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INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

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Vol. 19 No. 2



Capturing total meeting spend is fundamental to achieving an effective strategic meetings management program.

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Publisher's Message

Visitor Counts Surge

Total visitor numbers for 2011 are still pouring in, and they are better than expected. The number of visitors to some major cities skyrocketed to record-breaking proportions, and many cities expect to post extraordinary gains in 2012 as well.

Las Vegas was up by 4.3 percent in 2011 with 38.9 million visitors — the city's second-best year ever. The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority projects a record 40 million visitors for 2012. (See how everybody wins in Las Vegas on page 28.)

New York City attracted 50.5 million visitors in 2011, a record-breaker that exceeded estimates and was surpassed only by Orlando's 51.5 million visitors in 2010 — the first U.S. destination to attract more than 50 million visitors in one year. Orlando officials estimate they will break another record in 2011 with 55 million visitors.

Many industry experts suggest that the resurgence in meetings and conventions has been a primary driver in reviving the tourism sector of the economy. As the figures climb, so do visitor spending, hotel demand and occupancy rates, all of which are helping fuel a modest recovery of the global recession.

Furthermore, now that the administration's executive order designed to simplify the visa process is underway, CVB marketing departments are moving full speed ahead with plans to attract the other 95 percent of the world's population to our shores and cities. Destinations like Las Vegas and Florida (see page 18) are experts in converting both U.S. and foreign businesspeople in town for meetings and trade shows into loyal repeat customers.

For instance, at the Honda Classic, an elite PGA Tour event held annually in March at PGA National Resort & Spa in Palm Beach Gardens, FL, the attendance numbers were astounding: A total of 161,700 spectators attended from Monday to Sunday — a new record — nearly a 45 percent increase over 2011 and more than a 60 percent increase over 2010. Drawn by the top stars of the game including the incomparable Tiger Woods and Honda Classic winner Rory McIlroy, the new No. 1 in the world, thousands of corporate attendees have already marked their calendars for March for the next four years. As a matter of fact, PGA National and tournament officials are already trying to figure out where to place the extra corporate tents.



Harvey Grotsky

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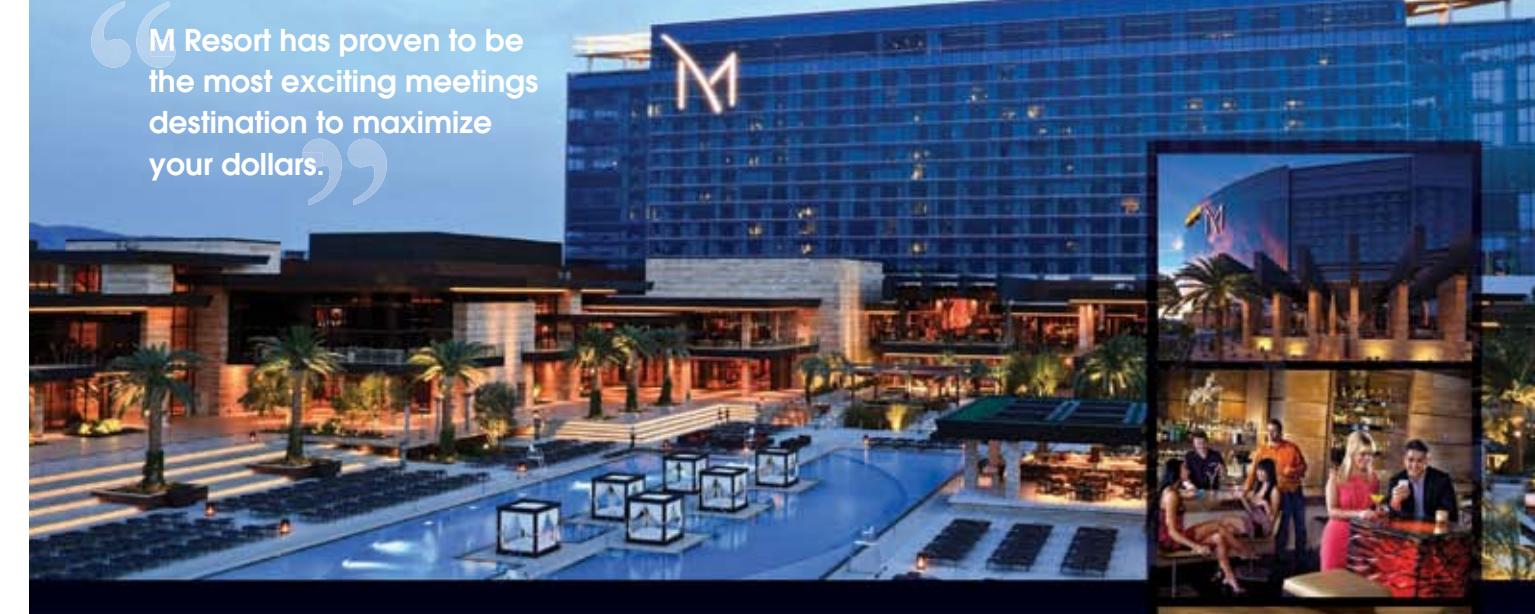
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Turnberry Isle Miami, Miami, FL. The Summer Meeting offer, for meetings booked and consumed by July 2012–September 2012 (for predetermined special dates), includes: complimentary afternoon or evening cruise for up to 100 people (F&B not included); dinner for 10 in the Bourbon Steak private glass box dining room; 50 percent off group rate for pre- and post-program nights; 20 percent off all resort recreation activities (golf, spa, tennis) during the pre- and post-stay; comp meeting room wireless Internet. Minimum 75 rooms per night, two nights minimum required. Meetings of 35–74 total rooms per night receive two of the above perks. 800-661-8101, rptir@turnberryislemiami.com, www.turnberryislemiami.com.

Paradise Point Resort & Spa, San Diego, CA. Planners who book a meeting of 10 guest rooms or more per night receive: 5 percent off the group master account; one complimentary room for every 30 booked; 20 percent attrition; and eight rooms upgraded to suites. The offer is valid on these 2012 dates: April 1–13, April 20–23, May 29–June 3 and June 10–20. Valid for new business only. 800-542-6275, www.paradisepoint.com

Lansdowne Resort, Leesburg, VA. The Twice the Meeting plan includes 50 percent allowable attrition; 50 percent off an opening reception; 50 percent off airport transfers; 50 percent off contracted golf event; and 50 percent off Spa Minerale. The offer is valid for new meetings consumed by December 30, 2012. 877-509-8400, www.lansdownerresort.com

Hyatt at Fisherman's Wharf, San Francisco, CA. Planners who book meetings with a minimum of 10

rooms receive rates as low as \$159 for group bookings on select dates in May 2012. The hotel is also offering a wide range of concession options based on number of rooms booked, including 6 percent rebates, free Internet access, complimentary wine and cheese reception, F&B discounts and more. Contact Marianne Milton at 415-486-4415, marianne.milton@hyatt.com, fishermanswharf.hyatt.com.

Callaway Gardens, Pine Mountain, GA. Complete Meeting Package rates start at \$150/person single occupancy (minimum of 20 rooms required) and include: breakfast, lunch and dinner; a.m. and p.m. breaks; general session meeting room; flip-chart package; three "Taste of Callaway" gift bags; use of fitness center; admission to the resort's gardens, nature trails and bicycle trail; and accommodations in the Mountain Creek Inn. Meetings must be booked by August 31, 2012 and consumed by February 28, 2013. 800-543-7121, www.callawaygardens.com

Industry News

Access Destination Services Expanding Into Arizona

SAN DIEGO, CA — Access Destination Services, a destination management and event production company,



LEE

announced that the company is expanding into Arizona under the leadership of industry veterans Christopher Lee, DMCP; Jennifer Miller, DMCP and Dale L. Hahne, DMCP.

