgets shrink or remain flat while attendees' expectations for unique experiences rise.

That's why destinations aggressively seek to offer value by providing top services and building new hotels and venues while expanding and renovating existing ones.

Here are some of the destinations that are establishing reputations for providing value.

Indianapolis

When it comes to what Indianapolis offers planners, the Visit Indy website says it all: "If you can dream it, Indy can make it happen."

Indianapolis made it happen last May for 2,500 software engineers

and sales employees of Siemens PLM Software Inc.

Sally DeBolt, CMP, senior event manager, global events, Siemens Digital Industry Software, says Indianapolis was chosen for its value and other reasons.



Indianapolis is becoming more popular with the versatility of the Indiana Convention Center, which is adding a 235,000-sf expansion that includes a 50,000-sf ballroom.

"Indianapolis is a centralized location for many of our users, and offered a hotel package with a variety of service types and price points, and the affordability helped us sell the event as a whole," DeBolt says.

"As a result, the decision to attend was a good value proposition," DeBolt says. "Also, options for using venues such as Lucas Oil Stadium for our opening reception gave us the opportunity to provide some unique experiences for our guests."

The Siemens Digital Industry Software citywide meeting involved half of the Indiana Convention Center (ICC) space and six hotels, and the properties were a perfect match. "We obviously fit very well in the vast amount of space available," DeBolt says. "We are incredibly space heavy with 40-50 concurrent breakout rooms and exhibit space."

Judy Payne, CMP, director, meetings and travel, GameStop, was also impressed by the meeting and hotel space in Indianapolis. Payne planned GameStop's recent 2019 annual conference for 7,000 attendees.

"Our host hotel was the Marriott, but we also used the Embassy, Westin, Crowne Plaza, Hyatt Regency, and Marriott Tri-brand," Payne says. "All of our meeting space was at the convention center. The beauty of Indianapolis is not only are all these hotels across the street from the convention center, but they're also connected. Attendees can elect to cross the street outside or stay in the skywalk to get to the center," Payne says.

The ICC met the conference's needs in a way no other facility had. "GameStop has extensive A/V in our meeting rooms to support our gaming sessions, so we require a lot of space," Payne says. "In most other cities we use the full convention center plus all of the space at our host hotels. Indy was the first city where we could put all of our sessions under one roof."

"Not only was their more than enough space," Payne adds, "Our attendees said that the ICC was the easiest center in which to get around. It's well laid-out and has lots of common space for our crowd."

Leonard Hoops, Visit Indy president and CEO, says more planners are discovering Indianapolis' value, especially

in hotel prices. Indianapolis' hotel rates for comparable properties are consistently more affordable than cities that offer similar convention district amenities," Hoops says.

The downtown Wholesale District also contributes to the value. "Indy's thoughtfully designed district provides unbeatable value both to event decision-makers and their attendees," Hoops says. "The event package includes a centrally located convention center with 12 hotels totaling more than 4,700 hotel rooms directly connected by enclosed skywalks."

The district will offer even more after the ICC completes a 235,000 sf expansion



Sally DeBolt, CMP
Senior Event Manager,
Global Events
Siemens Digital Industry
Software
Westerville, OH

"Indianapolis is a centralized location for many of our users, and offered a hotel package with a variety of service types and price points..."

sion that includes a 50,000-sf ballroom, the state's largest, and 30,000 sf of additional meeting rooms.

The ICC will also add 1,400 adjacent hotel rooms after two Hilton-branded hotel towers are constructed by 2023. In addition, another 1,800 downtown hotel rooms are under development. The new properties will include the Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, InterContinental Hotels & Resorts, Aloft Hotels and west elm Hotels brands.

Milwaukee

There was a time when some people jokingly referred to Milwaukee as Chicago's smaller, friendlier cousin. Milwau-

kee residents think there is some truth to the saying and would add that the city's value is also something to brag about.

According to the VISIT Milwaukee website, "Milwaukee is an exciting meetings destination with an unexpected 'wow' factor, and all this at substantial cost savings."

In addition, the website boasts about "5,000 hotel rooms located downtown at average daily costs of lodging and meals that are among the lowest in our competitive set."

The hotels include The Pfister hotel downtown, which hosted a corporate meeting earlier this year for 125 attendees.

According to Tracey Bockhop, CMP, CEO of Meet Meetings, a Verona, WI-based meeting and event planning company, "The Pfister is laid out almost perfect for our group. We had all our meeting space on the same level and moving from meetings to meals went so smoothly. The hotel has a lot of spaces for this size group and was able to accommodate us while keeping costs affordable."

In addition, Bockhop says, "Our attendees were in intense meetings all day long and having such beautiful space and natural light in the hotel really helped them stay engaged and productive."

Meeting in Milwaukee — in February — and possibly facing very cold weather did not deter Bockhop. "I know Milwaukee is usually not the first choice for a group in February, but we found it to be very beneficial," Bockhop says.

Attendees enjoyed several offsite activities. "There were not a lot of distractions during the day and in the evening, we were able to load up buses and take them to the Harley-Davidson Museum for dinner and entertainment. There were so many other choices, but this fit our attendees best."

Attendees also enjoyed activities within The Pfister. "With so many options in and around the hotel, they did not have to look too hard to find things to do," Bockhop says. "The hotel has a bar on the top floor which provides amazing views and great drinks."

They also made some new friends with another group in-house that was doing a scavenger hunt and some joined in."

Paul Upchurch, VISIT Milwaukee president and CEO, says the city is appealing to more planners such as Bockhop.

"Consistently rated as a top destination among planners and attendees, Milwaukee is the city that planners want to work with, and attendees look forward to visiting," Upchurch says. "Being within a single day's drive of several Midwest cities and having an airport offering nonstop service from cities coast-to-coast, it's easy to get to Milwaukee."

"And once you're here," Upchurch adds, "it's easy to get around our compact downtown area with our convention center campus and connecting hotels right in the center."

Oklahoma City

Michael Carrier, CTA, president of the Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau, touts the city's value for groups: "Our cost of living is one of the



Oklahoma City will get an additional 200,000 sf of exhibit space when a planned convention center opens in 2020 adjacent to 17-floor Omni-branded hotel set to open in 2021.

most affordable in the U.S. and visitors benefit from that," he says.

Carrier has a simple strategy for spreading the word about Oklahoma City's value and other strengths: "Tell planners in all markets what is being done in this renaissance city to serve their needs, and then do it all over again every day," Carrier says.

Several factors contribute to Oklahoma City's value.

"Oklahoma City is a large city with small-town feel," Carrier says. "The friendly, down-home attitude is obvious to our visitors. Planners and their attendees get first-class service all over the city."

Service standards remain high as the city expands its meetings facilities and infrastructure. "Many of our long-time customers remark how OKC has changed physically but maintains its small-town charm and care," Carrier says. Planners will have 200,000 sf of exhibit space when the new \$288 million convention center opens in 2020 with 45,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including a 30,000-sf ballroom.

The convention center will have an adjacent, brand-new Omni headquarters hotel. The 17-floor, 605-room Omni will feature 78,000 sf of meeting, event and pre-function space. Completion is scheduled for 2021.

Other properties under construction include a six-story boutique hotel in the Midtown area. The property, which will be part of a national chain, will fea-

(WRWA) terminal launched an \$89 million expansion project that includes four new airline gates, a consolidated security checkpoint and additional greeting lounge space. It's the first major expansion at WRWA in 12 years. The project is scheduled for completion in the second quarter of 2021.

Spokane, WA

Spokane is known for its plethora of outdoor activities, including 33 golf courses, 78 lakes and rafting on the Spokane River.

However, Spokane is also becoming known as an attractive meetings destination anchored by the Spokane Convention Center (SCC), which is connected to two hotels and offers 390,000 sf of total event space including 41 meeting and breakout rooms.

Last year, the SCC hosted 600 attendees for Reinke Manufacturing Company Inc.'s national sales meeting.

"Having direct access to the convention center — where all of our main events were held — from The Davenport Grand, Autograph Collection, which is connected, gave our attendees more time to enjoy Spokane as a whole," says Stacey Bowers, Reinke meeting event planner. "They needed less time to transfer back and forth in between sessions and could get out and see the surrounding area."

The Davenport Grand, Autograph Collection had all the amenities the group needed. "We had one small meeting at the hotel prior to our event," Bowers says. "The meeting space was great, and the food, beverage and service exceeded our expectations."

In addition, the group took advantage of Spokane's diverse activities.

"Our group enjoyed a trip to Coeur d'Alene for a lunch cruise, a golf outing at The Creek at Qualchan Golf Course and also a sporting clay tournament at the Double Barrel Ranch," Bowers says.

"They really enjoyed the walkability of downtown Spokane as well as the rental scooters," Bowers says. "There are so many local shops and restaurants that it was actually hard to choose what to do some evenings."

New construction will create more activities and venue space.

According to Meg Winchester, CMP, president and CEO of Visit Spokane, "Riverfront Park, adjacent to the convention center, is in the final phase of a \$64 million upgrade that includes the addition of a 4,000-seat outdoor pavilion ideal for concerts and large gatherings."

In addition, Winchester says, "The First Interstate Center for the Arts, which is connected to the SCC, opened in November after renovation. It has 2,700 seats and is the inland Northwest's premiere theater facility."

Mobile, AL

The cultural center of the Gulf Coast, Mobile, AL offers value its boosters say compares favorably to bigger-named competitors.

According to David Clark, Visit Mobile president and CEO, "I look at reports for our comparable cities. We are significantly below the average daily rates (ADR) for our 'comp set.' The value here is a great opportunity for meetings and conventions. It's a big deal when your rates are better than almost everybody else's."

Clark says a variety of factors contribute to Mobile's value.

"The value of the overall customer experience is significant when you tie in the things to do in Mobile, the walkability of our city and the iconic lodging that we have at very affordable rates," Clark says. "We have about 1,100 hotel rooms within two or three blocks of each other, including Renaissance and Hilton brands."

There's also more to do in Mobile than ever. The city has opened more than a dozen restaurants, bars and shops in recent years. "The culinary scene is on fire with 62 restaurants within five blocks of each other," Clark says.

In addition, many of the hotels are near the state-of-the-art Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center (AOMCC), the city's prime meeting space. Planners are attracted to the center's two



Mobile got a boost when Carnival Cruise Line agreed to extend the Carnival Fantasy's stay in the city through November 2019. About 2,400 people go through the Mobile Terminal daily.

ballrooms, each with 7,750 sf of space as well as 16 meeting rooms.

"We have made a few improvements in the AOMCC over the last few years with air walls and things like that," Clark says. "We don't have to improve a lot there. It's one of the most beautiful in the nation. There are lots of windows and lights. It's walkable to all downtown hotels."

Meanwhile, Mobile officials have also been working hard to recruit cruise

when Carnival Cruise Line agreed to extend the Carnival Fantasy's stay in the city through November 2019.

Detroit

Detroit's meetings industry has come a long way since the city filed for bankruptcy in 2013.

Since then, the city has turned around financially and become an increasingly popular option for planners, including Stephanie Gillett, manager, internal communication and events for Livonia, MI-based Pet Supplies Plus.

The company held its Leadership Summit for 750 employees, store managers, franchise owners and operators at the Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center.

Gillett chose Detroit and the Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center after a thorough vetting process.

"I am very careful about choosing our venues because I want our people to see the kind of customer service we expect them to execute on the sales floor," Gillett says. "I do site visits to make sure the space is adequate, but I won't work with a group that's not going to offer outstanding service."

The Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center delivered.

"The level of customer service was second-to-none, which was a great thing to see," Gillett says. "I had a group of go-to staffers at the Marriott that drove the meeting forward, taking



Tracey Bockhop, CMP
CEO
Meet Meetings
Verona, WI

"The Pfister hotel has a lot of spaces for this size group and was able to accommodate us while keeping costs affordable."

traffic back to the city and the effort is bringing results.

More than 2,400 passengers pass through the City of Mobile Terminal each day. Cruise traffic received a boost

David Clark
President and CEO
Visit Mobile
Mobile, AL



“The value of the overall customer experience is significant when you tie in the things to do in Mobile, the walkability of our city and the iconic lodging that we have at very affordable rates.”

care of one need after the next without hesitation. They handled one crazy situation after another.”

The Renaissance Center’s self-contained activities matched the group’s needs perfectly.

“The RenCen is a city unto itself,” Gillett says. “Our guests had a variety of restaurants and bars where they could escape the bigger group but not have to go outside. “From our point of view, it was great to keep the team so contained and close.”

On the other hand, the atmosphere outside of the Renaissance Center

offered enjoyable experiences for attendees.

“You can just step outside and you’re on the RiverWalk, watching freighters go by, saying ‘Hello!’ to people on their fishing boats,” Gillett says. “And, of course, you can practically wave to Canada right across the street. We have lots of attendees who

don’t travel except to our event, so seeing Canada was very cool for them.”

Gillett considers the meeting a big success because the destination and hotel helped her enhance attendee experiences and achieve meeting goals.

“Our goal for the meeting was to increase our team members’ engagement with the company and drive behaviors that help them provide an excellent shopping experience for our customers,” Gillett says. “The Marriott staff did everything in their power to provide our team with an experience they wouldn’t forget, with great service, a great Detroit theme, food and a great place to put on a party after the learning was done.”

Baltimore

Planners looking to stretch budgets while obtaining everything they need for meetings need look no further than “Charm City.”

According to Al Hutchinson, Visit Baltimore president and CEO, “Baltimore offers the perks of a big city without

the price tag, plus the bonus of being located directly on the waters of the Chesapeake Bay. Baltimore’s affordability and walkability make it an easy city to navigate knowing that wherever you decide to explore, there is always something new and exciting to discover.”

Meeting space is plentiful. More than 8,500 hotel rooms are located near the Baltimore Convention Center (BCC) and Inner Harbor.

The BCC, with 85,000 sf of meeting space that can accommodate up to 75 percent of meetings and conventions, is undergoing a \$20 million in renovations.

“We continue to work with the Maryland Stadium Authority and Baltimore Development Corporation on plans to expand the BCC,” Hutchinson says. “Not only would the current proposed scenario allow us to market to more and larger groups by added square footage in exhibit, ballroom and meeting space, but also renovate the facility and further enhance our overall competitive position.”

Completed upgrades to the BCC include additions that planners seeking green-friendly will find attractive.

Recently, the BCC completed its 27,000-sf Outdoor Terrace Green Roof atop the exhibit hall. In addition, the BCC is also the first convention center to implement SOMAT, a waste-reduction process that decreases solid waste up to 90 percent and converts it into a useable soil product.

Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh, an energetic mid-sized city with a small-town feel, has made great strides as a meeting destination and is gaining national recognition.

For example, Pittsburgh ranks No. 3 on National Geographic Traveler’s 19 for 2019 Cool List. The destination was the only U.S. city on the list. Also, af&co., a restaurant and hospitality consulting firm, named Pittsburgh the 2019 Food City of the Year.

According to Craig Davis, VisitPITTSBURGH president and CEO, Pittsburgh’s value is very competitive.

“We compare strongly depending on how you classify our market set,” Davis



Pittsburgh ranks No. 3 on National Geographic Traveler’s 19 for 2019 Cool List. Also, af&co., a restaurant and hospitality consulting firm, named Pittsburgh the 2019 Food City of the Year.

says. “We compare ourselves against other mid-size cities in the Northeast. We have great four- and five-star hotels that, compared to other cities, are very affordable. We are right in the middle in terms of hotel affordability.”

Hotel rate value, coupled with the Platinum LEED-certified David L. Lawrence Convention Center (DLCC), is a winning combination for Pittsburgh.

AE Ventures, a South Easton, MA-based technology company, held its Total Tech Summit at the DLCC last year for 850 executives who stayed at the Westin and Omni hotels near the convention center.

Nicole Dreher-Silvia, meeting planner and creative services manager for AE Ventures, found that the DLCC’s central location, accessibility by air and 1.5 million sf of meeting and exhibition space, including 53 meeting rooms, perfectly matched her needs.

“Ease of transportation to and from the airport and proximity of hotels to DLCC are important to our attendees,” Dreher-Silvia says. “We have guests flying in from all over the country.”

The DLCC’s space was also crucial. “We needed over 25 breakout rooms and the DLCC easily accommodated us,” Dreher-Silvia says. “We also used the exhibit hall and ballrooms. All of our events took place at the convention center.”

Service was top-notch. “The staff

at the visitor’s bureau and DLCC were very professional and helpful in every step along the way, which helped us serve our guests to the fullest extent,” Dreher-Silvia says.

At the end of each meeting day, attendees enjoyed Pittsburgh’s bustling nightlife.

“We planned a pub crawl outing for attendees,” Dreher-Silvia says. “Downtown Pittsburgh has lots of restaurants and bars in a compact location, so that made our pub crawl easy to plan and no one had to walk too far. There was also a Pittsburgh Steelers game one of the

nights of our event and several attendees went to that.”

Davis says Pittsburgh’s value proposition has grown with its guest room space.

“We have a lot of new hotel product that has come into our city in the last six years,” Davis says. “We’ve added about 6,000 rooms during that time. We have about 29,500 total rooms in the metropolitan area. The growth has been in all price points.”

Baton Rouge, LA

Louisiana’s capital city, located just 80 miles from New Orleans, appears on many “best of” lists, including National Geographic Traveler magazine’s “Best Small Cities in the United States.”

As Baton Rouge reaps the accolades, it is offering more of everything planners need to for successful meetings, including value.

According to Paul Arrigo, CDME, Visit Baton Rouge president and CEO, “Baton Rouge continues to be a city that specializes in experiences at reasonable rates year around. We will continue to personalize services based on planners’ needs. We also offer incentives to meeting planners based on their group’s needs without offering a one-size-fits-all approach.”

Meanwhile, Baton Rouge is adding more guest amenities.



Baton Rouge’s Raising Cane’s River Center complex includes the River Center Arena, River Center Theatre for the Performing Arts and a new exhibition hall, all of which offer more than 200,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space.



Baltimore offers more than 8,500 hotel rooms near the Baltimore Convention Center, which has 85,000 sf of meeting space and is undergoing \$20 million in renovations.

“Over the past few years we’ve seen a lot of growth in the number of hotels as well as attractions and restaurants,” Arrigo says. “We don’t see this growth slowing down anytime soon. Being able to continue to offer different experiences is a reason to keep coming back.”

Reasons for planners to return include Baton Rouge’s meeting-space mainstay, the Raising Cane’s River Center (RCRC), recently underwent an expansion that transformed the downtown area.

The RCRC complex has the River Center Arena and River Center Theatre for the Performing Arts and a new exhibition hall, all of which offers more than 200,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space.

In addition to the RCRC, Baton Rouge offers many activity and venue options.

“We are a city that offers plenty of unique meeting venues whether you choose to meet over a game of golf, on a swamp tour, in Louisiana State University’s Tiger Stadium or in a traditional quiet meeting venue,” Arrigo says. “Meeting the needs of the planner is what we specialize in.”

Greenville, SC

Value along with all that Greenville offers as one of the nation’s fastest-growing cities is attracting more meetings from companies, including SYN-

Al Hutchinson
President and CEO
Visit Baltimore
Baltimore, MD



“Baltimore’s affordability and walkability make it an easy city to navigate knowing that wherever you decide to explore, there is always something new and exciting to discover.”

NEX Corporation, which holds about 400 meetings a year nationwide.

The technology solutions company recently held a meeting in Greenville. Rae Hawkins, SYNEX manager, conferences and events, says they chose Greenville partly because it encourages networking.

“For us, having events in a smaller destination like Greenville means more interactions between our attendees, which fosters better networking, part-

nerships and, ultimately, better business,” Hawkins says.

Attendees spent time together at the many local restaurants and bars within walking distance.

“For example, they socialized at the Orb Lounge or had dinner together in the Roost Restaurant or somewhere along Main Street,” Hawkins

says. “In Greenville, our attendees could spend all their down time together because everywhere they went, they ran into other attendees. They didn’t get lost in the crowd, because they were the crowd in Greenville.”

In addition, Greenville offers a healthy variety of downtown hotels and meeting venues that accommodate groups ranging in size from 12 to 2,000.

According to Hawkins, “Some newer venues we used to great success are el Thrifty social club; Oak and Honey restaurant and bar in the newly opened SpringHill Suites Greenville Downtown; and the Bon Secours Wellness Arena, where we hosted a reception and concert for 800 people. Some hotels have great alternatives to a ballroom, like the Hyatt.”

In addition to plentiful hotels and venues, the Greenville Convention Center (GCC) offers 60,000 sf of meeting and conference space along with 280,000 sf of exhibit space. According to the VisitGreenvilleSC website, “The Greenville Convention Center offers unbeatable flexibility and value to people hosting any type of event.”

Hawkins plans to bring more meetings to Greenville partly because of its unique charm.

“The advantages to hosting a meeting in Greenville is that you get to be a part of this colorful and ever-changing southern tapestry,” Hawkins says. “There are so many award-winning restaurants, great breweries, unique venues and a walkable downtown.”

Richmond, VA

Don’t think of Richmond as a dowdy destination that isn’t accustomed to hosting a variety of meetings.



Travel + Leisure named Richmond, VA a must-visit destination, and the city ranked No. 7 on the magazine’s list of “America’s Favorite Cities.” The city boasts 8,000 hotel rooms.

Richmond officials are the first to admit that the city traditionally hasn’t been top of mind for planners. But while planners may have focused on other destinations, Richmond was busy making itself more attractive for meetings.

Now, Visit Richmond, VA’s website boasts, “While you weren’t looking, Richmond got cool.”

It’s no wonder that Travel + Leisure named Richmond a must-visit destination, and the city ranked No. 7 on Travel + Leisure’s list of “America’s Favorite Cities.”

Indeed, Richmond offers everything planners need for every type of meeting.

Like many mid-size destinations, Richmond attracts a sizeable portion of meetings from companies within driving distance.

One such company, Wartburg, TN-based radio station WECO-FM, held a meeting last year for 65 employees and advertisers.

According to Ed Knight, owner of WECO Radio dba: Morgan County Broadcasting and meeting planner, “We chose Richmond because it was the host city for a NASCAR race with several hotel options nearby, making travel logistics easy. We went to the race and watched from a suite and took garage and pit tours.”

The meeting was a success. “My clients were very happy. So happy in fact, that they renewed a large contract for 2019.”

The destination’s meeting space

anchor, The Greater Richmond Convention Center (GRCC), is the largest in the state with more than 200,000 sf of convention, ballroom and meeting space, including 13,000 sf of newly renovated space. The GRCC is located within a short distance of most of Richmond’s 8,000 hotel rooms, which include brand-name properties such as Marriott, Hilton, Omni and Hyatt.

Atlantic City

Conventions and meetings continue to flock to Atlantic City, as the destination expands and refurbishes meeting space while setting booking records.

Meet AC reported a fourth consecutive year of higher convention bookings in 2018. Last year, Meet AC booked 238 conventions representing 371,996 hotel rooms through 2022. Meet AC aims to book 360,000 rooms this year.



Meet AC reported a fourth consecutive year of higher convention bookings in 2018 for Atlantic City. Many hotels and resorts, with 18,000 rooms, are improving their properties.

As an example of the rising attendance, earlier this year the four-day Progressive Insurance Atlantic City Boat Show recorded a 2 percent increase in attendees.

Commenting on the bookings, Jim Wood, Meet AC CEO, told the organization’s annual meeting, “I think we as a group, we as a destination, as we continue to pour investment and add new products into hotel properties and casinos, continue to enhance their flavor and their offerings.”

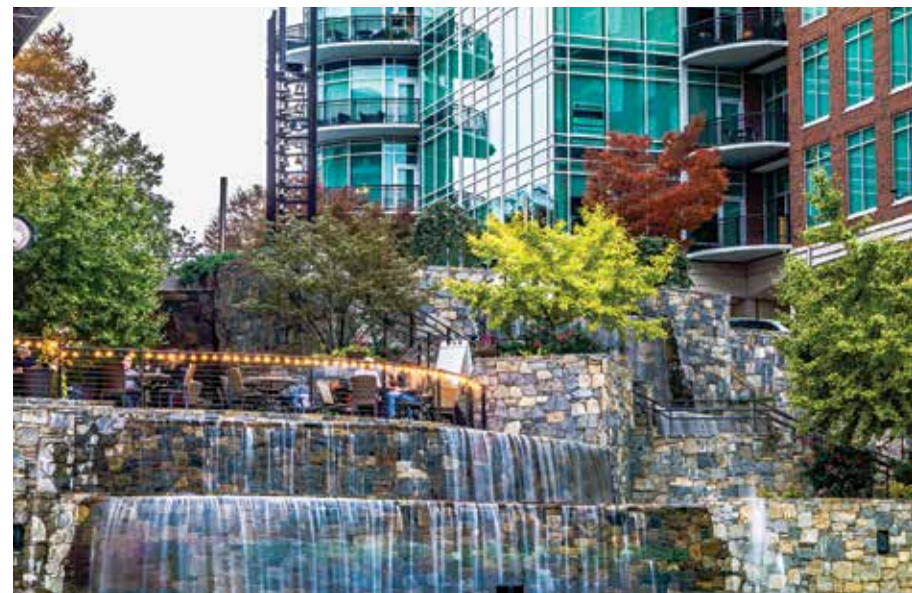
Hotels and resorts, which offer a total of 18,000 guest rooms, are improving their properties.

Caesar’s Entertainment is financing a \$56 million renovation of 507 rooms and suites in the Coastal Tower at Harrah’s Resort Atlantic City Hotel & Casino. The project is expected to wrap up by the end of the year.

Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa is undergoing an \$11 million refreshing to integrate its sportsbook operation with a new bar. In addition, Borgata added a two-floor, 18,000-sf conference center.

The Ocean Casino Resort is undergoing a \$70 million project that will add 500 guest rooms to the 1,399 currently in the property’s hotel tower.

The Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City opened last year after undergoing a \$500 million transformation. The Hard Rock offers 150,000 sf of meeting space and the 7,700-seat Mark G. Etes Arena.



The Greenville Convention Center offers 60,000 sf of meeting and conference space along with 280,000 sf of exhibit space. Its ballroom on Level 2 has 30,000 sf of space.

Resorts Casino Hotel recently added 64,900 sf to its conference center.

Coastal Mississippi

Mississippi Gulf Coast Regional Convention & Visitors Bureau is now Coastal Mississippi, according to Milton Segarra, CEO of Coastal Mississippi. The “recent rebranding has led to a shift in our value drivers as a premier meetings and conventions destination to destination influencers. We are positioning ourselves amongst the leading DMOs to provide meeting planners with the highest-quality service and strategic support.”

Coastal Mississippi targets a range of groups. “In terms of meetings and convention bookings, our sales and marketing strategy targets specific business in and around hub cities that have direct flights to and from our regional airport,” Segarra says.



The Mississippi Coast Coliseum & Convention Center features 400,000 sf of meeting space and can accommodate up to 6,000 attendees. It's in walking distance of nine casino resorts.

petroleum industries, in order to solicit and secure new business,” Segarra says.

Coastal Mississippi’s advantages include The Mississippi Coast Coliseum & Convention Center (MCCCC), across the street from Biloxi Beach, which features 400,000 sf of meeting space and can accommodate up to 6,000 attendees.

The MCCCC is also within walking distance of nine casino resorts with a total of 5,000 guest rooms. Some of the casinos have up to 66,000 sf of meeting space.

The resorts include: Beau Rivage Resort & Casino, Golden Nugget Biloxi, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Biloxi, Harrah’s Gulf Coast, Hollywood Casino Gulf Coast, IP Casino Resort Spa, Palace Casino Resort, Scarlet Pearl Casino Resort, and Treasure Bay Casino and Hotel.

Norfolk, VA

Planners seeking an affordable, friendly and accessible destination can meet these needs in Norfolk. According to Kurt Krause, VisitNorfolk president and CEO, “Norfolk is a vibrant, urban destination that provides unique value to planners.”

Krause says Norfolk provides value in several areas, starting with the destination’s 5,000 hotel rooms.

Primary meeting hotels include the Norfolk Waterside Marriott, which

is undergoing a transformation that includes the renovation of all 405 guest rooms and suites and the M Club, an exclusive lounge.

The 468-room Sheraton Norfolk Waterside Hotel, the city’s only waterfront meeting property, provides 46,000 sf of meeting space. Another property, the luxurious Hilton Norfolk The Main, is located downtown along the waterfront. It offers The Main Ballroom with 18,382 sf.

Beyond meeting properties, Norfolk offers many activities and top service to enhance attendee experiences.

According to Krause, “You can feel the Southern hospitality and creative grit when walking around downtown which is full of entertainment, shopping, attractions and delicious cuisine.”

Most of Norfolk’s dining, nightlife and entertainment options are located downtown within 12 walkable blocks. “Additionally,” Krause says, “Norfolk has 144 miles of shoreline to be explored so attendees will also never be far from the water.”

Destinations that have spent years under the radar are becoming more popular due to planners’ needs for more budget-friendly options.

Groups that have been priced out of costlier destinations or want a change of pace from bustling big cities can find everything they need at value destinations to achieve meeting goals and create unique attendee experiences. **C&IT**

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Stephanie Gillett
Manager, Internal Communication and Events
Pet Supplies Plus
Livonia, MI



“I had a group of go-to staffers at the Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center that drove the meeting forward, taking care of one need after the next without hesitation.”

Groups in industries related to the Mississippi coastal area are among the prime targets.

“Our marketing strategy leverages key industries that Coastal Mississippi has to offer, such as maritime biology research, nature-based organizations, aerospace, golf, and port-related and

Hotel Brands



Credit: GameStop

The Omni Fort Worth Hotel hosted a GameStop event in 2019. GameStop's meeting planner likes Omni's ample space.

"For our annual meeting, we're so large we only go to certain cities. So if they're reaching out telling us 'We have a new Marriott coming online near the convention center in Indianapolis, we know you're going to go there.' Yes, we absolutely want to know about that."

Carrie Huffhines, CMP, senior events and logistics manager with Austin, TX-based Keller Williams Realty, also enjoys having an open line of communication with the national reps at the chains with which she frequently works, including Hilton, Marriott and Omni Hotels & Resorts. "We do ask them to reach out to us, usually quarterly, to give us an update on what the brand is doing and what they're seeing in the industry. But then we want to have the same ability to reach out to them if we have questions or if we're having a difficult time with a specific client services manager (CSM). The ability to reach out and have that immediate response is priceless."

senior manager, meetings and travel with Grapevine, TX-based GameStop, has strong relationships with both Marriott International and Hilton Hotels & Resorts sales reps, and enjoys having them reach out to her with opportunities because they understand "the nuances of what we do."