Access Arizona, serving Phoenix, Scottsdale and Tucson, was established as a result of growing demand for destination services. "We have always listened to our clients and will go wherever they want and need us," says Access General Manager Jennifer Miller. Under the direction of Lee and Miller, the new Access Arizona daily operations will be run by Dale Hahne, director of business development. A seasoned veteran with more than 20 years in the incentive and meetings industry, Hahne brings extensive local knowledge and DMC expertise to the Access team.

Access Destination Services CEO Christopher Lee said, "Our growth is a result of staying true to our core vision and values, developing an exceptional team of professionals and maintaining long-term partnerships with clients, hotels and suppliers." Access Destination Services provides services in North America including Chicago, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Orange County, CA; Palm Springs, San Diego, San Francisco, Orlando, South Florida and Arizona. www.accessdmc.com

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Cassandra Matej Receives ESPA Executive Excellence Award

PRINCETON JUNCTION, NJ—The Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA) (formerly ACOM) recognized Executive Director Casandra Matej of the San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau in San Antonio, TX, as the recipient of the 2011 Executive Excellence Award



MATEJ

at the 2012 Awards Luncheon and Business Meeting at the ESPA Annual Conference held January 6–8, 2012 at the US Grant in San Diego, CA.

Trump Purchases Miami's Legendary Doral Hotel

NEW YORK, NY — The Trump Organization has announced that it will purchase Miami's Doral Hotel & Country Club for \$150 million, assuming operations by June 2012. A scheduled multimillion-dollar makeover of the property will include a refurbishment of all four golf courses, including its iconic Blue Monster course, and renovation of the main building, lodges, conference areas, spa and the Champions Pavilion.

The property will remain operational during the renovation, which is slated for completion in fall 2013. "The combination of the property's incredible location in the heart of Miami and our very significant investment in upgrading the resort will enable us to return Doral to its former glory if not surpass it," said Donald J. Trump, chairman and president. Doral offers 700 guest rooms, more than 86,000 sf of meeting space, a 50,000-sf Pritikin spas, six food and beverage outlets, extensive retail and a private members' clubhouse. www.trumphotelcollection.com

"I am so honored to have received this award as it came from my No. 1 customer — my staff," said Matej. "Convention services is so important to the overall success of the city of San Antonio and our customer's

events. It is important for leaders in our industry to support the growth and provide the tools so convention service managers can be successful."

www.espaonline.org/executiveexclnce.html

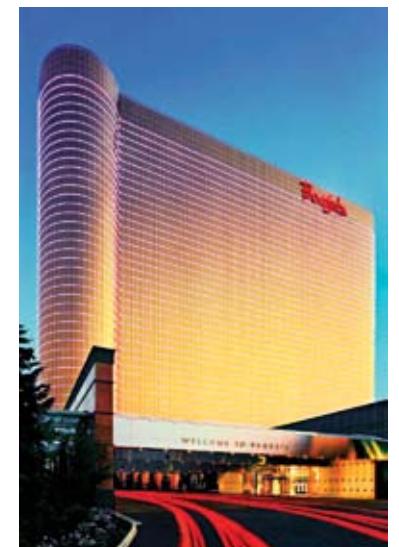
Caesars Entertainment Expands Loyalty Program

LAS VEGAS, NV — Caesars Entertainment launched "Escape to Total Rewards," the largest promotion in company history. Total Rewards members will have countless chances to win more than 90,000 prizes through the "Escape to Total Rewards" game that can be accessed at www.totalrewards.com/escape. In addition to a vast array of experiences and millions in prizes that will be awarded at the nearly 40 Total Rewards casino resorts nationwide, one lucky winner will receive a once-in-a-lifetime, all-expense paid trip for eight to Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. Gary Loveman, CEO and president of Caesars Entertainment, said, "Total Rewards is no longer just a gaming loyalty program; whether traveling for business or pleasure, playing or simply staying, all of our guests will find value and benefit in a Total Rewards membership." Total Rewards also recognizes and rewards meeting planners and business travelers for their engagement with the program. Planners booking meetings or events at a Total Rewards resort may also earn reward credits — one credit for every dollar spent — that may be redeemed for either personal use or placed toward a future meeting or event. www.totalrewards.com, www.caesars.com

Borgata Unveils \$50 Million Guest Room Renovation

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa has completed slightly more than half of a \$50 million renovation of 1,566 hotel rooms and corridors. "Our guest rooms represent a progressive departure from other hotels in the region, with impeccable attention to detail that combines feelings of established hospitality, original touches and smart amenities to exude absolute comfort," Borgata President Robert Boughner said. The room makeover, which is slated for completion by July 2012, also includes a 46-inch flat-screen

LED high-definition television set, a huge walk-in shower, wireless Internet service and more. A color scheme of gray, berry and black replaces the earth tones in the guest rooms and corridor carpets. The project is on target to be completed by July 2012. www.theborgata.com



The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa

Regulatory Rules

Barry Goldsmith



K. Susan Grafton

FINRA and SEC Compliance in the Use of Social Media

By Barry Goldsmith and K. Susan Grafton

Social media comes into play at many stages of a conference or program. When the meeting is hosted by a broker-dealer, or involves speakers from broker-dealers, care must be taken to comply with the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority's (FINRA) rules applicable to communications with the public, and the Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) books and records requirements. The time to address these issues is at the planning stage to be sure that FINRA and SEC requirements are taken into account early on and that disruptive or costly changes to the event are not required later on.

1 Use of social media to market a conference. If social media is used to market a conference, care will need to be taken to comply with FINRA's rules relating to communications with the public. In particular, NASD Rule 2210(b)(2) requires the retention of all advertisements, sales literature and independently prepared reprints; NASD Rule 2211(b)(2) requires the retention of institutional sales material; and NASD Rule 3010(d)(3) requires the retention of correspondence of registered representatives.

In the case of a client conference hosted by a broker-dealer, generally all communications, whether through social media or otherwise, will likely need to be pre-approved and reviewed, as discussed more fully below. Even in the case of third-party sponsored conferences, however, certain communications may be viewed as business communications of the firm. This could be the case if, for example, speaker biographies for personnel or other information includes descriptions of products or services offered by the firm.

If a broker-dealer co-sponsors a conference with a third party and places its logo on the third party's site, such co-branding could result in

FINRA holding the broker-dealer to be responsible for the entire content of the third party's site if the firm is viewed as having adopted or become entangled with its site. Similarly, if a third party advertises a conference or seminar on the broker-dealer's website, FINRA will view the firm as having adopted the content if the firm or its personnel explicitly or implicitly endorse or approve the post. Notwithstanding the above, a broker-dealer may link to the website of a third-party conference sponsor without assuming responsibility for the content of that site if the broker-dealer does not (a) "adopt" or become "entangled" with the content of the third-party site; and (b) know or have reason to know that the site contains false or misleading information.

2 Use of social media as part of presentations — supervisory approval. Before broker-dealer personnel use social media for business communications, a registered principal of the firm should approve use of the site based on a determination that such use can and will comply with all applicable FINRA rules, the federal securities laws and rules, including the SEC's record-keeping requirements, and the firm's own policies and procedures. In some cases, broker-dealers simply prohibit the use of social media by their personnel for business purposes.

The use of social media can be an issue in the case of a conference or other program that includes an interactive session via social media. In such cases, the firm's participating personnel will need to take care in responding to questions that could be viewed as prompting a business-related communication, such as responding to a question about a security or trading strategy. Moreover, if the firm's social media policy prohibits the use of

social media for business purposes, the person should not respond substantively to the question.