BRAND NEWS

Every Good Planner Keeps up With the Latest Information About Venues

By Patrick Simms

One of the most personalized ways that a hotel chain caters to its group clients is via its national sales representatives. They effectively become the face of the brand, and when they demonstrate attentiveness to the planner's needs, the brand looks good. Samantha Vogel, CMP,

While a brand extends personalized service to group clients via its representatives, it also pursues numerous initiatives catering to group clientele as a whole, ranging from meeting technology to onsite wellness activities to property upgrades that will benefit meetings. Following is an overview of some of the latest developments that showcase the commitment to the meetings group market among the world's largest hoteliers.

Hilton Hotels & Resorts

Huffhines points to a welcome trend among renovating hoteliers, including Hilton. "Our attendees like the fact that many of the hotels are upgrading their lobby areas to be more social areas. Networking is huge for our events," she says. For example, "the Hilton Austin within the last two years has finished renovating their lobby and now they have the long tables for several people to share and network. The atmosphere has changed so it's more communal."

Far beyond meetings-friendly lobby renovations, Hilton is upping the ante in the group market with the launch of a global meetings-focused brand, Signia Hilton. Properties such as the Signia Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek, Signia Hilton Atlanta and Signia Hilton Indianapolis are under development, and will boast a minimum of 500 guest rooms and 75 sf per room of flexible function space. Other features include signature restaurants, destination bars, wellness experiences and, most importantly, a variety of high-tech meeting spaces, from large

ballrooms and pre-function areas to small and midsize meeting rooms.

Hilton has been making significant strides in meetings technology by introducing a variety of meeting room elements. Examples include Steelcase Thread, which conveniently situates power outlets in different parts of the meeting room as needed; CoeLux artificial skylights, which brings the appearance and feeling of natural skylights to the room with nanotechnology; Nanoleaf customizable lighting; and Panasonic's BF1 Series LCD touchscreens, which can connect and display content from any operating system or

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts

The latest Wyndham property developments favor both incentive meetings and training conferences. Incentive planners are constantly looking for upscale resorts in intriguing destinations that will likely be new to well-traveled potential qualifiers. Wyndham's "upper upscale" brand, Wyndham Grand, is debuting in six new destinations this year: California; Cam Ranh, Vietnam; Mexico City, Mexico; Kayseri, Turkey; Tblisi, Georgia; and Crete, Greece. Wyndham Grand resorts, featuring a distinctive architectural design and premium amenities, restaurants and spas, are an



"We also think Omni has that one-on-one service feel and it tends to feel like a boutique property because of private management."

Samantha Vogel, CMP, Senior Manager, Meetings and Travel
GameStop, Grapevine, TX

USB and enables meeting facilitators to switch between a PowerPoint presentation and a collaborative whiteboarding session. Complementing these tech tools are atmospheric elements such as Nordgröna's unique moss wall, which brings a taste of the outdoors to meeting rooms and acts as an air purifier and sound absorber. Locally themed elements are also being introduced to meeting spaces — the Hilton Austin's music-inspired meeting room, The Reverberary, is a prime example.

ideal home base for incentive travelers to explore these destinations.

On the business meetings front, few brands deliver a conference experience on par with Dolce Hotels and Resorts by Wyndham. The historic Seaview, a Dolce Hotel, in Galloway, NJ, reopened in March after a \$17 million project that updated all 296 guest rooms and suites; refreshed the 27,000 sf of meeting space, lobby and public areas; renovated the outdoor pool; and added new dining options, including an eatery within the



Credit: Signia Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek



Signia Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek has 132,000 sf of total meeting and function space, including the 35,925-sf Bonnet Creek Ballroom.

hotel's famed Oval Room. Groups in intense sessions benefit from Dolce's signature Nourishment Hubs and the brand's Thoughtful Foods for Thoughtful Minds program.

Planners partnering with the Seaview as well as other Wyndham properties can take advantage of the chain's go meet rewards program, enabling them to earn one point for every dollar spent on qualifying revenue, regardless of billing method, with no minimum spending requirement and no maximum point limit.

Omni Hotels & Resorts

The combination of local character and ample meeting facilities is what attracts GameStop's Samantha Vogel and her participants to the Omni brand.

about 500 attendees and utilizing all of the hotel's 68,000 sf of meeting space.

Novartis utilized the same property for its National Sales Meeting in January. "We have found the staff at the Omni Fort Worth Hotel to be creative and resourceful in enabling us to execute our objectives," notes Laura Healy, director of meetings and events management. She relates an example of that creativity. "We decided to hold both the Opening Theme Party and the Awards Gala at Omni Fort Worth Hotel; however, we did not want the two events to look and feel the same, as they had just one major ballroom. The hotel worked with us to design an interactive event by just mapping out the foyer areas, creating staging for the band/karaoke contest, and integrating food and beverage sta-

offering guests a unique culinary experience each quarter such as "Season of Smoke" and "Morel Mushrooms." Along with that creativity, Omni brings social responsibility. In recent years, the brand launched its Say Goodnight to Hunger program, which makes a donation to Feeding America for every booking made through OmniHotels.com. In addition, Omni hotels support their local food banks and pantries, and enable their group clients to donate meals. "We really like the program because it gives you the specific number of meals that they've donated, and you can turn that around and let your attendees know we donated 562 meals to the local homeless community," Vogel says.

InterContinental Hotels Group

IHG made a strong commitment to its group clientele at IMEX America last year when it introduced Crowne Plaza Meeting Mentors: Christy Lamagna, founder of strategic meetings and events; Tahira Edean, event-technology and design expert; Michaela Alexis, personal-branding coach; and Julian Lwin, owner and creative director of Lwin Design studio. These globally recognized industry experts are collaborating with Crowne Plaza to develop a robust meetings website with videos, blog posts and other content, and assisting clients in the areas of event strategy, design, technology and social media.

IHG also has meeting attendees' needs in mind. Traveling professionals want to be both well rested and fueled for a long day of meetings, and

tions with gaming activities. They also worked with use to create 'reveal' experiences throughout the night of the Awards Gala, which was optically effective and minimized costs."

Omni also excels on the F&B front, offering "creative menus" according to Healy. A case in point is Omni Originals, a brand-wide food and beverage series

"Our attendees like the fact that many of the Hilton Hotels are upgrading their lobby areas to be more social areas. Networking is huge for our events."

Carrie Huffhines, CMP Senior Events and Logistics Manager
Keller Williams Realty, Austin, TX



"Our attendees feel Omnis tend to be a little more upscale and have more local flair," she says. "We also think Omni has that one-on-one service feel and it tends to feel like a boutique property because of private management." GameStop recently held its 2019 Field Leadership Meeting at the 614-room Omni Fort Worth Hotel, bringing in



Credit: Omni Fort Worth Hotel



Omni Fort Worth Hotel offers 68,000 sf of meeting space, including the Texas Ballroom with 18,315 sf, and the Fort Worth Ballroom, with 9,576 sf. The hotel also boasts 6,500 sf of usable outdoor space.

new IHG offerings assist on both counts. The brand has piloted the use of the JOURNI Mobile Task Light, first installed at Crowne Plaza Atlanta-Airport. Developed by Healthe by Lighting Science, this portable LED task light is designed to help regulate sleep when traveling, and is effectively a response to a new IHG study revealing that 80 percent of travelers struggle to sleep when away from home. On the sustenance side, attendees staying at Holiday Inn properties can begin their day with a breakfast that is both expedient and energizing with the new Express Start Breakfast, included in every stay. More than 30 hot and fresh items are available, including healthy options, dishes localized by country, and grab-and-go meals.

Marriott International

Given her long-standing relationship with Marriott, Vogel was among the planners who were advantaged by the Marriott-Starwood merger. "Our Marriott national sales reps are fantastic. They are talking to us all the time, making sure we're up to date on which properties they've invested in from a remodel standpoint. When Marriott and Starwood merged, it extended the available properties" under the existing relationship, she says. Moreover, Marriott is very proactive in maintaining and improving its hotels, she adds. "We've been at properties where we feel the service has been great but the property hasn't been updated in some time. We don't tend to go back to those kinds of properties. And I really feel that Marriott overall

has done a good job reinvesting in their properties and keeping them up to date."

The brand is also heavily investing in expanding its portfolio, with a three-year growth plan that includes opening more than 1,700 hotels worldwide and adding between 275,000 and 295,000 rooms by 2021. The development pipeline includes an increasing number of Legacy-Starwood branded hotels. With regard to Sheraton, the company's most geographically diverse brand, more than 1/4 of the properties are already under renovation or committed to a renovation.

Two recent Marriott openings are especially of note for the meetings industry. Located just 10 minutes from the Denver International Airport, the 1,501-room Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center debuted in December, offering groups 485,000 sf of function space that includes the 174,000-sf Aurora Exhibition Hall and 22,000-sf Aurora Patio. Other property highlights include eight F&B outlets, the Relâche Spa and Salon, 22,000 sf of aquatic recreation and an eight-story atrium window affording a panoramic view of the Denver skyline and Rocky Mountains. And in January, the Delta Hotels by Marriott Dallas Allen & Watters Creek Convention Center opened as the first of the Delta Hotels brand in the Dallas-Forth Worth area and the brand's first new build in North America. The Benchmark-managed property features 90,000 sf of convention, ballroom and meeting space, 300 guest rooms and suites and a restaurant by celebrity Chef Stephan Pyles.

Also of note, Marriott rebranded its loyalty program, which combines Marriott Rewards, The Ritz-Carlton Rewards and SPG, as Marriott Bonvoy this year.

Hyatt Hotels Corporation

Last fall, Hyatt made life easier for its meeting planner clients with the introduction of the Hyatt Planner Portal. Available across Hyatt's global portfolio, the invitation-only, comprehensive tool allows planners to manage contracts, attendee information and costs through all stages of planning. It can also generate reports on current, upcoming and past meetings. "Created with feedback directly from meeting planners, this solution aims to alleviate pain points planners face and it captures information in one place so they can spend more time focusing on what is most important for their attendees," explained Steve Enselein, senior vice president of events at Hyatt, in a statement.

The Hyatt Planner Portal also includes a customized reservation link for attendees, banquet menus, event space floor plans and access to diagramming software. It is integrated with Hyatt's Event Concierge App, which allows planners to make requests directly to the hotel team, and Group Bill, which organizes all costs into a single invoice for easy payment.

MGM Resorts International

MGM is engaging its meetings clientele on multiple fronts, from major meeting space expansions to wellness to technology to team building. MGM Grand completed a \$130



Credit: Seaview, a Dolce Hotel

Seaview, a Dolce Hotel, reopened in March after a \$17 million project that refreshed all 296 guest rooms and the 27,000 sf of meeting space.



The LINQ Hotel & Casino, a Caesars Entertainment property, will be connected via skybridge to Caesars FORUM, which is set to open in 2020.

million, 250,000 sf expansion of its Conference Center in December. As part of the project, Stay Well Meetings, which launched at MGM Grand in 2014, expanded its footprint by 22,000 sf and now encompasses the Conference Center's entire second floor of both the new and existing space. Stay Well Meetings has also been implemented at The

wall surfaces; audio/video conferencing at the touch of a button; and wall-mounted speakers for presentations and background music.

Groups that want to enjoy a bonding experience before they head into the conference room might consider the ARIA Hike. Participants are guided through ARIA Resort & Casino's \$40 mil-

lion fine art collection, gaining an appreciation for leading contemporary artists while benefitting from a cardio workout.

is accessible via skybridge from Harrah's Las Vegas and The LINQ Hotel & Casino. In addition, the FORUM is adjacent to The LINQ Promenade retail district, giving attendees a convenient way to spend their free time.

In terms of meeting space, the FORUM boasts ample square footage, variety and flexibility.

Its 300,000 sf of meeting space includes two 110,000-sf pillar-less ballrooms, two 40,000-sf ballrooms and six state-of-the-art boardrooms. More than 2 miles of airwalls can create more than 100 breakout rooms. The LEED Silver certified facility is also being built on one floor for convenient move-in, supported by nine loading docks. Groups looking for an outdoor experience are accommodated by FORUM Plaza, a 100,000-sf outdoor space.

Caesars is complementing this major new business offering with new entertainment options this year. Of particular note is the Vanderpump Cocktail Garden, which opened at Caesars Palace in April. TV star and restaurateur Lisa Vanderpump's stylish garden oasis can be rented for events of up to 150 guests, and its two venues can be individually rented: an interior back lounge that accommodates 50 seated guests or up to 70 standing, as well as the patio for 50 seated guests.

From this compelling venue for recreational gatherings to a new state-of-the-art conference facility, Caesars Entertainment is more prepared than ever to host groups at all levels of hospitality. **C&IT**

"We have found the staff at the Omni Fort Worth Hotel to be creative and resourceful in enabling us to execute our objectives."

Laura Healy, Director of Meetings and Event Management
Novartis, Hanover, NJ



Mirage's Calypso Court, which includes seven meeting rooms ranging from 900 sf to 4,680 sf.

Stay Well Meetings features are also in place at MGM Resorts' new centerpiece for high-tech meetings, Park MGM. The hotel's Madison Meeting Center (MMC) and Ideation Studio both became IACC members in November. The 10,000-sf MMC offers 10 flexible rooms, two self-service lounges, ergonomic moveable furniture with integrated power, built-in A/V and rolling whiteboards, as well as the Las Vegas Strip's first Daily Meeting Package. The Ideation Studio has numerous high-tech features, including Cisco Webex Boards allowing for full HD video teleconferencing, audio conferencing and collaboration annotative capabilities; built-in whiteboard

lion fine art collection, gaining an appreciation for leading contemporary artists while benefitting from a cardio workout.

Caesars Entertainment

Caesars' most significant new meetings offering, and one of the most significant in Las Vegas, is Caesars FORUM, a \$375 million conference facility scheduled to open in 2020. As of February 2019, Caesars had booked \$150 million in meetings business at the venue, and its immediate popularity is not surprising. One of the FORUM's main virtues is, as they say in real estate, "location, location, location." There are more than 20,000 Caesars Entertainment hotel rooms within walking distance, and 5,000 Caesars Entertainment hotel rooms connected to the facility, which

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Meeting Room of the Future

Technological Transformation

Innovation Will Revolutionize the Event Experience for Attendees

What will the meeting room of the future look like? How will it function? What innovations in technology and the science of learning will drive its evolution? Those questions are among the most vitally important facing the meetings industry today. And both planners and attendees are increasingly pondering those questions.

There are three key elements of the current debate about how the meeting room experience is evolving and what it will look like and feel like in the future. One is new technologies. The second is the meeting room itself as a designed physical space. And the third is the ongoing breakthroughs in brain science and learning that experts argue will ultimately play the most important and transformational role of them all.

The Frontiers of Technology

To understand the role of new and innovative technologies in the meeting room experience, one must first understand how limited the vision has been so far, says David Hsieh, CEO of San Mateo, CA-based Kaptivo, which has pioneered the next-generation whiteboard and rendered it interactive and sharable.

"I would argue that technology in hotels is stuck in the Dark Ages," says Hsieh, who as former vice president of products at

WebEx and former vice president of marketing for Cisco TelePresence has been on the cutting edge of meeting technologies for well over a decade. "For example, if you ask what is the single-biggest improvement in recent years when it comes to meeting technology, the answer is Wi-Fi. And if you compare that to what is now available in a typical conference room in the corporate world, the hotel is not even close."