3 Static communications. A static posting on social media is viewed as an advertisement under FINRA's rules. In particular, NASD Rule 2210(1)(b) requires a registered principal to approve each advertisement and piece of sales literature before the earlier of its use or filing with FINRA's Advertising Regulation Department. Any conference-related material that is posted on a social media site must be pre-approved by a registered principal of the firm, including approval of any items that were materially changed since their approval in an earlier version.

4 Retention requirements. If information communicated via social media is a communication of a broker-dealer, the firm will be required to retain a copy of such communication pursuant to Rule 17a-4(b)(4) under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934. The broker-dealer will be required to maintain a record of such communication for at least three years, the first two years in an easily accessible place.

5 Training. As part of its regular training program, broker-dealers should include education regarding its communications policies, including how they apply to social media and participation in conferences and other public meetings. Among other things, personnel who participate in public meetings and conferences should be trained about the type of information that they may communicate (e.g., no confidential information about customers or proprietary information of the firm) and what to do if they receive inappropriate information (e.g., if an officer of a public company inadvertently discloses material non-public information).

Firms may wish to use spot-checks to confirm

that personnel who participate in conferences are obtaining appropriate approvals; and put in place policies and procedures regarding participation in conferences and what approvals must be obtained beforehand.

Key regulatory guidance on the use of social media can be found in FINRA's Regulatory Notice 11-39 (August 2011), available at <http://www.finra.org/web/groups/industry/@ip/@reg/@notice/documents/notices/p124186.pdf>, and Regulatory

Notice 10-06 (January 2010), available at <http://www.finra.org/web/groups/industry/@ip/@reg/@notice/documents/notices/p120779.pdf>. **I&FMM**

The use of social media can be an issue in a conference that includes an interactive session via social media.

Barry Goldsmith is a partner in the New York and Washington, DC, offices of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP. He is Co-Chair of the firm's Securities Enforcement Practice Group and previously served as the head of Enforcement at NASD (now FINRA). **K. Susan Grafton** is of counsel in the Washington, DC, office of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP where she focuses her practice on advising broker-dealers and investment advisers on their business, regulatory and compliance issues.

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Meetings at Spa Resorts

Foster Work and Wellness

By Stella Johnson

Ever hear people say that they need a second vacation to cure the overindulgences of the first vacation? Well, the same holds true for attendees after a meeting — in fact, even more so.

For instance, as for the attendees, while there aren't overindulgences to consider, there's pre-meeting stress such as taking care of loose ends at home and unfinished projects in the office.

There's travel fatigue en route to the meeting destination. And, there's progressive battle fatigue with long days (and nights), meetings, workshops, seminars, networking, meet 'n' greets and after-hour activities.

All of which plays out in the form of kinks, aches and pains in almost every part of the body, not to mention mind and spirit.

That's why an increasing number of planners are rediscovering meetings at spa resorts, with a newfound respect and appreciation for the overall benefits to be gained from

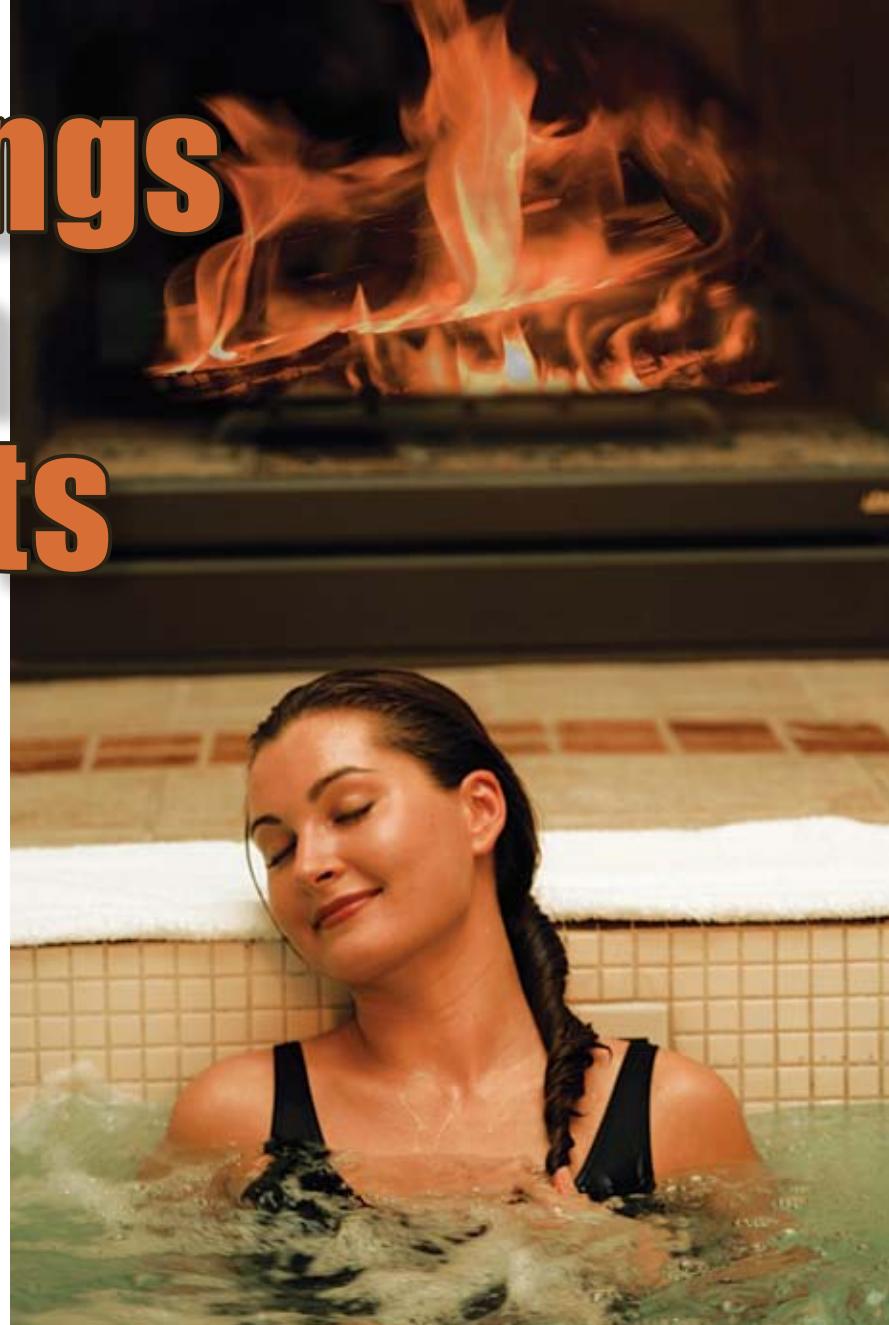


Photo courtesy of Cranwell Resort, Spa and Golf Club

Having a spa venue onsite like the one at Cranwell Resort, Spa and Golf Club in Lenox, MA, contributes to the quality and effectiveness of meetings and events say planners.

spa services and treatments, which are becoming more of an adjunct to wellness and less of a luxury or self-indulgence.

Like everything else, meeting at spa resorts has its challenges. There's corporate image that needs protecting, top management officials that need convincing and bottom lines that need attending. But planners have done some flexing on their own to incorporate spa services in the program agenda in clever and creative ways:

Free time option. Attendees

make his/her own spa appointment at his/her own expense. The planner promotes the spa benefits with in-room or online information about services, treatments and fees. In fact, many planners include spa use during the site selection/negotiation process.

Vacation time option. Attendees add on a couple of vacation days to the trip with an option of early arrival or late departure programs especially designed for them. Special discounts might apply as part of the overall negotiation process.

Spa certificates. Planners pro-



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vide an in-room gift certificate for at least one spa treatment of the attendee's choice.