How does he explain that gap?



"It's expensive to bring people to offsite meetings. So if you can have a virtual meeting, with remote attendees who can have the same kind of experience they'd have if they were there, you can save a ton of money."

David Hsieh, CEO
Kaptivo, San Mateo, CA

"Technology is not a core competence for hotels," he says. "So usually there is no one really focused on what the meeting room technology should be beyond basic things like A/V. And then there's the fact that so many hotels outsource their A/V, Wi-Fi and other technology services, so they're not really in the technology business. The hotel is just providing space. So with very few exceptions, there's no one really thinking about what kind of experience the meeting planner and attendees want and need to have."

In addition, Hsieh says, the time-

honored role of the hotel meeting room as the nexus of the meeting experience is also evolving. Today, he says, remote attendees are playing a more and more prominent role in the execution of meetings.

"For some companies, the trend is primarily budgetary," Hsieh says. "It's expensive to bring people to offsite meetings. So if you can have a virtual meeting, with remote attendees who can have the same kind of experience they'd have if they

were there, you can save a ton of money."

But another reason for the trend is convenience. Not everyone can travel for a meeting; it's a big-time commitment, and sometimes being there is either inconvenient or impossible. That's why more companies and meeting planners are providing new ways for attendees to 'be there' without actually being there. That was the idea behind TelePresence. The idea was to use HD video to make people feel like they were in the same room, sitting at the same table, whether they were actually physically present or not.

"The idea is to do something to get people involved in a way other than what they would normally expect. That gets them fully engaged, as opposed to just listening to somebody give a report or read a paper."

Samantha Meigs, Ph.D., Chair of Experience Design Department
Associate Professor of History and Experience Design
University of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN



What does Hsieh see on the far horizon of future technology? "It's easy now to imagine some kind of virtual reality-based experience, where the remote participants can literally feel like they are sitting in the room," he says. "Think of the Jedi Council in the Star Wars movies. You're not actually there, but you're a holographic figure that people can see and hear and interact with."

Given such possibilities, he says, the meeting room of the future must be built and equipped to facilitate such cutting-edge innovations.

The Here and Now

In the current market, Hsieh says, the focus is on the evolution of devices or any new technologies that facilitate more seamless meeting experiences, both for planners and attendees.

"One of the more interesting innovations right now is in wireless media-sharing devices that let you display content from your phone or your tablet or your PC onto a monitor wirelessly and easily, with one click," he says. "It used to be that when you walk into the room, you have to plug in your computer. If you don't have the right adapter, you need to go find one. Now, you can walk into the meeting, open up your device, click a button and then, Whammo!, your presentation is automatically shared. The function is much faster and more convenient."

There are a number of companies now providing or developing such technology, Hsieh says. He cites the current leaders in the space as Lifesize, Mersive, and Barco. "They all work really well."

Meanwhile, an entirely new category of meeting room device is being developed. "It doesn't really even have a name yet," Hsieh says. "But it's like a 'control

panel' for the meeting room. The reason that's important is that as technology has proliferated, it has become more and more complicated to get all this technology working together. With one of these new devices, all of the systems in the meeting room are now controlled by a single device. That way, you don't have to go to your phone and use that control panel, then go to another device and use that control panel."

Although the development and introduction of such technology is in the early stages, rapid progress is being made. "What we have seen up until now is that people have taken general purpose devices, like an iPad, and built special-purpose software that implements the control panel," Hsieh says. "For example, a company like Zoom has software for the iPad. But what we're starting to see now is companies that are doing purpose-built devices. And the companies that are working on that include Logitech, which is actually developing

control panel devices. And their only purpose is to be taken into the meeting room and control all of the technology in the room. The best way to understand it is to consider that you used to have multiple remote controls in your living room that controlled your TV, sound system, DVD player or DVR, and so on. Now you can do all of that with one universal remote control. That's the principle involved."

As an example of the evolving capability, he cites Logitech Tap, which was introduced early this year. Another provider is Crestron.

Yet another new category of meeting room technology will be voice-control capability. "Today, when you go into a meeting room and you want to turn something on, you have to push a button somewhere," Hsieh says. "What a number of companies are starting to do is add voice controls to their products. For example, you'll eventually be able to walk into the room and say, 'Start the video conference with so and so,' such as a remote presenter or 'Begin the ZYZ presentation.' And all the right devices just make that happen."

Think of the new functionality as Alexa for the meeting room, Hsieh says. "And as a matter of fact, Amazon now has a new Alexa for business that is trying to move in that direction."



The MGM Grand Conference Center participates in MGM Resorts International's Stay Well program, which provides air purification, aromatherapy, circadian lighting and more.

Kaptivo itself is another transformational technology. "What we've done is solve a problem that has been a meeting room problem since meeting technology was first introduced," Hsieh says. "And that is how to share a whiteboard electronically. People had been trying for decades to solve that issue, but never saw strong user adoption because either it didn't work well or was too complicated.

It was the same with videoconferencing technology, meaning it took a long time for it to really become useful and practical. Kaptivo has now delivered the same kind of breakthrough solution for the sharing of whiteboard content."

Any existing whiteboard can be equipped to become interactive with both onsite and remote attendees, who can share content on any device as well as save it to any device for future reference or additional sharing.

The Room Itself

The evolution of the meeting room itself, as space designed for a specific purpose, is another key element of the debate over the future. And so far, at least, it has not been given the level of attention it deserves, says Samantha Meigs, Ph.D., associate professor of history and experience design at the University of Indianapolis.

"It seems to me that the issue is late in being discussed by the meeting industry," Meigs says. "Based on what I see and hear, that this is an issue that is really just now being discovered and talked about." Meigs, Ph.D., Chair of the Experience Design Department, and Associate Professor of History and Experience Design at the Uni-



"And part of the issue now is not just what happens in the meeting room, but also what happens around the meeting room. That means that those other spaces become just as important as the main 'meat-and-potatoes' meeting rooms where your sessions are taking place."

**Ellen Sinclair, Senior Vice President
Benchmark, Brunswick, NJ**

versity of Indianapolis. She also plans conferences in the history department, and thinks that neither meeting planners nor vendors have yet approached the issue in a comprehensive or "holistic" way.

Based on his observations as an industry leader, Michael Dominguez, chief sales officer at MGM Resorts International in Las Vegas, disputes that assessment of planners, but concurs when it comes to suppliers. "What I have found," he says, "is that too many suppliers, partners and vendors have not been good resources to tell planners how to implement the future and help them do it."

Any suggestion that the bar is currently set too low, in general, is somewhat reinforced by what the International Association of Conference Centers (IACC) touted as the most significant finding of its own "Meeting Room of the Future" survey last year. "The report shows that high-quality internet will be the most impor-

tant meeting element in the coming years, and that the success of meetings today depends on the quality of a meeting venue's internet infrastructure," IACC CEO Mark Cooper noted in releasing the report. It is remarkable, especially given the ways in which new technologies have transformed other industries, that the overarching perception in the meeting industry seems to be the preeminence of internet service in hotels and conference centers. Any truly enlightened debate over the future of the meeting room must include the space itself.

And to IACC's credit, its 2018 report addresses that factor.

"One of the things that both this year's and last year's report touched on was the flexibility of where the meeting takes place and where collaboration takes place," says Ellen Sinclair, the Brunswick, NJ-based senior vice president of major hotel and IACC-certified conference center operator Benchmark, a global hospitality company. "And part of the issue now is not just what happens in the meeting room, but also what happens around the meeting room. That means that those other spaces become just as important as the main 'meat-and-potatoes' meeting rooms where your sessions are taking place."

As part of that evolution, now underway, Sinclair says, ancillary and alternative spaces will begin to supplant what

has traditionally been just another numbered — and standard — meeting room down the hall, so to speak.

Raising the Bar

When it comes to theoretical discussion of the meeting room of the future, one major hotelier, Las Vegas-based MGM Resorts International, has already set a high standard with the development of two new facilities at its new \$550 million Park MGM, formerly the Monte Carlo, which made its debut in April 2018. Its Madison Meeting Center caters to meetings for 10-50 attendees. The 10,000-sf complex features 10 flexible rooms that can accommodate various layouts ideal for classroom-style training, certifications, product seminars and workshops. It also offers moveable ergonomic furniture, built-in audiovisual equipment, and rolling whiteboards. It also incorporates the DELOS Stay Well Meetings protocol — developed in cooperation with health and wellness guru and DELOS board

"We have based the things we're doing on the underlying science. For example, a key question in the meeting industry is why attendees get tired in the middle of the afternoon?"

**Michael Dominguez, Chief Sales Officer
MGM Resorts International, Las Vegas, NV**



member Deepak Chopra — and previously deployed at the MGM Grand and Mirage properties. The Stay Well program features state-of-the-art air purification, energizing lighting, science-based menu options, soothing aromatherapy and other wellness features designed to enhance the productivity and overall wellness of attendees.

"We have based the things we're doing on the underlying science," Dominguez says. "For example, a key question in the meeting industry is why attendees get tired in the middle of the afternoon? And the reasons are twofold: One is that you've been sitting in really crappy light all day long, which means a yellow hue. We have gone to blue-hued light in our Stay Well meeting rooms. And that's important because blue light allows your body to suppress melatonin. And that allows you



Activities that get attendees fully engaged or that present a challenge are effective for helping them retain information. Hi-tech lighting such as artificial sunlight also helps.

to remain alert and attentive. The second reason is that because you're indoors all day, you're not getting enough Vitamin D. So what we now know from the science is that it's not just important that the food you eat at the meeting to be nutritious, but also for it to be Vitamin D-infused. So that is now a focus on our menus."

The Park MGM's new Ideation Studio, which opened last fall, provides spaces ideal for corporate retreats and

ness from attendees. "It's the mental equivalent of 'hands on,' and it means a more in-depth way of talking about things and communicating," she says. "It means having people be more actively involved in engagement with your material and with problem-solving."

The inherent flaw in the current way meetings are conducted is that levels of attention and engagement among attendees range from minimal to meaningful and effective, along with everything in between.

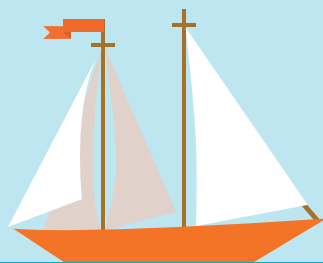
How can that reality be overcome? "One way is to do anything that is unexpected and presents some kind of a challenge," Meigs says. "The idea is to do something to get people involved in a way other than what they would normally expect. That gets them fully engaged, as opposed to just listening to somebody give a report or read a paper."

Perhaps the most critical element of the larger discussion, Meigs says, is that her academic understanding of experience design differs quite sharply in one key respect from what meeting planners typically do. "True experience design, as I think of it, is all about sort of letting go of control. And meeting planners are typically very much in control of everything, which they have to be. But I think that control is also antithetical to the idea of a better experience. In the future, the most successful results are going to come from letting go of control, which seems to be a very difficult thing for people in the meetings industry to do."

C&IT



With meeting room technology such as lighting that simulates daylight and air purifiers, planners say nothing can replace simply getting attendees outside of their meeting rooms.



Reduce Your Risk

By Christine Loomis

Understanding the Hidden Dangers Before an Event Helps Avoid Problems Later

You've crossed every T and dotted every I in your hotel contract for an upcoming conference. You've taken every possible precaution to mitigate potential risk to you and your company.

But have you? There are many potential risks beyond the scope of a hotel contract, from transportation issues to attendee misbehavior and offsite venue/vendor considerations.

The Legal Perspective

Attorney Jonathan T. Howe, president of Howe & Hutton, Ltd., in Chicago, says the answer to most questions about the potential for risk is almost always "Yes," and a first line of defense is insurance.

"Insurance is the granddaddy of all prevention and risk-management efforts," Howe says. "You must be certain you have it and that all of your vendors and operators have it as well."

You also have to have the right kind of insurance and ensure that vendors are properly licensed. "You have to be sure that what you have is right for exactly what you're doing," Howe says. "And you have to confirm that the insurance and licenses your private vendors have are right for the specific service they're providing."

Attorney Lisa Sommer Devlin, of Devlin Law Firm P.C. in Phoenix, AZ, recommends consulting an expert. "There's no 'one-size-fits-all' for insurance, as it depends on the types of events you're planning, their value, whether the events generate income for the customer and many other factors. You need to sit down with an insurance broker that understands your business to review the coverage options to figure out what works best for you."

One Huge Hurdle: Alcohol

Alcohol is one issue that requires planners to be proactive. "If there's alcohol at an event," Howe says, "planners should have liquor liability coverage as part of their standard insurance coverage — even if the caterer has adequate alcohol liability as well."

Naturally, you should verify their coverage. "Ask vendors for their applicable certificate of insurance," Howe says, "and consider asking to be co-insured on their policy. Even if you do that, you should also put an indemnification clause into any agreement with that vendor."

Devlin says, "It's always better for vendors to have ample insurance that names the planner and/or customer

as additional insureds. The amount of coverage would vary depending upon the service or activity the vendor is providing."

In addition to making sure that anyone serving alcohol has all the proper licenses, training and liability coverage, Devlin cautions planners to avoid having hospitality rooms where liquor is "help yourself."

She also notes that marijuana is an issue for planners now that it's legal in some states. "Generally meeting planners won't be responsible for an attendee who drinks or smokes marijuana

unless the planner provided it to the attendee or encouraged the attendee to drink or smoke," Devlin says. "However, it's a good idea to have your registration encourage attendees to drink responsibly. For events where marijuana is legal in some capacity, laws can be tricky. Marijuana is still illegal federally. Planners might consider a statement in registration materials spelling out that marijuana use is still illegal as a matter of federal law, thus the organization's policy is that marijuana in any form is not allowed at the event."

Howe concurs. "Marijuana is tricky even in states where it's legal, and at this point there isn't total clarity on how issues with marijuana will play out in courts, while alcohol laws are typically very clear."

He also advises clearly stating poli-



"Insurance is the granddaddy of all prevention and risk-management efforts. You must be certain you have it and that all of your vendors and operators have it as well!"

Jonathan T. Howe
President
Howe & Hutton, Ltd.
Chicago, IL

have talked to an attorney and know exactly what to do in the case of any attendee doing something for which he/she might be asked to leave."

What if attendees visit an offsite function at a restaurant, decide to stay on after the function ends and drink too much, causing harm to themselves or others? Is the planner liable?

Tyra Warner Hilliard, Esq., Ph.D., CMP, attorney and professor at the College of Coastal Georgia, suggests planners include a clause in any agreement/contract with venues that makes clear when the function starts and stops and when the planner's liability attaches and releases. "However," she adds, "this doesn't mean the planner wouldn't be sued. Anyone can be sued, with or without such language. It would be up to the fact finder — a judge or jury — to determine responsibility and fault."

Thorough Vetting is Important

Indemnification clauses, like insurance and licensing, are essential. "You always want one in any agreement or contract with a vendor, so that liability is shifted away from you should there be a problem," Howe says.



Experts advise planners who serve alcohol to be sure to have liquor liability coverage as part of their standard insurance, even if the caterer already has coverage.