Awards programs. Spa treatments may be offered as an award at receptions, luncheons, teambuilding competitions and golf tournaments.

Mix it in. Spa services as part of the meeting program such as spa breaks instead of refreshment breaks, or as alternative breaks, completed between meeting sessions.

New On-the-Fly Trend

It seems that all the world loves a good spa treatment or two, be it on their lunch hour, a Saturday after-

noon, a business trip, at a corporate meeting, and even at the airport.

"Spa-ing" on the fly, literally, is a new trend. As CNN recently reported, mini-spas or express spas are turning up at international airport terminals and lounges around the globe. Marie Lotode Chandra, founder of *ViaHerWorld.com*, which caters to the women business traveler community, lists the Xpress Spa at JFK airport, which accommodates walk-ins; the Virgin Cowshed Spa at Heathrow Airport, which offers fast, 15-minute treatments; and the Departure Spa at Newark Liberty International Airport, which offers mini- and altitude-pro-

tection facials as examples of the new global trend.

Survey Says

No wonder that as the interest in spas grows exponentially, New York City-based SpaFinder's most recent annual survey of global travel agents reveals an increased client interest in spa travel for health and wellness. Meeting planners are noticing the trend, too.

Lisa King, AISN, an executive assistant at Great West Risk Management in Knoxville, TN, agrees. King says, "I believe that more people are turning to spa services as part of their overall health and wellness routine.

With the fast-paced world we live in, there are times you have to decompress and relax."

For the first time in the survey's five-year history, the category of health and wellness ranked as the No. 1 emerging trend in 2010. Furthermore, spa travel in general registered significantly bigger gains in 2011, which could be attributed to more aggressive dealmaking by spa resorts in 2011.

Of course, these revelations reflect what's going on in consumer travel but they play out in the meetings industry as well.

In addition, group travel to spas was the second biggest trend; people

traveling solo ranked third; increased interest in spa travel for younger people (those under 40) placed fourth, and increased interest in international spa resorts and destinations was listed in fifth place.

Susie Ellis, president of SpaFinder, celebrating its 25th year of operation, observes that spas have gone way beyond their "mere pampering" image of decades past, and have taken on a more important role in society as people use valuable vacation time to jump-start healthy lifestyle changes "so that they can return from trips feeling revitalized rather than worse (for the wear)."

All of this is of particular significance to meeting planners of insurance companies and financial firms because:

- Spa resorts as an incentive award can be used to motivate sales.
- Spa resorts are often all-inclusive destinations offering privacy and security, state-of-the-art conference facilities, first-class accommodations and more.
- Spa resorts provide that rarified atmosphere that makes meetings shine.
- Spa resorts make excellent client appreciation destinations.
- Spa resorts are known to have

Why Spa Resorts Work for Meetings

Steve Clark, CMP, president of Marco Island, FL-based Stephen Clark & Associates LLC, a meeting and incentive consultant, is a former assistant vice president of conference and travel at the CUNA Mutual Group. A veteran planner of nearly 30 years, Clark became an independent meeting planner in 2002. Clark's specialty is planning meetings and events for insurance companies and financial firms. Once voted Meeting Professionals International's (MPI) Meeting Planner of the Year, Clark is an active member of MPI, both at chapter and international levels, and serves on many boards and committees in the meetings industry.

Clark tells why spa resorts are the ideal sites for insurance and financial groups that seek privacy and security, excellent accommodations, state-of-the-art meeting space, special features and amenities, and a unique atmosphere that promotes business agendas and fosters health and wellness at the same time.

I&FMM: What's so special about spa resorts for meetings, especially with insurance and financial groups? Do they have some unique criteria that other corporate groups do not?

Clark: Depends on our definition of a spa resort. Are we talking about those spa resorts that are strictly for health and wellness as some that we see out in Napa Valley, or those that are especially designed to accommodate business conferences with, not only state-of-the-art meeting space but, the right number of rooms per the amount of meeting space. That's something that is very important for creating the right ambience for your event.

I&FMM: So, what's the first step?



Tamaya Mist Spa & Salon's signature Spirit Path treatment includes an ancient healing experience.

ties and other concerns regarding privacy and security, which is very important to insurance and financial groups.

And, as I said before, the Hyatt had the right amount of meeting space for the number of rooms it offered. That helped us maintain that warm, friendly and intimate atmosphere for the attendees that the EDL wanted.

I&FMM: How many attended and how did they avail themselves of the Tamaya Mist Spa & Salon's facilities?

Clark: A total 150 people, some of whom were spouses or guests. I'd say about 25 percent of the total group booked spa treatments on an individual basis.

Clark: I'd say that insurance and financial meeting planners, in particular, want to be sure to identify full-service spa resorts for their group business, and there are a number of resources available for that, from surfing the Web to consulting with professionals.

I&FMM: What is your specific experience in booking a spa resort for an insurance or financial group and why?

Clark: Recently, I booked the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa for four days (July 2011), three nights for EPL Inc., a solution-based outfit for credit unions based in Birmingham, AL. It was a combination meeting for its top clients that included an annual meeting, educational sessions, product updates and more. So, it was important to have quality meeting space like the Hyatt Regency Tamaya provided.

Basically, it was selected for its overall layout, uniqueness, Native American ambience, friendliness and professionalism of staff, warm atmosphere, convenient location for most of our attendees, onsite activities and other concerns regarding privacy and security, which is very important to insurance and financial groups.

And, as I said before, the Hyatt had the right amount of meeting space for the number of rooms it offered. That helped us maintain that warm, friendly and intimate atmosphere for the attendees that the EDL wanted.

I&FMM: How many attended and how did they avail themselves of the Tamaya Mist Spa & Salon's facilities?

Clark: A total 150 people, some of whom were spouses or guests. I'd say about 25 percent of the total group booked spa treatments on an individual basis.

The spa activities were not actually incorporated into the program, other than to gather information and post it on the website, so attendees booked spa services and treatments on an individual, pay-as-you-go basis. And that's the benefit of being in a spa resort. You are able to have all services for your guests without going off the property, making it cost-effective too, if it's self-selected.

Many insurance clients offer spa activities at meetings as part of services available without the company having to pay for it due to certain governmental rulings. Although they can pay for time spent on the golf course, mostly because there's the networking element involved, it's sometimes hard to build a case for use of the spa — but that's changing, too.

I&FMM: What was the feedback from EPL attendees about the spa resort?

Clark: I have been at this a long time, and I was blown away by Tamaya's level of attention to detail and friendliness of staff. It has a Native American feel to the resort, and the people who work there "live it." That special feeling a spa resort like this has puts attendees in a relaxed mode and makes it easier and more enjoyable to conduct business. All of us can't say enough about it. Needless to say, the reviews about meeting at the Hyatt Tamaya, its accommodations, conference space, onsite amenities like those at the spa, were sensational.

The Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa is situated on 500 acres on the Pueblo of Santa Ana, between Santa Fe and Albuquerque, NM, and is adjacent to the Sandia Mountains along the Rio Grande River. According to Steve DeFelice, director of sales and marketing at the Hyatt Regency resort, "The Tamaya Mist Spa has received several awards and accolades for the talented masseurs and to add to the guest's overall spa experience, the resort has created the Spa Experience Room, to include pampering amenities for an even more relaxing, tranquil stay."



Techno-De-Stress Massage and Gentlemen's Total Timeout services are available at the T Spa at Tulalip Resort Casino.

The T Spa at the Tulalip Resort Casino is another fine example of a spa that holds a profound reverence for nature and a respect for balance of mind, body, heart and spirit.

A premier resort and conference destination in the Pacific Northwest, Tulalip Resort Casino is located just 30 minutes from downtown Seattle. Native American influence is evident everywhere such as the welcoming 25-foot house posts that are hand-carved from a 1,000-year-old red cedar.

The Tulalip Resort's T Spa is a luxurious, 14,000-sf sanctuary featuring stress-relieving, deep-issue massages and native-inspired spa rituals and therapies. The spa offers steam rooms, cedar saunas and grotto showers. Other elements such as river rocks, wide bamboo floors, candles and natural foliage all contribute to the serenity at the T Spa so that attendees will emerge rejuvenated, refreshed and renewed.

— SJ

a most efficient and well-trained staff to support all aspects of the meeting agenda.

More than that, deals abound as well. In fact, SpaFinder's survey says, "Despite more bullish reports for travel generally, 55 percent of agents reported that hotel/resort/destination spas actually offered more aggressive deals, attractive pricing and value-add packages in 2011 over 2010 with only 8 percent seeing any declines."

King, who coordinates corporate meetings from start to finish for Great West Risk Management, recently arranged an event at the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa to review trends in the trucking industry as they pertained to risk management issues.

The award-winning resort, located in northern California's wine country area, features swimming pools fed by mineral water from underground springs and Willow Stream, a 40,000-sf spa that offers a bathing ritual, individual mineral baths, private whirlpools and a dedicated Watsu pool, which is described as "a warm and liquid journey for your mind and body."

King says each guest room was provided with a spa certificate to use for services of their choice. "They made their own appointments, and more than half of a group of about 115 attendees, including top executives, risk management professionals, insurance agents, as well as spouses and guests, took advantage of it," says King.

The Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa was a replacement location that worked out very well. "We alternate our locations each year bouncing from the East Coast to the West Coast. Our first location was sold out so we booked the Fairmont instead," adds King. "The spa resort was a good idea, too, as it was not so large that our group felt lost on the prop-

erty. The staff was exceptional. Our guests enjoyed the beautiful grounds, fabulous amenities and wonderful food," she says.

And, having the spa facility located right on the property encouraged the guests to make use of their spa gift certificates during their stay. "It gave our guests the opportunity to feel special, relax and enjoy; primarily the spouses who used the spa for health

remain anonymous), the company's certified meeting planner books the Cranwell Resort on a regular basis.

Located in the heart of the Berkshire Mountains, and approximately a two-hour drive from either Boston or the New York metropolitan area, the Cranwell Resort is a convenient destination for regional meetings. It boasts an 18-hole championship golf course and one of the largest spas in the Northeast. The spa features a range of meeting-enhancing breaks, including wellness seminars, chair massage, yoga stretches and stress-relieving breathing exercises. For example, the Brain and Body Rejuvenator is a 20-minute series of stretches designed to stimulate the body's circulatory system and get the creative juices flowing.

The insurance company's events at the Cranwell Resort include sales conferences, training meetings, board meetings and incentive programs. The attendees may include clients, sales consultants, support staff, spouses/guests and top management.

According to the meeting planner, the company believes the presence of the spa venue contributes to the overall quality of their meetings and that the proof of the pudding is that whenever the group convenes at the Cranwell Resort, the company's goals and objectives are met. The venue is an ideal destination for rewarding their top performers with spa and golf gift certificates and provides a comfortable learning atmosphere and a confidential environment for board retreats.

"Typically, spa resorts are in remote areas that are peaceful and relaxing, as is the Cranwell. It is a comfortable environment, and attendees feel as though the company values them as their employees, sales people, managers, executives and so on," the planner relates.

I&FMM



The 40,000-sf Spa at PGA National Resort & Spa, in Palm Beach Gardens, FL, features more than 100 treatments and the "Waters of the World" collection of healing mineral pools with salts imported from around the globe.

and wellness as well as little pampering, while their husbands were attending meetings or golfing."

King opted for "the bathing ritual," a multistep process that features an exfoliating shower, two mineral water soaking pools, herbal steam, dry sauna and cool-down showers.

Meeting-Enhancing Breaks

The historic 100-year-old country hotel Cranwell Resort, Spa and Golf Club, located in Lenox, MA, is a recent recipient of the *Condé Nast Traveler's* Readers' Choice Awards and one of Zagat's "Top U.S. Hotels, Resorts & Spas." The property hosts numerous insurance and financial conferences year-round, for such companies as the Capital Financial Group, Liberty Mutual Insurance and Farm Family Insurance companies. Because it is in the vicinity of the corporate office of an insurance company (that wishes to

The SMM Challenge

Overcoming Roadblocks to Capturing Total Meeting Spend

By Mike Bassett

Some time back, Kari Kesler Wendel, senior director, SMM program management and solutions for Carlson Wagonlit Travel, made some calculations concerning companies she has worked for and with, and came up with a rather startling statistic.

She estimated that despite significant effort on the part of these companies, the amount of meeting spend captured never surpassed 30 percent of what was actually spent on meetings. "And in the case of Xerox (a former employer of hers) we spent a year and a half baseline data and didn't uncover more than 30 percent," she says. "It's really an area that continues to be elusive and is not really managed well."

Which may be one reason why — despite much attention paid to the concept of Strategic Meetings Management (SMM) within the meetings industry — some companies are still hesitant about fully committing themselves to the implementation of SMM programs (SMMP).

Not So Easy

Kevin Iwamoto, vice president of enterprise strategy at StarCite, says there

are several reasons why SMM is "not as easy to implement as one would think."

For example, Iwamoto says, there could be a "chasm" between marketing and events teams that are externally focused on their mission and goals, and internal SMM corporate teams that are looking at regular business meetings that are on a much smaller scale.

"So both teams are aggregating data and reporting it up to senior management, but they really aren't talking to each other," he says. "So what happens is that you have different technology and marketing decisions being made on each side, and from an internal ownership perspective, you have different missions and goals and scopes of responsibilities. That can make it difficult to get enterprise-wide SMMP going."

Iwamoto also points out that despite the fact that most executives understand SMM is "the last frontier of managed travel," it is problematic because it's also an area where you can have many different owners who don't want to relinquish control. "It's a part of the job they thoroughly enjoy and they don't want it outsourced, or taken away," Iwamoto

says, which makes it harder for executives to understand the true scope of the meeting spend and who is touching that meeting spend, because they're hesitant to get into too much change management in this area.

Wendel suggests that sometimes it is just hard to make a serious argument for strategic meetings management in the absence of real numbers. "If you were to go to your CFO without a meeting program in place and say, 'We should spend some significant time and energy putting together a global strategy for this,' he would probably answer, 'What's the point?'"

Crisis Management

In fact, it could take a major slap in the face for a company to realize the potential benefit of a strategic meetings management program. For example, Wendel points to a planner at a large technology company, who, despite working for several years to try to put together an SMMP plan, was unable to generate sufficient interest.

"Then one day the company had to pay out a \$1.2 million cancellation



penalty because the event wasn't contracted properly," says Wendel. "Guess how quickly the (SMM) program took off, then? So, it's usually not important enough until something goes wrong."

So it's critical, Wendel says, that a planner making a case for strategic meetings management ensures he or she has the business intelligence and data points lined up in order to support an argument.

Another possible reason companies hesitate to embrace the SMM challenge, Wendel adds, is that there are so many different ways of starting a path towards SMM success that it can lead to a kind of corporate paralysis. "The sheer number of choices seems to be too much for some people," she says.

It Just Makes Sense

When David Smart, director of Destinations Inc., the meeting and travel planning affiliate of The Alabama Farmers Federation, which includes Alfa Insurance began at Alfa 36 years ago, his was a one-man travel and meeting department. Over time his department changed its business model (it became an independent entity affiliated with Alfa), added more staff, and even, he says, adopted the principles of strategic meetings management "in a loose sense." But, it's only in the past year or so that Smart, along with Shane Watkins, his event project manager, took concrete steps to implement a formal SMM.