“There’s no ‘one-size-fits-all’ for insurance, as it depends on the types of events you’re planning, their value, whether the events generate income for the customer and many other factors. You need to sit down with an insurance broker that understands your business to review the coverage options to figure out what works best for you.”



Lisa Sommer Devlin, Attorney
Devlin Law Firm P.C., Phoenix, AZ

But something else comes into play even before all that. “Beyond insurance and licensure,” Howe notes, “probably the most important strategy for planners to reduce risk is to do due diligence on every vendor.”

Take, for example, the caterer at an offsite venue. “Yes,” Howe says, “you need to have a contract with that caterer; however, before you get to that point you should have thoroughly vetted the caterer. What is the caterer’s reputation? Has the company ever been sued for negligence? What’s the caterer’s standing with local food-safety inspectors? Has the company ever been cited by the local public health department? Have clients ever complained of food poisoning? You should have also checked the caterer’s references, not just asked for them and then ignored them. You should have documentation that you asked and verified everything.”

Should attendees get food poisoning from the catered meal, for example, Howe says, “You may not be held responsible as the owner or organizer

of the event if you can prove you did your due diligence and nothing came to your attention that would make you think tainted food might be a problem or that the caterer is anything less than qualified, professional and adhering to all safety protocols.”

Having alcohol at an offsite event also requires significant vetting, and the questions you need to ask go beyond alcohol liability coverage. “Have the catering employees serving the alcohol been trained in alcohol awareness so they know not to serve anyone underage and when to cut someone off? What’s the level of training for every server who will work at your event? “And,” Howe adds, “consider putting into your agreement with the company an expectation of who will be serving alcohol, how it will be served and how servers will handle any alcohol-related problems.”

Don’t Forget Transportation

The same type of due diligence applies to transportation companies.



It’s not enough that the company has the appropriate license. “What’s the company’s safety record? Reputation? How does the company train and certify its drivers? What kind of background checks are done on drivers to ensure

they’re competent and experienced enough to be driving your group?” Howe says these are all questions planners should ask before booking a company.

Due diligence also comes into play when something goes wrong.

“Say an attendee clearly has had too much to drink,” Howe says. “You can’t just let him/her walk out, get in a car and hope it all goes well. Should something happen, you have to show that you did everything possible to protect that

person from hurting himself or others so that you’re not held responsible. You can provide transportation for him so he doesn’t drive. You can provide a hotel room if necessary and take away the car keys. Leaving that kind of situation to chance is, as the phrase goes, an accident waiting to happen.”

What about waivers? How helpful are they in protecting planners? The answer is they can be very helpful — if executed correctly. “In addition to carrying insurance and making sure the vendors carry the right insurance and licenses,” Howe says, “you should also have attendees sign waivers if they’re going to engage in anything risky such as horseback riding, a 5K or helping out in a plant for a corporate social responsibility (CSR) project. These waivers act in two ways to help planners: First, they can serve as a deterrent to attendees suing the planner/company if the attendee does get hurt. Second, they do carry weight in court if an attendee does sue — but only if the waiver is detailed, well documented and clearly spells out exactly what the risks inherent in the activity would be.”

Avoid Copyright Infringement

Some legal pitfalls are not about illness or injury but can still cause planners a world of trouble if ignored. One of those is making sure you’re not infringing on copyrights or trademarks during the meeting. Taking photographs of attendees or taking video of presenter sessions for use on your organization’s website, for example, are problematic if the right precautions aren’t taken.

“These can be a copyright and/or trademark violation,” Hilliard notes. “If planners want to photograph or provide videos of a presenter while presenting,

they need to include that information in the speaker contract so that, when signed by the speaker, it grants permission for the specific use(s) of the images or videography captured. However, copyrights are a bundle of rights, not a single right. So it’s important for a planner to remember that if a speaker grants permission for a single copyright use, such as use of slides, that doesn’t grant all copyrights, such as video. Likewise, there should be a notice on the registration form for any meeting that says photos are going to be taken and that attendees are agreeing to allow their likeness to be used on the group’s website, mar-

“Partner with suppliers you know and prepare for the unexpected during every step of the planning process.”



Rebecca Wright, CIS, CITP
Director, Account Operations
Creative Group, Inc.
Schaumburg, IL

keting materials and so on. All efforts should be used to avoid getting non-attendees in the photos.”

Music at an event is also a potential issue. “You have the right to use copyrighted music — but only if you get the proper licensing,” Howe says. The three main organizations holding music copyrights are The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) and Society of European Stage Authors and Composers (SESAC). Sometimes you have to get licenses and permissions from more than one, so due diligence is the best practice here, too.”

Planner Insights

Rebecca Wright, CIS, CITP, director, account operations, with Creative Group, Inc. and member of SITE’s international board of directors, lists the top three things she thinks are critical to

minimizing risk outside of hotel contracts.

- Proactively put measures in place to be able to quickly respond if the unexpected occurs.
- Request that attendees accept a general liability waiver during the event registration process.
- Attempt to partner with suppliers with whom you have worked and that meet your standards for insurance and liability.

Following up on those, Wright addresses the specific steps her company takes in specific situations.

In terms of choosing a transportation company to move attendees from one place to another, she says, “We’re selective of our supplier partners, ensuring that they meet our insurance standards. In addition, we have limitation of liability clauses in our client and supplier contracts.”

Wright’s group also includes addendums for non-hotel supplier contracts that address serving alcohol at functions as well as potential health issues at offsite venues.

The alcohol addendum “addresses liquor liability, and that supplier will be responsible for following local laws regarding liquor service, will not serve anyone under 21, and will not serve anyone noticeably intoxicated,” she says.

“We also include an addendum for non-hotel supplier contracts that addresses safety code compliance related to food, including health inspections for the kitchen. In addition, during the planning process, we gather information and outline the required protocol if a health issue occurs during program execution.”

For Wright, much of it comes down to due diligence and putting protocols in place well before the conference. “Creative Group, Inc. employs a three-pronged approach to duty of care for our clients and program participants. This approach includes preventative,



Attendees who are bold and choose to participate in risky activities should be required to sign a liability waiver.

active and post planning methods to respond to potential or active threats to the safety of our attendees.”

Preventative actions, for example, include, “The gathering of emergency protocols and information from our local suppliers and host properties. This information is provided to the onsite team of all managed programs prior to operation for reference or use in the event of a crisis. Onsite, the management team will identify/confirm whereabouts; determine risk; and coordinate the communication between the onsite authorities, client and Creative Group senior leadership. And post-conference there is detailed incident reporting, coordination of external communications with senior leadership and, if necessary, we arrange for post-incident resources for affected individuals.”

In terms of specific potential problems, Wright is well prepared. “We have protocols in place for onsite response in the event of an attendee accident. Accidents that occur are documented and the details forwarded to our attorneys and insurance providers.”

There’s an action plan to deal with stolen property, too. “During the planning process, we gather information and outline the protocol required if property is stolen at a venue. And onsite staff has heightened awareness to property that’s left unattended.”

Use Waivers for Risky Activities

If attendees are engaging in any risky activity, there are waivers. “Attendees are asked to sign a liability waiver when participating in an



Credit: Hosts Las Vegas

Travel comes with inherent risks. Experts advise planners to do rigorous driver background checks and ensure transportation companies have proper insurance.

activity with some inherent risk. Additionally, they may be asked to sign a similar waiver by the DMC or CSR supplier. For activities we think are too high risk for attendees but the host company still wants to offer, we ask the company to sign a waiver holding us harmless."

Wright's best advice for other planners is, "Partner with suppliers you know and prepare for the unexpected during every step of the planning process."

One way for planners to take some worry out of finding the highest quality, most reliable local suppliers is to

areas of the meeting. That said, "We also understand that sometimes the best planning of risk avoidance is not exempt from incidents happening and how we handle those incidents is critically important. Part of our principles include all of our DMCs to have an emergency preparedness plan for our groups. Proactive procedures and communication planning can help

minimize impact when it matters most."

When it comes to transportation, Jones lays out appropriate steps. "When moving attendees from one venue to another, it's important to check the levels of insurance with the transportation companies, ask what type of driver background checks are done, how and how frequently are drivers trained and find out the age and regular maintenance schedule of the fleet. All transportation companies should have full emergency plans in place."

As for serving alcohol, Jones notes,

"It's important to make sure bartender and server ratios are within recommended guidelines. This allows for more eyes on guest consumption and prevents over-serving. Having adequate and substantial food at



Joshua Jones, DMCP
Regional President
Hosts Las Vegas, Hosts Seattle and Hosts Southern California
Las Vegas, NV

work with a DMC. DMCs know the local area and they know the top vendors and venues. As Joshua Jones, DMCP, regional president, Hosts Las Vegas, Hosts Seattle and Hosts Southern California, notes, "One of the most important reasons to work with a DMC is that we are risk mitigators."

However, he adds, planners need to engage in open, honest conversations with DMCs regarding potential risks in all

the event as well as coffee, tea and other non-alcoholic options is imperative."

While working with trusted caterers and venues with solid reputations and practices doesn't categorically prevent such issues as food poisoning, it does minimize risk. Additionally, Jones says, "Tracking the time food is out for consumption, staggering food and choosing items that hold up better than others are all things that can be done to help reduce the risk of food issues."

Accidents Happen

Attendee accidents can and do happen, and it's the response that matters.

Jones says having a field staff onsite helps. "This adds another layer to risk mitigation. Field staff are trained on how to handle incidents as well as emergency preparedness. They're also briefed on how to work with the venue or activity to ensure medical response is called if necessary, processes are being followed and reports and photos are recorded."

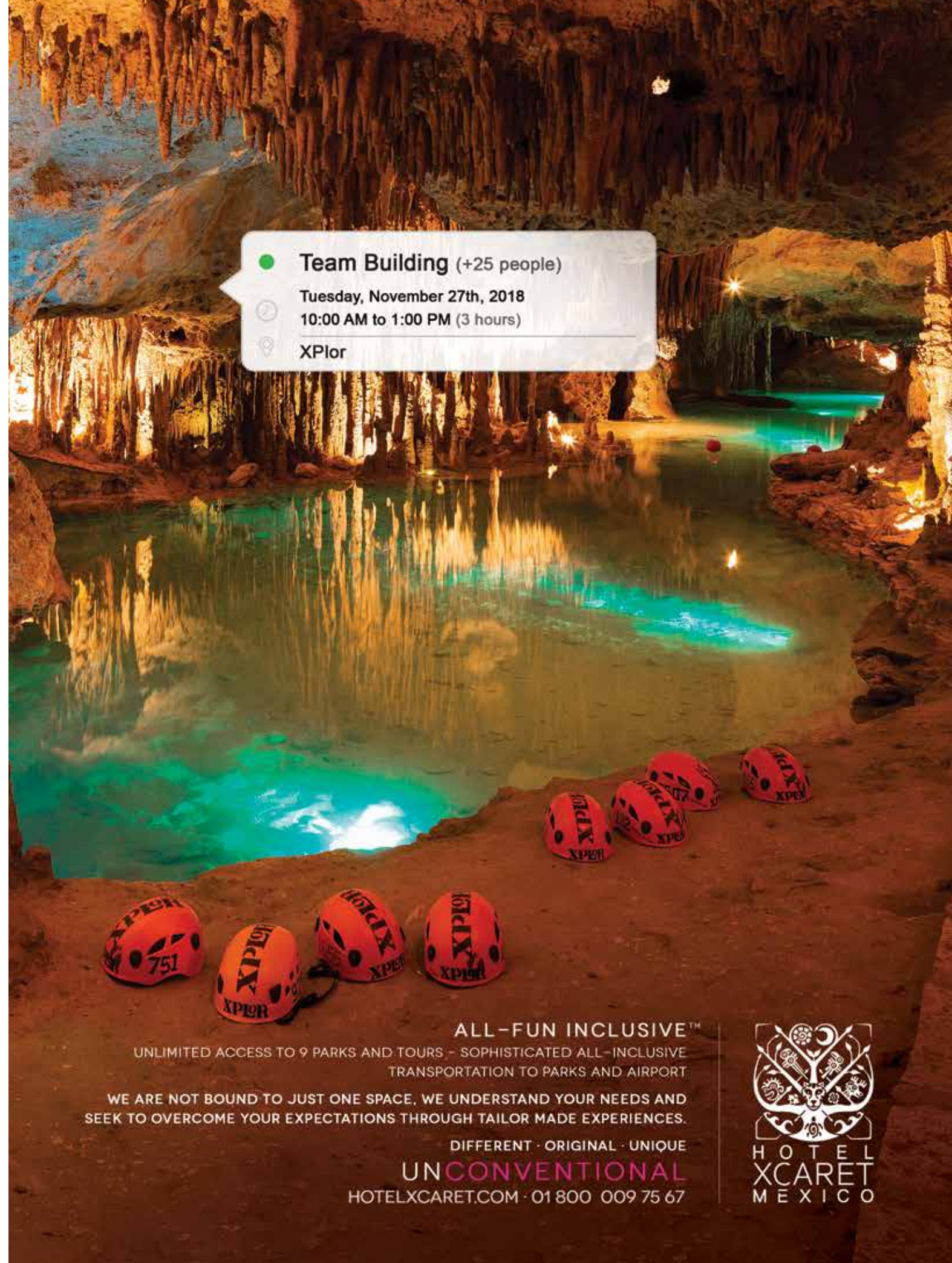
Can you over communicate when it comes to attendees watching their property? Probably not.

"It's important to over communicate to attendees that items should not be left unattended," Jones advises. "In addition, hiring proper, well-vetted security can help deter potential criminals, and doing a sweep of rooms, vehicles and venues after attendees have departed is also a good practice to avoid guests' personal items going missing."

Like our other experts, Jones thinks due diligence is critical. "We invest a lot of time and resources in the vetting and training of suppliers to reduce risk. We start with a dive into the basics: insurance levels, types of coverage, who is covered, financial strength, etc. We also look into internal policies and training they provide to their teams; are they aligned with the service levels and execution we have? In many cases we work with partners to go through our own training to ensure delivery of the types of experiences our clients expect. Internally, we provide extensive quarterly training for internal teams and field coordinators."

Not surprisingly, Jones believes in the value DMCs bring to the table in terms of risk management. "They've already done the work for you. As local experts, they have properly vetted each supplier. They know a supplier's service level, have identified potential risks and verified insurance coverage. They know their history in the city and genuinely care about your program and attendee experience."

All of that is true, and the reason many planners work with DMCs. But as our legal experts know, planners still should perform due diligence as necessary for every single program. Managing risk should be a priority with every single program as a best practice. **C&IT**



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RETURN ENGAGEMENTS

Why Do Some Destinations Create a Sense of Place That Repeatedly Attracts Planners and Attendees?

By Beth D'Addono

What better way for a group to connect with the culture of a legacy destination than to give a *passé* product a jazz funeral?

The meeting place, of course, is New Orleans, a city that's been celebrating its dead for close to 300 years. The group, a pharma company that's a regular in the Big Easy, relied on Bethany Lemanski, owner and creative designer of Gwendolyn Events, to give the product a proper send off.

"The culture in New Orleans is something that draws groups again and again," she said. "Our job is to make a bridge between the city's vibrant art, music and history scene and our corporate groups in ways that constantly surprise them."

Legacy denotes staying power, a sense of place that goes beyond a generic hotel ballroom and convention center setting; a venue or destination that planners know to which they can return again and again for a successful event. Harnessing that energy in an era of digital connections gives the

meetings industry the opportunity to connect on many levels: intellectually with the topic of discussion, personally with the local culture and fellow attendees and emotionally with the experience that energizes the meeting in memorable ways.