"It just makes sense," says Smart. "It makes so much sense that it is impossible to see how it would not be accepted."

There were several reasons why Smart and Watkins decided it was time to formalize a strategic meetings management program. "First, we saw a duplication of effort within our building on meetings," Watkins says. "There wasn't a lot of efficiency the way things were being done with internal clients. We wanted to tighten up the process from the beginning of the meeting to the end."

There's also wasted effort, such

as the time, energy and money spent in fruitlessly sourcing meetings that have been cancelled because they've never been approved. "So we'd like to coordinate the approval process so

ment a strategic meetings management program, Watkins attended the Global Business Travel Association's Strategic Meetings Management Certification course (*see box on opposite page*), which Watkins described as 80 hours of "pretty rigorous" study. Now Watkins

is in the final stages of writing a formal SMM.

Smart says that Alfa Destinations already has some strong executive backing for the idea, so that once they are ready to roll out the plan they'll have someone at the company's highest levels championing the cause and helping to overcome any internal opposition.

And they do expect some opposition. "While we have buy-in from upper management, direct stakeholders may feel they are giving up something in terms of the 'this is my meeting' syndrome," Smart says. "So in something like this, you expect some resistance."

Watkins says, "Mid-level managers — they tend to get emotionally involved in their meetings. On the other hand, David and I have zero emotional involvement. When they come to us and tell us that they have a location in mind for one of their meetings, and we have to tell them it's unsuitable, there will be some opposition."

They were also looking to establish a plan of overall meeting management, says Smart. They may have had plenty of cooperation with clients when it came to handling things like contracts and the registration process for a conference, but that cooperation ended when it came to anything having to do with promoting the meeting.

Synergies and Collaboration

Kathy Rust, who is now director, global travel services for the Sunnyvale, CA-based technology company NetApp, cut her teeth on strategic meetings management while at Washington Mutual.

When Rust joined WaMu, no strategic meetings management plan existed, though an informal group of planners did exist that was beginning to think about those issues.

It was clear, Rust says, that there was a need for SMM at WaMu. Since its demutualization in the 1980s it made numerous acquisitions, which meant that



A lot of well-intentioned people... just put the policy out there, expect compliance, underestimate the complexity of the space, and then it goes nowhere.

Kari Kesler Wendel, SMMC
Senior Director, SMM Program Management & Solutions
Carlson Wagonlit Travel Meetings & Events,
Minneapolis, MN

we're not out doing a lot of useless work," says Smart.

Smart and Watkins also recognized there was money at stake. "I think we were missing some cost savings along the way," Watkins says. "We work on 50 to 70 meetings a year and at the end of the year we always end up with the question, 'Meetings cost us what?' We are looking for SMM to provide us with the executive clarity on exactly what the costs are."

They were also looking to establish a plan of overall meeting management, says Smart. They may have had plenty of cooperation with clients when it came to handling things like contracts and the registration process for a conference, but that cooperation ended when it came to anything having to do with promoting the meeting.

For example, we may be working on the program many months in advance, but our client may not be thinking about content and what to promote other than time and place," says Smart. "Who are the speakers, what can be used in publicity to promote the meeting? We want a process where they know when they have to have a program put together so that it can be properly promoted."

So, as part of the plan to imple-

SMM Certification. Last summer, the Global Business Travel Association discontinued its Strategic Meetings Management Certification as a separate designation. SMMC, along with the CCTE and CGTE designations, is now equivalent to the "Manager" certificate program level of the newly created GBT Academy. For more information on the GBT Academy, visit www.gbt.org. Contact www.gbtfoundation.org for information on the SMM Maturity Index, which helps companies gauge the progress of SMM across 13 categories.

meetings policy was completely decentralized. In the course of discussions with planners across the company, for example, Rust learned that those organizing incentives in Hawaii were using different suppliers, or buying different gifts, or were overlapping programs.

"There was no synergy; really no interest in collaborating at all," she says.

Rust, and other planners working within the informal group called the "Events Council" began efforts to bring some rationalization to the way meetings were managed in WaMu. Rust says they gathered the necessary data and developed a business case, which they brought to some senior managers who ended up supporting the project.

"We took a very systematic approach and didn't try to do everything at once," Rust says. "And we got some major wins that we were able to point to that helped people believe in the eventual success of the program. That's not to say we didn't lay out the big picture — we did, but we did it by laying out a three-year plan and then executing that plan in bite-sized pieces as we went."

The process was an "evolution," Rust says, and it took a while for people to totally buy into it, but the results were rewarding. Rust estimates that by aiming at WaMu's large events, her department was able to affect about 80 percent of meeting spend. "It (SMM) certainly evolved and matured as a program," she says. "We were running our programs very effectively."

Unfortunately for Rust, that progress — and her job — came to end when WaMu declared bankruptcy in 2008.

Why Do Programs Fail?

While WaMu's program was aborted through a company bankruptcy, there are a number of factors that can end up strangling strategic meetings man-

agement programs before they've had a chance to fully mature.

The major reasons programs fail or stall, says Wendel, is lack of stakeholder management.

"A lot of well-intentioned people start the program and integrate the meeting planners and other stakeholders within the company, and never talk about it again," Wendel says.

"They don't put a lot of value in customer buy-in; they just put the policy out there, expect compliance, underestimate the complexity of the space, and then it goes nowhere."

Rust agrees that stakeholder management is critical to the success of a strategic meetings management program. "Knowing your stakeholders and working hard to get their buy-in — that's well worth the investment in time," she says. "We didn't ever want to cram this down their necks. We wanted them to feel a part of it and not threatened by it."

In her case, this involved endless, very transparent communication. This kind of change, which can result in combining, overlapping or even eliminating programs, can be threatening. "You don't want people worrying about job security," she says.

Wendel also points out that when companies fail to find most of their meeting spend — just 30 percent or so in her examples — the amount is so insignificant that executives end up asking themselves, "Why even bother?"

Wendel provides a real-life example of how some companies — even those with established SMM programs — fail to identify and capture meeting spend. While with Honeywell she was sitting in an airport when she ran into

a fellow employee and they started comparing notes.

It turned out this fellow employee was involved in executing up to 50 employee training sessions (involving 25 to 30 people) each year in different cities across the country.

"I said, 'Well, that's a meeting,'" she says. "In that case, semantics alone caused the problem. Every year that program took place involved significant spend that no one caught. They could have read the SMM policy from end to end, and they never would have thought it applied to them."

So with all of these challenges, is it possible for companies to ever develop fully mature strategic meetings management programs? "I hope so," Wendel says. "I do think we'll get there."

She suggests that meetings are following a similar trajectory to that of travel management. Common metrics for comparing airline ticket and hotel costs were unavailable 25 years ago,

We took a very systematic approach and didn't try to do everything at once. And we got some major wins that we were able to point to that helped people believe in the eventual success of the program.



Kathy Rust
Director, Global Travel Services
NetApp
Sunnyvale, CA

Wendel says, but are readily accessible now in the form of average room and air rates. "I'd like to believe that if travel management could get there, meetings can get there as well," she says. "What's really frustrating is that the principles involved in strategic meetings management are typically things that companies are already doing almost everywhere else — so why can't SMM work better?"

I&FMM

Florida

The Perfect Mix of Business and Pleasure

By Harvey Chipkin

A meeting for Alfa Insurance claims adjusters, whose main office is in Montgomery, Alabama, was slated for last June at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando. On April 27, record-breaking tornados smashed through Alabama resulting in more than 25,000 claims that had to be dealt with. Claims adjusters worked day and night through May and June.