Why Planners Choose One Destination Over Another

When planning meetings for large liquid asphalt producers that make up the Asphalt Institute out of Lexington, KY, Natasha Pedigo, CMP, is charged with wowing as many as 1,000 attendees a year. The Asphalt Institute is the international trade association of petroleum asphalt producers, manufacturers and affiliated businesses. Pedigo, who brings 15 years of meeting planning experience to the task, has a definite checklist when it comes to giving one destination her business.

"We do have a small international contingency and a few partnerships in Europe," she said of the companies that

New Orleans, with its unique history and culture, is often a destination planners select repeatedly to host events because there is so much to see and do.

make up all aspects of liquid asphalt manufacturing. "We look for cities that have airlift for international visitors and are a reasonable distance to and from the airport, which is another consideration." Naturally she wants to lock in destinations that are intriguing to the attendees. "A legacy city is a place where they'll see things they wouldn't see at home."



As for hotels, she likes the idea of the group being the big fish, not getting lost in a large convention hotel juggling multiple conferences. "We don't want to feel like a number," she said. "We like to feel that we own the place; that both the destination and the hotel embraces us."

A destination may tick some of the boxes, but the hotel has to close the deal,

she added. "We have to have a lobby bar that is ready for us to be there in droves," she said. "That spot is essentially our fifth meeting room, the place where so many connections happen. That networking is critical to our attendees, who genuinely like each other and want to connect."

December's meeting found the group at a hotel that didn't take her heeding

seriously — resulting in an understaffed lobby bar with harried employees running out of drinks. "We won't be going there again," Pedigo says.

On the other hand, as part of the Asphalt Institute's 100th birthday celebration this year, she's once again turning to the Hilton Lexington/Downtown, which is connected both to the

Rupp Arena and the Lexington Convention Center. Lexington, like New Orleans, is a legacy destination for her. The hotel's Bigg Blue Martini is a stellar lounge; a lively spot that creates a welcoming gathering area for meeting attendees to network.

When dealing with her corporate groups, what deeper appeal a destination offers besides the nuts and bolts of programming is always front of mind, Anna Visconti Peagler says. Peagler, who recently parlayed a career managing meetings for a large Pennsylvania-based bank and the University of Pittsburgh into her own business, Black Angus Corporate Meeting Planners, knows from experience that destinations that deliver beyond the usual guarantee better meeting attendance.



Planners agree that a legacy destination must deliver "beyond the usual" events or venues. New Orleans meets that standard because attendees connect with the city emotionally.

Lemanski agrees, adding that return on investment plays a big role.

"Every meeting planner weighs the basics — the costs of hotel rooms, food and transportation vs. the experience the attendee is going to have. What will the ROI be?" Lemanski asks. "We have it pretty good here in New Orleans because we have so much to offer. Everything is close and walkable, which helps. We can not only save on transportation, but we can move our attendees in a second line parade, from the hotel to the dinner venue, complete with a police escort and a brass band. It's a comparable investment but the difference between a parade and a bus ride is a no brainer."

Delivering New Orleans culture can come in myriad ways, from serving hot beignets at the coffee break to kicking off an early morning general session with a 15-person gospel choir, Lemanski added. "That always gets everybody wide awake. New Orleans makes it easy for planners to get to wow."

Finding the Elements That Create a Lasting Experience

A destination and meeting that connects on an emotional level to an attendee is what will long resonate, Lemanski says. "New Orleans is able to hit all of the senses: hearing, sight, taste, smell and touch. Our great food is a given, and there is the amazing music,

of course. Then there's something to see like the Mardi Gras Indians — so colorful and culturally interesting — most people have no idea they even exist."

One important thing attendees appreciate is familiarity after a day of traveling. "Our attendees travel a lot," Pedigo says. "Giving them a sense of place is critical. In many hotels, for example, you could be in any city in America. For instance, in New Orleans, many hotels seem to have a passion for using local artists, not just generic art. If you're traveling three weeks in a row, it's great to know where you are when you wake up."

Incorporating a city's food specialties into the hotel's buffets is another important aspect, Pedigo says. "In Minneapolis, we want to serve a Jucy Lucy, the legendary cheese-stuffed burger. You can only have chicken piccata so many times. If members don't connect to the food in the meeting experience, they'll skip functions and find it elsewhere."

Food is a critical part of the experience, agrees Peagler. "Because it reflects the culture of a city. 'I've had a great experience in Toronto in that regard. They did a super job bringing Canadian culture, food, local speakers and entertainment into the programming."

Working closely with the local CVB is always a boon, Peagler says. "Although I always do site inspections and research in advance, the CVBs can really add that

insider info into the mix. Finding the hidden gems, the unexpected places and experiences, can really make a big impression."

Offsite programming can deepen the attendee's experience in many ways. Pedigo, who likes to incorporate offsite venues into smaller meetings for manageability, agrees that moving the group away from the hotel is always a big hit. "In Boston, we took them to a Red Sox game," she says.

Pedigo has learned over the years that while entertainment can be an important aspect of an offsite conference event, not everything works. For example, they don't always want to schedule a trip to a comedy show. "If the attendees genuinely like each other and want to visit with each other, we want to provide a space that allows them to talk while still soaking in some of the local culture."

In New York, for instance, she brought in some students from The Juilliard School to play classical music during dinner. It was a big hit. "The idea is to find what in a city you can't do anywhere else," Pedigo says.

Offsite experiences in New Orleans run a wild gamut, Lemanski says. "In less than an hour we can be on a bayou having a crawfish boil, the attendees can hold a baby alligator and listen and dance to a Cajun band. In and around

the city, there's Mardi Gras World, where attendees make masks on a Mardi Gras float on the river front. A Mississippi river cruise can evoke the days of Mark Twain, with jazz music and local cuisine part of the experience."

The renovation and revival of a handful of historic downtown theaters, including the Saenger Theatre, the Joy Theater and the Orpheum Theater, has expanded the offsite playing field. "These are beautiful historic buildings with tons of detail and stories. Add an old-style jazz band and characters in costume and you can really give attendees an enjoyable time."

Lemanski has had great success using cultural experiences to punch home a conference theme. One example is the jazz funeral for a product that's on its way out. "For a group that's trying something new, or launching a new product, we can do a voodoo blessing of positivity. That involves using the elements of earth, fire, sky and water to bless the new product. The ceremony always makes a huge impression."

Tapping Into Legacy to Create a Memorable Meeting

A legacy meeting delivers on all of these counts and so much more, says Pedigo, who associates the word legacy with longevity.

"I've seen so many meetings and



The Orpheum Theater is a great way for attendees to appreciate the history and culture of New Orleans. The venue can host live music, private parties, corporate meetings and more.



Anna Visconti Peagler
CEO, Corporate Meeting Planner
Black Angus Corporate Meeting Planners
Latrobe, PA

"Although I always do site inspections and research in advance, the CVBs can really add that insider info into the mix. Finding the hidden gems, the unexpected places and experiences, can really make a big impression."

events come and go with literally no footprint or staying power left behind," she says. As the Asphalt Institute this year is celebrating its 100th anniversary, that adds both a fourth meeting and the importance of the group's own legacy into the mix. "Part of our legacy is to really listen and pay attention to what our companies want. Our records go back to 1986, which is a lot of back story. We don't want to have meetings just for meeting's sake. We aren't just checking a box."

They held the meeting in New York to celebrate the organization's manufacturing past, and upcoming centennial meetings include Chicago in August for a celebration of the organization's present; a homecoming meeting planned in October at the Hilton Lexington/Downtown, their founding city; and finally San Diego in December, where the group's future will be the theme.

Although legacy denotes a history,



Bethany Lemanski
Owner, Creative Designer
Gwendolyn Events
New Orleans, LA

"The culture in New Orleans is something that draws groups again and again. Our job is to make a bridge between the city's vibrant art, music and history scene and our corporate groups in ways that constantly surprise them."



Natasha Pedigo, CMP
Meeting Planner and Event Manager
Asphalt Institute
Lexington, KY

"I've seen so many meetings and events come and go with literally no footprint or staying power left behind. Part of our legacy is to really listen and pay attention to what our companies want. We don't want to have meetings just for meeting's sake."

it isn't something that ossifies, Pedigo says. "We have to listen, to pay attention and change as needed to stay nimble within that legacy. The whole 'same as last year' doesn't fly with me. That's when you get stagnant."

The companies that make up the Asphalt Institute are themselves concerned with legacy, as many of them are multigenerational. "What might have been important to the first and second generation doesn't matter as much to the third or fourth. We have to be open to that and continue to serve as change occurs."

For some of Peagler's groups, leaving a bit of themselves behind is a way to extend that sense of legacy. "They get involved in some kind of charitable community work that really touches the locals," Peagler says. "We bring so much revenue along with our meeting, but this is a way to stretch that in a slightly different direction than in just hospitality."

While there are elements of a meeting that Peagler can't control — the quality of speakers and educational programming, for example — wrangling the bits she can influence is full-on her job. "I'm here to make everybody's job easier, and handle any issues that come up seamlessly, behind the scenes. I want the destination to really shine and make that lasting impression."

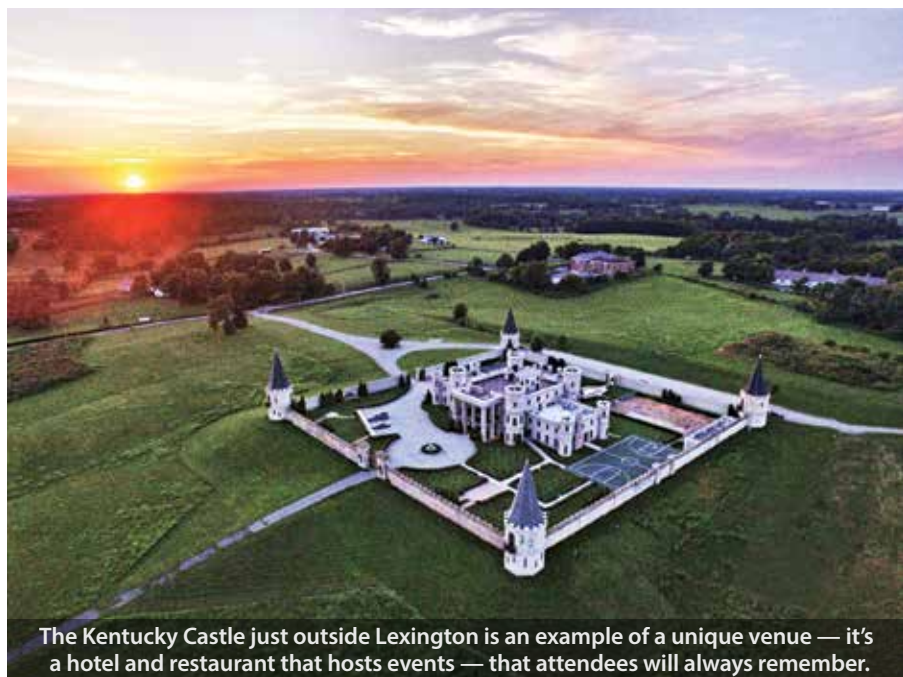


The Sienna Mercato Restaurant's rooftop bar, Il Tetto, in Pittsburgh is an example of a venue that will leave a lasting impression.

New Orleans, which just celebrated its 300th birthday in 2018, is certainly an example of a legacy destination with staying power, Lemanski says. "Our history stems from a gumbo of nationalities and influences that has created a unique and particular culture. And the city still continues to develop and grow."

The ability of a destination to charm and surprise attendees makes the difference between a same-old meeting and one that invites attendees to ruminate on their experiences and be eager to return.

"New Orleans is always surprising attendees," Peagler says. "That memorable moment might happen as soon as you get in the cab from the airport. People are so friendly here. The driver might start talking about his day, telling you about his favorite restaurants or bars; sharing stories about his life." She continues, "Your New Orleans experience may have already started before you even get to the hotel. It's that genuine interaction — with hospitality staff, locals, shop owners — that will stick in the minds of the meeting attendees. Every time they come to New Orleans, it's a different experience. Which makes them want to extend, stay longer, or bring the family in for the weekend. That's a win-win for everybody." **C&T**



The Kentucky Castle just outside Lexington is an example of a unique venue — it's a hotel and restaurant that hosts events — that attendees will always remember.



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Destination Management Companies



Beach events are fun, but there's a lot of planning involved. A local DMC can ensure things run smoothly.

Credit: 360 Destination Group

Partners in Planning

Work With a DMC to Get Things Done Right

By Maura Keller

As most experienced planners will agree, destination management companies are destination experts and far-sighted professionals who gather meeting planners' visions and help pull the threads of an event together by providing creative solutions and event design concepts that truly "wow." As Jennifer Patino, DMCP, CEO of Hosts Global explains, DMCs provide risk mitigation using trusted suppliers, venues and relationships to deliver a safe, effective plan for clients. Each program is developed with not only creative strategies in mind but also a sound logistical plan and attention to the potential what ifs — weather or other business disruptors — that could impact the outcome of a program's success. While rarely needing to employ "Plan B," the job of DMCs is to consider many factors to ensure they are proactively planning to execute seamlessly for clients.

"For planners, using a DMC is like having their own trusted VIP concierge," says Catherine Chaulet, president of Global DMC Partners. "DMCs have a wealth of local connections to make sure attendees will experience the most exclusive activities their destination has to offer," Chaulet says. "They know best how to showcase their destination and local culture to attendees, elevating the program for a truly authentic experience."

Dan Tavrytzky, managing director of DMC Network, agrees that DMCs are an educated connection to a destination. Essentially they are the experts in the cities in which they live and work.

"In the DMC Network, we like to say that our partner DMCs are the mayors of their towns," Tavrytzky says. "They know all of the key vendors, local hot and cold spots, key stakeholders and how to bring out the best in their destination to match the needs and budget of their client."

As such, a DMC should be viewed as an event or meeting partner, creating a vision for a program in tandem with the client — namely a meeting or event planner.

The value of a DMC is often best told by painting a picture. The Japanese DMC partner of Global DMC Partners recently managed an incentive program in Tokyo and Kyoto for 55 attendees from Brazil. As Chaulet explains, the planning of this incentive group was particularly challenging, especially where dining and gala dinner venues were concerned.

"Japan is known to have a very rigid structure in place with traditionally early closing times for restaurants and gala venues," Chaulet says. "The Japanese tend to eat dinner early — between 6 and 8 p.m. — and the planner wanted to offer dinners starting later in the evening at around 9 or so, which is more typical in Latin America." Destination

Asia, a Global DMC Partner, not only worked closely with their connections at all the local restaurants to ensure the client's specific needs and timing could be met, but also sourced a traditional Japanese gala venue in Kyoto that was able to cater to a group wanting to party past midnight with traditional Japanese drumming as entertainment.

"In the end, our experienced DMC partner was able to deliver the incentive just as the client desired," Chaulet says. "And the guests left Japan with a glowing impression of what the country has to offer."

As DMCs aren't membership-based, they offer a complete, unbiased view of the market. Joe Fijol, managing partner, Florida, 360 Destination Group, explains that this comprehensive knowledge and experience enables them to give planners insight into the pros and cons of all the options based on their goals and needs.