"Filing those claims was a four-month process," says Shane Watkins, event project manager of the meeting and travel arm of The Alabama Farmers Federation, Destinations, Inc. "They allowed us to simply pick up the meeting and move it ahead 60 days — intact and with no penalties. We would not get the same cooperation at every hotel we deal with."

Alfa's experience seems to be typical of the fact that Florida hotels — heavily dependent on meetings — share a consistent eagerness to please. That was shown in an experience shared by Murray Vassar, senior

compliance associate at New York Life Insurance and president of the Insurance Advertising Compliance Association, which held a recent meeting at the Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando Resort in Orlando.

According to Vassar, "The Hard Rock was not even on our radar of six or seven properties in town. It didn't seem to fit our image. However, they bowled us over with the welcome we got," Vassar says.

"They actually made us feel like rock stars. When we got there, the general manager came out and opened the car doors. When we walked into the lobby, every management person from every department that we would be dealing with was lined up. And this is for a meeting of only about 150 people. They seemed to know all of our names.

"They gave us excellent suggestions," says Vassar. "For one, they suggested an event in the lobby lounge. Ordinarily we would not lean toward that, but you're actually

off in a sunken lobby which they set up for breakfast and lunch. That was a huge hit down to the breakfast sandwiches. They even set up guitars on the buffets. Some of our members are (baby) boomers while the overall age is getting a bit younger so that appealed to everybody. This is the first time that our attendees sent notes after the meeting talking about how great it was."

The Hard Rock Hotel is one of three Loews hotels inside Universal Orlando Resort. The Hard Rock offers 650 guest rooms and more than 6,000 sf for meetings. The 750-room Loews Portofino Bay offers more than 90,000 sf of meeting space; and Loews Royal Pacific has 1,000 guest rooms and more than 210,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting space.

Orlando

Aside from tornado-induced crises, Alfa sees Orlando as a preferred destination. According to David Smart, director of Alfa Destinations, the com-

pany held its delayed meeting of 500 claims adjusters as well as an incentive program with around 1,700 people late last summer at the Swan and Dolphin Resort.

"We have also used other properties in the area," says Smart. "It all depends on the budget and strategic objectives of the individual meeting. We look for versatility in event spaces. Also important is the variety of suite categories, because of the various categories of incentive awards. We like that the Dolphin and Swan have an unusually large inventory of suites in various categories. We also look at properties with an experienced staff in key positions. Over these years we have been dealing with the same people in catering sales, banqueting. We even request these people when we negotiate."

Also positive for those properties, says Smart, is that there are 2,265 rooms between the two adjoining hotels and, depending on the meeting, most delegates will be at one or the other. With incentives, says Smart, "it's really helpful to be able to accommodate last-minute qualifiers so if the primary hotel is sold out we can use a nearby one. Proximity and ease of transportation to the parks are also important for incentives. These are family-based incentives and tend to be family awards."

Also helpful, says Smart, is that "you can use food and beverage outlets at either one and charge it no matter which property you are staying in."

He adds, "Many of our events open with a welcome party with the entire number in attendance, including children. It takes a lot of square footage to do that. We might have 800 children at the incentives."

"We do use other properties in Orlando," Smart continues. "In 2010, we had a group at (Disney's) Grand Floridian because it fit that particular group and the purpose of the event, and it was an excellent event."

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort offers 329,000 sf of meeting space, including four ball-

rooms, 84 meeting rooms and two executive boardrooms.

Orlando's ability to handle any kind of group will only be enhanced by a variety of projects underway in the city.

Construction recently began on a 55,000-sf addition to the meeting space at the 720-room Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, according to Mike Magnelli, the general manager.

"We have had quite a few requests for additional space, and this will give us 124,000 sf," says Magnelli, "with an unusually good room-to-space ratio. The new space is right off our main ballroom, and we can sell it as a standalone meeting facility. This makes it much easier to move large events in and out. We can be having a function in one of the big ballrooms while another group is moving out."

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Hilton, Located in the Walt Disney World Resort, Florida's first Green Lodging Certified Hotel, is currently in the final stages of a multimillion-dollar renovation of the hotel's lobby level and executive meeting rooms. The hotel features 73,500 sf of meeting and event space.

Rosen Hotels & Resorts' convention properties in Orlando are also making significant improvements to their infrastructures. For example, Rosen Centre Hotel has completed a multimillion-dollar remodeling of the third of its three 2,500-sf Presidential Suites as well as its two-bay and three-bay hospitality suites. Renovations to the 1,334 guest rooms as well as the Grand Lobby are also complete. A new 18,000-sf ballroom will debut this fall. Currently Rosen Centre Hotel offers 106,000 sf of meeting space. The Rosen Centre Skywalk, a covered pedestrian walkway connecting the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC), was completed last March.

Rosen Plaza Hotel, located next door to the OCCC and in the heart of the International Drive attractions corridor, has completed a floor-to-ceiling renovation of all 800 guest rooms, as well as hospitality suites and hallways. Rosen Plaza has 60,000 sf of meeting space.

Aside from construction, venues are also offering new meetings-focused programs. For instance, Rosen Hotels & Resorts has announced a new awards program to assist meeting planners in creating corporate social responsibility programs. The program allows groups to realize an immediate reward — participating in a teambuilding activity while giving back to the community in which they're meeting.

The program is offered to groups of all sizes meeting at any of the three Rosen convention hotels: Rosen Plaza Hotel, Rosen Centre Hotel or Rosen Shingle Creek. A new website, www.RosenRewards.com provides CSR re-

sources such as lists of local charities and contact information as well as companies that can provide logistics assistance for CSR programs.

Meeting and group clients at the three onsite Loews hotels at Universal Orlando Resort can now enjoy playing privileges at some of Orlando's finest courses. Planners receive the services of a dedicated golf coordinator to plan and oversee their golf outing or event, which includes arranging tee times and complimentary transportation, setting up onsite reg-



Murray Vassar, Senior Compliance Associate
New York Life Insurance Company, Tampa, FL

istration, coordinating tournaments, arranging food, beverage, awards and gift items.

"We are excited to partner with both Grand Cypress Golf Club and Windermere Country Club to give our meeting and group guests some impressive golf options for their overall meeting experience," says Vince LaRuffa, vice president of resort sales and marketing for Universal Orlando Resort. "Planners can leave the work to us and let our team, along with our new partners, create a worry-free golf outing or tournament."

Tampa

Formed late last year, Grand Golf Resorts of Florida includes three golf resorts located in a line along Interstate 4 crossing Central Florida: Innisbrook Resort near Tampa, Reunion Resort just outside Orlando and Hammock Beach Resort in Palm Coast near St. Augustine. Together, the properties offer nine golf courses.

According to a spokesperson for Salamander Hospitality, which operates Grand Golf Resorts, the group is

ideal for a multi-resort incentive because of the diversity within the collection. An incentive trip for 100 top brokers, for instance, could include a three-day stay at Innisbrook — with an elite group going to Hammock for a couple of additional days — all the while dealing with a single sales person and a single conference manager.

Peter Dugery, senior vice president at Morningstar Investment Management, brought a group of 10 salesmen to Innisbrook in January. "We always had our annual sales meeting at our headquarters in Chicago," says

"The Hard Rock was not even on our radar of six or seven properties in town. It didn't seem to fit our image. However, they bowled us over with the welcome we got."

Murray Vassar, Senior Compliance Associate
New York Life Insurance Company, Tampa, FL

Dugery, "but we thought that doing it offsite would make it more productive. We decided on Florida because the meeting is in January, and we wanted the warm weather. And we ended up at Innisbrook because of a referral from a friend of mine, and because I love Southwest Airlines, which flies into Tampa."