"A good DMC will tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear," Fijol says. "DMCs have their finger on the pulse of what's new in the market and the experience and working knowledge of the details and logistics that can make or break a program. A good DMC knows how to make the walls disappear between a meeting planner's office and theirs, providing transparency and serving as a seamless extension of the meeting or event planner's team."

Jeff Nelke, DMCP, partner — South Florida at ACCESS Destination Services, stresses that meeting and event planners could use more hours in a day and more hands to do the heavy lifting come meeting operation time. That's where DMCs come in.

"DMCs offer planners a resource to expand their teams and local expertise needed to help pull that proverbial rabbit out of the hat," Nelke says. "This can be accomplished via a myriad of services DMCs offer. The goal is always to add great efficiencies to the process."

Imagine being in an unfamiliar, new destination where something goes wrong with

your group. Or worse, imagine having to take an attendee to visit a doctor who does not speak your language. As Chaulet explains, common situations like these are when it's crucial to have a DMC as a local partner. "Safety and security are top of mind for all DMCs," Chaulet says. "They have local resources at hand to help put together the strongest contingency plans and be ready to take care of any emergency — big or small."

Strategies to Take

Like any product or service purchase, doing your homework, asking for referrals and conducting research will give meeting planners the confidence to know they made the right choice in a DMC. The DMC world is proud to have an industry association — Association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI) — that supports and promotes the professional aspects of the work of DMCs and provides an accreditation that recognizes DMCs. This recognition means the designated DMCs have gone through the educational rigors and work history to show that they are professional and experienced experts in their field with staff who have a Destination Management Certified Professional certification (DMCP).

"These credentials certainly convey that a DMC is dedicated to its profession and craft and not just working from a kitchen table with a glitzy website," Tavrytzky says.

Patino agrees. "Looking for an accredited DMC allows you to know that you're working with a vetted DMC. Look for those companies that have

"In the DMC Network, we like to say that our partner DMCs are the mayors of their towns.

They know all of the key vendors, local hot and cold spots, key stakeholders and how to bring out the best in their destination to match the needs and budget of their client."



Dan Tavrytzky
Managing Director
DMC Network
Phoenix, AZ

singular focus around their respective destinations with staff possessing certifications such as DMCP, CMP or other such certifications that attest to ongoing education," Patino says. A planner will be best served in finding a DMC that is client focused — demonstrating the necessary knowledge to deliver on expectations.

"Clients are particularly interested in working with an organization that focuses on account management, allowing each current and future destination to build upon the value of shared experiences and allows fluid engagement," Patino says.

When establishing a potential relationship with a DMC, there are some key questions meeting planners need to ask, including requesting referrals and samples of past work, which will support the current proposal under review. Tavrytzky also advises meeting planners to ask an official at the DMC



"In the end, our experienced DMC partner was able to deliver the incentive just as the client desired. And the guests left Japan with a glowing impression of what the country has to offer."

Catherine Chaulet, President
Global DMC Partners, Washington, DC

about its history, industry involvement, community engagement, insurance levels, accreditations and awards.

"This will also help paint a picture for the type of organization you will be hiring to execute your vision as it's important that a rapport and trust are created to have a successful working relationship," Tavrytzky says. "There's also value in being part of a larger organization that further supports the DMC's mission and value."

Chaulet says the questions every planner needs to ask include: How is the DMC structured to be able to operate their program and manage the program until it operates? Can the DMC provide client and vendor references along with insurance certificates? Is the DMC part of a larger DMC network to have additional backing and support?

Additionally, working with a network such as Global DMC Partners, which has over 65 elite DMCs in over 500 locations, will ensure that a planner is working with the best DMCs in each market.

"Before they become a member, each

"A good DMC knows how to make the walls disappear between a meeting planner's office and theirs, providing transparency and serving as a seamless extension of the meeting or event planner's team."



Joe Fijol
Managing Partner, Florida
360 Destination Group
Hollywood, FL

of our DMC partners goes through an extensive vetting process to ensure they are financially sound, well-established, highly recommended and the most creative DMC in their market," Chaulet says. Chaulet and her team go through the entire process of reviewing their insurance certificates,



A group enjoys an event in Panama. A good DMC has connections in destinations around the world, allowing locals to best showcase their destination and culture to attendees.

organizational structure and policies, proposal templates, client and vendor references and their membership in industry organizations.

"It is extremely time-consuming to assess DMCs on your own, so part of our value is that we take that first step — the DMC vetting process — off the planner's hands so they can focus on other important aspects of their meeting or event," Chaulet says.

Determining if a DMC has related experience either within a specific industry or the type of event or meeting being held also is paramount. "Find out if the DMC will be operating other programs or have commitments during that time, as that can impact how a meeting is managed," Fijol says. "Also confirm they have an office in the designated market as that is an indicator of the depth of their relationships and knowledge."

Be sure to also review a DMC's staffing plan for a meeting or event program. "Unfortunately sometimes planners get sold the dream and delivered the nightmare, so taking time to ensure sufficient operations support is critical," Fijol says.

After selecting a DMC, a meeting planner should have clear and

transparent goals and shared budgets, both of which are vital for a successful program creation.

"Understanding the parameters of past program successes and failures will help to frame the work to be done and clarify the expected outcomes," Tavrytzky says. "Also, open, honest and timely communication is key for both the planner and the DMC. Like any relationship, the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it. A great client and DMC relationship is the opposite of transactional — it's collaborative."

Fijol also recommends establishing a communication structure that includes regular check-ins to review important information and deadlines at each stage.

"Often a DMC will offer to travel to a planner's office for a planning day, which is a great way to kick off the partnership and make them an extension of the meeting planner's team," Fijol says.

Also be sure to plan at the onset for the worst-case scenario. In doing so, the DMC should review all the potential things that could go wrong — weather, public health issues, or a government shutdown — and be equipped with processes and insurances to make sure the meeting and event is covered.

"Luck favors the prepared, and DMCs have firsthand experience should a

"DMCs offer planners a resource to expand their teams and local expertise needed to help pull that proverbial rabbit out of the hat. This can be accomplished via a myriad of services DMCs offer. The goal is always to add great efficiencies to the process."



Jeff Nelke, DMCP, Partner – South Florida
ACCESS Destination Services, Hollywood, FL

planner be faced with a challenge or obstacle they can't control," Fijol says.

Once you select your DMC partner, one key way to get the most from the partnership is a "deep dive" conversation. As Nelke explains, this entails exploring a planner's needs and meeting goals to assure alignment and prevent overstep. An example of this might be determining who is pulling a special event permit and managing the local regulatory obligations.

Patino and her team at Hosts Global have found that the smoothest and most effective relationships begin with adequate time allocated to discovery about the breadth of a meeting's needs and goals as well as learning more about the various stakeholders for the client's meetings.

"A proper intake question-and-answer session between the DMC and client allows the DMC to uncover pain points and opportunities to become a valued resource for the planner," Patino

"A proper intake question-and-answer session between the DMC and client allows the DMC to uncover pain points and opportunities to become a valued resource for the planner."



Jennifer Patino, DMCP
CEO
Hosts Global
Las Vegas, NV

says. "Understanding how the client will measure success for any program allows a proactive approach to the proposed services."

Mistakes to Avoid

A DMC selection should be viewed similar to hiring an employee. As Fijol explains, DMCs work best with clients when the shared goal is to develop a long-term partnership.

"Treating a DMC like a vendor is short sighted and a planner will limit their team as they won't achieve the benefits and efficiency that a deeper, trusted relationship can offer," Fijol says.

One of the key mistakes meeting planners make when working with DMCs is offering minimal communication. "Clients who can openly communicate and share information in a timely fashion will be better positioned to get the full value and partnership from their chosen DMC," Tavrytzky says.

Some planners also may not share the appropriate amount of information with the DMC, specifically around program budget, history and expectations. As Chaulet explains, attempting to get the best price by not sharing the budget or pushing too hard to bring the costs down can cause the planner to lose sight of the end result and the most important part of the program — the attendee experience.

"A DMC can provide exceptional options for a whole range of budget needs, but without any idea of the budget up front, the DMC doesn't have

any direction on how best to meet a planner's needs," Chaulet says. If there isn't a specific budget, giving a range, or a couple of ranges is fine so a planner can see the different options at different price points. Ultimately, a DMC needs to know if they are working with a \$5,000 budget or a \$40,000 budget

to know what options to propose so that they don't get turned away prematurely with the planner thinking they are just too expensive.

Additionally, Chaulet stresses that sharing the program's history is just as crucial. "Being too vague or using general statements around needing something new and creative isn't enough," Chaulet says. Planners must share past experiences, videos, pictures of the program, and how it was operated in the past so the DMC has a clear direction of what kind of elements the planner is looking to incorporate.

"What is new and creative to one client might be old and tired to someone else, so clearly outlining expectations is essential," Chaulet says.

Underutilization also is one of the largest missed opportunities of working with a DMC. "Maximizing each other's resources to come together under a common meeting goal can be the difference between a good and 'wow' meeting," Nelke says.

The future looks promising for solid relationships between corporate meeting planners and DMCs. As such, Patino expects the role of DMCs to continue to grow and thrive in the meetings planning industry, especially for those that pursue best-practice development, ongoing education and a client centric approach.

"Good DMCs remain an essential extension and resource to planners," Patino says. "The sheer number of hours it would require for a planner to conduct a thorough vetting of all local services and goods, establish the logistical plan and provide the proper team to execute on the vision of the program validates the value of a great DMC partner." **C&IT**

Las Vegas **Vibe**

Planners Know This Destination Always Delivers What Their Attendees Want

By Maura Keller

When Chris King, meeting planner and president of Focus Incentives, a meeting, incentive and group travel management company, looks for a meeting or event location that offers the best of everything, he often considers the Las Vegas and Reno areas. Here's why: "Las Vegas and Reno offer everything that a meeting planner needs to create a successful event," King says. "From outstanding hotels, resorts and meeting venues to unmatched entertainment options and recreational activities, Las Vegas and Reno provide easy-to-reach destinations that attendees appreciate."



Credit: alisha/Depositphotos.com

Excellent Values

Recently King turned to Treasure Island Hotel & Casino for a corporate meeting that met King's parameters and budget expectations. "Treasure Island provides an excellent value compared to similar Las Vegas resorts," King says. "The resort's location cannot be beat. The experienced events team at Treasure Island made our group feel at home. Many of the employees are longtime Treasure Island team members and they care about the success of the events they manage."

Treasure Island recently completed a full remodel and expansion to its meetings and event space as well as several luxury and premier guest suites. In addition, all 2,664 deluxe rooms as well as the 120 petite, 55 tower and 19 executive suites are currently undergoing a multimillion-dollar renovation scheduled to be completed over the next several months. Any attendee would also be inspired by the newest Antilles Ballroom space, which features natural lighting from the optional tropical pool view with panoramic two-way mirrored glass doors. For those who host or attend a meeting or convention at Treasure Island, customized banquet menus also are available, including regionally sourced options.

As Jennifer Guevarra, vice president of business development and sales at MEET Las Vegas explains, Las Vegas is the ideal city to host corporate meetings and events as the city offers a vast array of activities, diversified dining options and entertainment.

"Meeting planners have more access to celebrity performances, world-renowned chefs, as well as indoor and outdoor activities," Guevarra says. "This accessibility along the Las Vegas Strip takes away from many of the logistical challenges of transportation either for the celebrity or the attendees. The diversification of restaurants within the city allows both planners and attendees a vast amount of options for every palate."

Parker Meeks, president of infrastructure at TRC Companies, Inc. orchestrated a leadership strategy offsite meeting for the organization's top-25 leaders at ARIA Resort & Casino. "I was familiar with ARIA and knew it was a great location in the middle of the Strip," Meeks says. "It is a nice property with all the meeting and conference amenities to provide all of our needs with a high-end feel."

ARIA is one of MGM Resorts International's venues within the Las Vegas area. MGM's vision to grow the convention market within Las Vegas has resulted in MGM Grand's \$130 million, 250,000-sf expansion. With this expansion, MGM Resorts now offers a total of 4 million sf of leading meeting and

"From outstanding hotels, resorts and meeting venues to unmatched entertainment options and recreational activities, Las Vegas and Reno provide easy-to-reach destinations that attendees appreciate."

Chris King, President, Meeting Planner
Focus Incentives
High Point, NC



convention space within a 2-mile stretch on the Las Vegas Strip. That's more than all the convention space in Manhattan combined. MGM Grand's expansion comes on the heels of expansions at sister properties Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino Las Vegas, ARIA and Park MGM.

Meeks recognizes that Las Vegas offers an easy location for direct flights from across the country. "Our leadership team is spread across both coasts," Meeks says. "There are lots of activities for social events and high-value hotel rooms for the price."

"We had 42 attendees and the constant clean up by ARIA Resort & Casino staff really made a difference in us being able to get things done."

Koren Vazquez, Meeting Planner
Full Steam Staffing
Ontario, CA



Treasure Island Hotel & Casino offers 30,500 sf of meeting space after \$8.2 million in enhancements to its upper- and lower-level spaces.

Credit: kobbydagan/Depositphotos.com

Koren Vazquez, meeting planner with Full Steam Staffing, also selected ARIA Resort & Casino for the company's 10-year anniversary conference. "We had 42 attendees and the constant clean up by ARIA staff really made a difference in us being able to get things done." ARIA recently added outdoor meeting space with its Ironwood Terrace, an 8,000-sf outdoor space connecting ARIA's East and West Convention Centers overlooking the pool complex and mountains. An ideal location for breakfast, lunch, dinner or receptions, the terrace can accommodate an intimate event for 30 or a large reception for up to 800 guests.

Changes Aplenty

The Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino Las Vegas Convention Center also recently finished an expansion, which included 350,000 sf of new exhibit space, a 20,000-sf foyer and underground parking. The Mandalay Bay Convention Center now boasts more than 2 million total sf and more than 900,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space with the ability to grow current shows and attract new corporate, association and incentive groups.

Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino is undergoing \$250 million in renovations and expansions that have touched nearly every inch of the property as it celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2019.



Bellagio Las Vegas, of MGM Resorts International, is famous for its Fountains of Bellagio. The free show has thrilled attendees for years.

In April 2016, Las Vegas added the T-Mobile Arena, a multipurpose indoor arena on the Las Vegas Strip. This venue is home for the city's Vegas Golden Knights NHL team.

"MEET Las Vegas is fortunate to be one block away from the Downtown Las Vegas Events Center, which brings concerts, music festivals and viewing parties for various events taking place at the T-Mobile Arena," Guevarra says.

Unique Venues

One unique venue that has become very popular among meeting and event planners is The Mob Museum. The

"The Mob Museum was the perfect opportunity to give them something they couldn't have done on their own. We hosted a sit-down dinner in the courtroom for 60 people complete with an ex-mob guest speaker who shared his life story."

Leora Azoulay, President
Incentives By Design, Inc.
Las Vegas, NV



New York-New York Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, another MGM Resorts International property, offers 30,500 sf of flexible meeting space.

The Westgate Las Vegas offers more than 225,000 sf of renovated convention space, 2,800 guest rooms and suites and the award-winning Serenity Spa by Westgate.

The venue's expansive convention space can accommodate any function; from intimate gatherings of 10 to groups of 6,000. The meeting space is centrally located on the ground level and offers 35 meeting/breakout rooms. They also boast more than 100,000 sf of continuous customizable meeting space including the 70,000-sf Paradise Event Center, 43,000-sf Pavilion and 35,000-sf Ballroom.

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rio

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ROADHOUSE

WSOP

TOTAL REWARDS



Credit: The Mob Museum

“This accessibility along the Las Vegas Strip takes away from many of the logistical challenges of transportation either for the celebrity or the attendees. The diversification of restaurants within the city allows both planners and attendees a vast amount of options for every palate”

Jennifer Guevarra, Vice President of Business Development and Sales
MEET Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV



The team at Incentives by Design began by sending invitations to guest’s rooms the evening before — a plush fish wrapped in newspaper with a little note that read: “If you don’t want to swim with the fishes, you’ll be in attendance for dinner tomorrow night.” Upon arrival guests explored the

museum offers truly unique spaces of various sizes. Guests can attend a classroom-style training in the Oscar B. Goodman Room, enjoy an elegant dinner in the Historic Courtroom or hold a Roaring ‘20s-themed reception in the Distillery. During events guests are also encouraged to explore The Mob Museum’s award-winning exhibits.

Leora Azoulay, president of Incentives by Design, Inc., recently worked with a client who comes to Las Vegas for their annual meeting.

“They invite all their top customers to attend and on the second night they host them to a special dinner event that will be memorable and out of the ordinary,” Azoulay says. “The Mob Museum was the perfect opportunity to give them something they couldn’t have done on their own. We hosted a sit-down dinner in the courtroom for 60 people complete with an ex-mob guest speaker who shared his life story. It was truly enlightening, entertaining and perhaps even a bit unnerving.”



Credit: Caesars Entertainment

Caesars FORUM, a \$375 million, 550,000-sf conference center will open in 2020. The venue is adjacent to The LINQ Promenade retail district.

museum and enjoyed the exceptional exhibits before coming into the courtroom.

“The room was set with long tables, using the existing courtroom benches for seating,” Azoulay says. “Our guest speaker, Frank Cullotta, who right hand man to Tony Spilotro in the day, entertained all and terrified some with his stories of life in the mob. When the guests returned to the hotel that night, they each had a personalized signed copy of a book written by Frank. The guests that attended the event were in awe, both because of what they learned walking through the exhibits and later from the guest speaker. Dining in the same courtroom that you now know was where the actual mob members were tried is quite a spectacular sensation. The guests will remember this event for years to come.”

The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas’ uniquely vertical design, situated on just 8.6 acres, allows for easy access to the facility’s meeting and convention space, which spans three floors of the 2,995-room resort and offering seven ballrooms ranging from 7,000 sf to 37,000 sf.

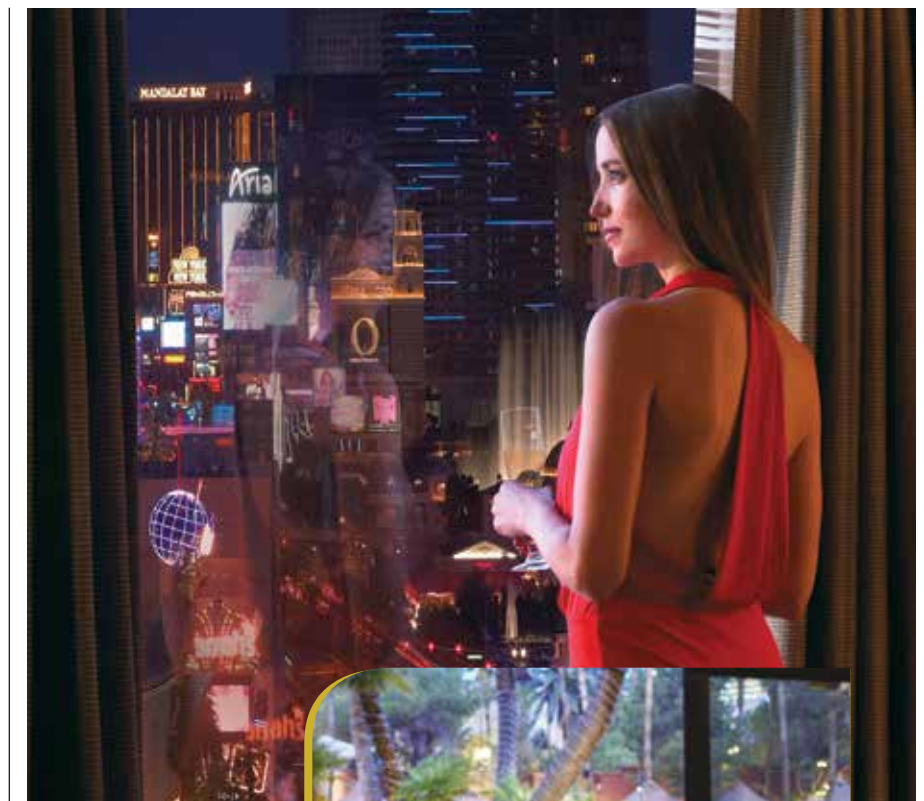
The Chelsea, the Cosmopolitan’s new 40,000-sf event and performance space, offers business, meeting and convention planners an avant-garde approach to meetings, a refreshing addition to what is currently available in Las Vegas. The unique meeting space, which can accommodate more than 3,000 people, is further complemented with stunning digital displays that create surfaces for meetings and groups to enhance the experience beyond traditional programming.

To offer a one-of-a-kind conference experience, Caesars Entertainment recently began construction of Caesars FORUM, a \$375 million, 550,000-sf conference center in Las Vegas with the two largest pillar-free ballrooms in the world that will open in 2020. Within walking distance to more than 20,000 Caesars Entertainment hotel rooms, connected to 5,000 Caesars Entertainment hotel rooms and adjacent to The LINQ Promenade retail district, this state-of-the-art facility will provide a unique option for meetings and events.

Until Caesars FORUM is complete, Caesars Palace Las Vegas Hotel & Casino also offers an amazing meeting space experience. Its 300,000 sf of meeting space is comfortably set apart from the

“ARIA Resort & Casino is a nice property with all the meeting and conference amenities to provide all of our needs with a high-end feel!”

Parker Meeks, President, Infrastructure
TRC Companies, Inc.
Houston, TX



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Credit: Peppermill Resort Spa Casino

Peppermill Resort Spa Casino boasts a two-story, 4,000-sf Executive Boardroom, which can accommodate up to 46 attendees.

casino area, yet remains within easy reach of attendees. Caesars Palace offers a large range of flexible venues with countless configuration options to suit groups of all sizes. In addition to traditional meeting venues within Caesars, the site's Colosseum boasts one of the world's largest LED screens, a perfect location for presentations that really "wow."

Reno Gems

Reno has long been a favorite destination for meeting and event planners, and Grand Sierra Resort and Casino in Reno is a go-to resort for meetings and events of all sizes. Grand Sierra's convention center provides over 200,000 sf of meeting space, along with 45 breakout rooms to meet smaller group's needs. Located a mere five minutes from the Reno airport, Grand Sierra can accommodate groups ranging from 10 to 4,000 people.

With 106,000 sf of meeting space, Peppermill Resort Spa Casino, features its newly renovated Sorrento, Naples and Capri ballrooms. In addition to offering Northern Nevada's largest clear-span meeting space, Peppermill also boasts a unique private dining room and two-story executive boardroom.

To establish strong relationships with meeting planners, Atlantis Casino Resort Spa in Reno works hard to make their jobs as easy as possible. A meeting planner who recently visited the Atlantis property commented that it took exactly eight minutes from the time they received their luggage at the Reno-Tahoe International Airport to be escorted to the hotel by Atlantis' complimentary shuttle. Atlantis is connected to the Reno-Sparks Convention Center via a glass-enclosed Sky Bridge with 550,000 sf of combined flexible meeting space available at Atlantis and the convention center.

"The decisive factor for this client choosing our hotel was how bright and spacious the meeting space is," says John R. McGinnes, executive director of sales at Atlantis. "Additionally, another huge plus was having access to all of the meeting space on the same floor and being accessible from each of the hotel's elevator banks."

Tips for Success

Recently MEET Las Vegas hosted a corporate event that not only bought out their entire building and outdoor

Pavilion, but also the adjacent parking lot next to the company. As Guevarra explains, this allowed the planner to create a "vehicle-to-event" experience where the moment they stepped out of their cars, they were immersed by the company's brand — from a welcoming entrance, to strategically sectioned off entry points and finally a sound tunnel with virtual reality effects walking into the event space.

"The flexibility of MEET Las Vegas to create a total arrival experience allows us to 'wow' attendees from the moment they arrive onsite," Guevarra says.

Las Vegas-Reno Area Benefits

Las Vegas and Reno are ideal locales for hosting and planning corporate meetings and events for several reasons. Accessibility is a big factor, because Las Vegas has direct flights from so many major hubs worldwide.

"Weather is also a key factor for meeting planners as they simply want sunshine — it's surprisingly a huge benefit for this great city and permits planners to look at group activities both indoors and outdoors year round," says Tara Russell, senior vice president of sales, catering and conference services at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. "The city of Las Vegas also still boasts a low tax rate for hotels, restaurants and retail shopping. In a small radius, we have nearly everything a planner would desire."

To make the most of their planning experience, King recommends meeting planners who have selected Las Vegas begin orchestrating their event as far in advance as possible

"The decisive factor for this client choosing Atlantis Casino Resort Spa was how bright and spacious the meeting space is. Additionally, another huge plus was having access to all of the meeting space on the same floor ..."

John R. McGinnes, Executive Director of Sales
Atlantis Casino Resort Spa
Reno, NV



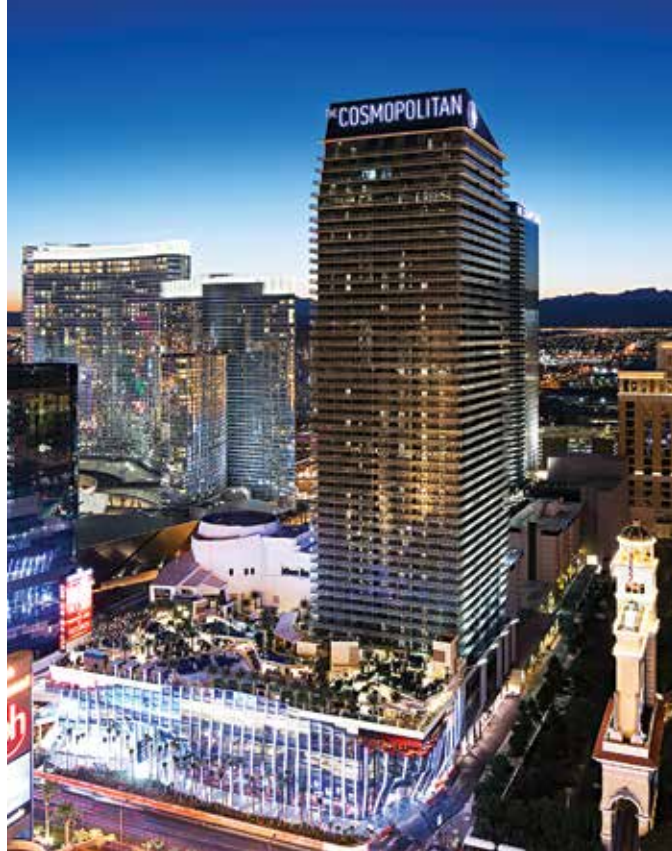
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Steve O'Malley, Michael Guerriero, and David Peckinpaugh (pictured left to right)
Maritz Global Events





Credit: The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas

“The city of Las Vegas also still boasts a low tax rate for hotels, restaurants and retail shopping. In a small radius, we have nearly everything a planner would desire.”

Tara Russell, Senior Vice President of Sales,
Catering and Conference Services
The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV



The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas offers a unique, 40,000-sf event and performance space called The Chelsea, which is split over two levels.

and avoid competing with major conventions that drive up the prices of hotels and event venues. “Las Vegas has so much to offer that it can be overwhelming when considering all of the group event options,” King says. “Experienced hotel teams and destination management companies can help planner find the best option for their group.”

Meeks also recommends meeting planners coordinate across venues by evaluating properties where possible to bundle dinners and events with meeting planning. “This

reduces the number of separate touch points to plan, including invoices, expenses, etc.,” Meeks says.

Russell says most attendees want to be where they would normally go on their free time anyway, so meeting planners should select what is best for the majority of the participants.

“Getting their ‘buy in’ before selection may also work towards your favor,” Russell says. “Giving attendees a bit of down time is also beneficial, as all work with little time to explore may hinder participation. Call out the designated free time on the agenda, so guests understand the balance between that and the scheduled activities.”

Guevarra stresses that Las Vegas is moving in a direction where the region will be the leader in entertainment, dining and event experiences. “More celebrity chefs and talent are recognizing they are able to have life balance in our city thanks to the amount of traffic that comes to the city,” Guevarra says. “With the arrival of the Las Vegas Stadium, to the all-immersive MSG Sphere, to up-and-coming hotels such as Resorts World Las Vegas and Circa in downtown, Las Vegas never ceases to push the boundaries of event demands.” Las Vegas Stadium is set to open in 2020, MSG Sphere in 2021 and Resorts World Las Vegas and Circa Resort & Casino in 2020. **C&IT**



Credit: MEET Las Vegas

MEET Las Vegas has 40,000 sf of meeting and event space, which includes its outdoor Pavilion that can accommodate up to 400 attendees, and additional space on three levels.

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On The Move



EGLOFF



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KENT



DUNN



DORNER

Teneo Hospitality Group, the premier Global Group Sales Organization, named **April Egloff** director of sales, Midwest. Egloff launched her hotel sales career in 2006 on Chicago's fabled Gold Coast at the historic Ambassador East Hotel, serving as the senior entertainment sales manager

Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts announced the appointment of **Ben Trodd** as its first senior vice president of sales and hotel marketing, consolidating hotel marketing, hotel sales and worldwide sales teams under one leader.

Explore St. Louis welcomed **Judy Kent** as the new national sales manager for Explore St. Louis. "We are confident that she will help us take Explore St. Louis to an even higher level," says John Bettag, vice president of sales for Explore St. Louis.

The Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau announced a new diversity and inclusion initiative that will be led by **Jason Dunn**, CTA, group vice president of diversity sales and inclusion.

Plantation on Crystal River selected **Laura Dorner** as new director of sales and marketing of the 196-room resort. Prior to joining Plantation on Crystal River, Dorner was a sales executive with Villages of Citrus Hills.

Naples Grande Beach Resort appointed **Melinda Hutchins** to director of sales and marketing. Prior to joining Naples Grande Beach Resort, Hutchins spent 13 years at the Trump National Doral Miami.

Doubletree Suites by Hilton Philadelphia West welcomed **Ashley Ridolfi** as director of sales and marketing. Ridolfi

brings more than 10 years of leadership experience in the hospitality industry.

The Charter Hotel Seattle, Curio Collection by Hilton, announced the appointment of **Nicole Cheramie** as director of sales and marketing. Cheramie joins with more than 15 years of experience in the industry.

Omni Orlando Resort named **Anne Madden**, CMP, HMCC, senior sales manager. With 25 years in the industry, Madden joins from Martiz, a sales and marketing service company.

InterContinental Hotels Group appointed **Eric Manning**, director of sales and marketing for InterContinental San Diego, where he will lead group sales for the hotel. Manning brings more than 15 years of experience in the industry. *C&IT*



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