The 2½ day event, says Dugery, involved two solid days of meetings — and wound up with a half day of golf for some of the attendees. The group, which flew in from around the country, had dinner on-property the first night and in resort-recommended restaurants the next two.

"It worked out really well," says Dugery. "The meeting room opened onto an outdoor porch, and people could go out and check messages. Also, we liked the fact that it wasn't a high rise so it didn't feel like a hotel; salespeople get tired of being in hotels. We could take a nice walk to and from the meeting room."

Mike Garrow, Innisbrook's director of sales, was assigned to the group and, says Dugery, "He was



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very helpful, especially when we were there. One night, he found us a restaurant on the beach, and they sent a Mercedes van to pick us up and take us back."

Bottom line: "We got much more out of the meeting than we have in the past. Most of the group asked if we could go back there. And if I get approval, we will go back next year."

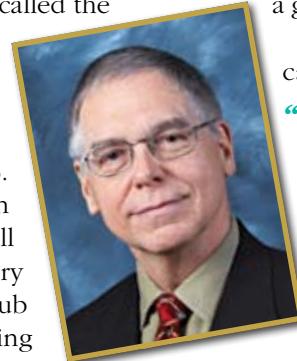
Innisbrook Resort has 600 guest rooms and 65,000 sf of meeting space.

Miami

Despite the halting for now of a plan to develop casinos in Miami, there is a lot of hotel activity in the city. For instance, Miami's Gansevoort Hotel will get a name change and renovation after its acquisition by an investment firm. It will be called the Perry South Beach, and the owners are planning a \$100 million renovation of the entire property with a relaunch set for late 2013.

The Trump Organization has announced that it will purchase Miami's legendary Doral Hotel & Country Club for \$150 million, assuming operations by June 2012. A scheduled multimillion-dollar makeover of the property will include a refurbishment of all four golf courses, including its iconic Blue Monster course, and renovation of the main building, lodges, conference areas, spa and the Champions Pavilion. The property will remain operational during the renovation, which is slated for completion in fall 2013. Doral offers 700 guest rooms, a 50,000-sf Pritikin spa and more than 86,000 sf of meeting space.

Turnberry Isle Miami, which offers 392 guest rooms and a 40,000-sf conference center, has completed a \$2 million renovation of guest rooms in the Orchid Building, one of four guest-room towers. Resort amenities include a private beach club, two redesigned 18-hole Raymond Floyd championship golf courses, an award-winning spa, three pools and four clay tennis courts.



David Smart, Director
Alfa, Destinations Inc., Montgomery, AL

acres in the Florida Keys island chain, an hour south of Miami International Airport. The self-contained, private, member-owned property is a popular choice for groups seeking an exotic island meetings experience as well as a high level of security. In fact, the number of meetings held at the property is rising rapidly, and 40 percent of group bookings are repeat business.

Ocean Reef Club boasts its own private airstrip, 30,000 sf of meeting space, a 144-room oceanfront inn, 115 vacation rentals of varying sizes and a marina. There are numerous dining and shopping options, two 18-hole golf courses, world-class tennis and more.

Benes, a member of Ocean Reef Club, is chairman of the tournament, which takes places over a weekend.

The Eden Roc Renaissance Miami Beach recently completed a \$220 million renovation begun in 2008. The project, which included the addition of the 21-story Ocean Tower, nearly doubled the number of guest rooms from 349 to 631. The hotel now offers 46,000 sf of indoor space and 25,000 sf of outdoor event space with ocean and Intracoastal views.

Key Largo

For the last six years, Edgar Benes, a partner in the Law Offices of Edgar A. Benes, P.A., in Boca Raton, FL, has held a fundraising fishing tournament at the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, sponsored by two clients: Paradise Bank and Mahogany Services, a management company. The law firm handles

a great deal of title insurance. Ocean Reef Club is located on 2,500 tropical

"We also look at properties with an experienced staff in key positions. Over these years we have been dealing with the same people in catering sales, banqueting. We even request these people when we negotiate."

"We wanted to have it in a centrally located place where all the boats could be in one place. We did the most recent one in February with 17 boats, with six or seven people on each boat. Some people stayed back at the resort.

"We awarded prizes — including stays at Ocean Reef — for most released billfish, heaviest fish, etc.

"We also had a captains meeting on Friday night to go over the rules and regulations, and also had entertainment. On Saturday, we fished from eight until four. On Saturday night we had a more formal awards dinner in a banquet room with a topnotch illusionist who flew in from Las Vegas. On Sunday, some people went home and others stayed at the resort.

"Ocean Reef works perfectly for this," says Benes, "because it has a marina and fuel, and very luxurious hotel rooms and private houses to



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— increasing total capacity to 70,000 sf. The new lobby, with floor-to-ceiling ocean views, will provide quicker and easier check-in to guests. Capping off the redo is an infinity-edge adult pool just off the lobby area cascading down to the family pool with two hot tubs, a poolside bar and expanded poolside dining options — all with ocean views. The meeting space, says DiSalvo, will be contiguous, and guest

rooms will be connected by a covered walkway right next to the conference area. Existing guest rooms also will be upgraded. "This will broaden the kinds of meetings we can accept," says DiSalvo. "The new lobby will completely change the sense of arrival. And in general this changes the entire dynamic of the resort."

The Renaissance World Golf Village Resort and Convention Center in

Jacksonville/St. Augustine has completed a dramatic renovation and expansion of its outdoor meeting, event and recreation space. The large project included new and expanded outdoor function space. With this expansion, the resort added 15,000 sf of new function space, bringing capacity to 101,000 sf of meeting and event space. Together with the adjacent World Golf Hall of Fame, the AAA Four Diamond resort is the largest combination hotel and convention center between Atlanta and Orlando.

These enhancements follow other new offerings at the resort, which include the addition of a 450-sf Masters Boardroom and the addition of a new destination services and event planning department.

Omni Jacksonville Hotel in downtown Jacksonville renovated all 14,000 sf of meeting space. The \$1.5 million project included new décor and an upgrade of the sound system and lighting.

Ponte Vedra Beach, located 20 miles southeast of Jacksonville, is the site of a singularly superlative meeting and incentive property. The AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club has been a Northeast Florida coastal landmark since 1928. It offers 250 upscale rooms and suites — many with oceanfront views — and more than 25,000 sf of flexible meeting space to accommodate groups from 10 to 450 people. The meeting space features two ballrooms, a cherry-paneled executive boardroom as well as elegant touches such as marble floors, silver service, crystal, china and chandeliers. Amenities include the largest spa in north Florida at 30,000 sf, 36 holes of golf — including links-style with sea breezes, 15 tennis courts and four heated pools in a beachfront setting.

The Ponte Vedra Inn & Club's impressive offerings extend to its more intimate Lodge & Club at Ponte Vedra Beach, situated a mile away. The Lodge & Club has 66 oceanfront accommodations and 13,000 sf of function space, perfect for an executive retreat or exclusive incentive program.

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Naples

The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club's championship golf course has reopened after closing for several months for a significant enhancement. The 18-hole course now boasts new grass on all fairways. This follows the enhancements in the summer of 2010, which included new grass on 12 of the greens and other changes. The classic course dates back to 1927.

The property is Southwest Florida's only beachfront resort to feature an onsite championship golf course, world class spa and award-winning tennis center. It previously completed a \$22 million renovation in 2010 that included guest rooms and the addition of a \$5 million pool complex. The complex features two pools, two whirlpools, a bar and grill and a recreational shop.

The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples now has a new multiuse event pavilion in place for meetings and events. The 14,652-sf Grand Lawn Pavilion doubles the resort's existing meeting and special event space. It accommodates 1,400 people with theater-style seating and 900 people with reception-style seating.

The Palm Beaches

Nadine Murray of Plan It Best, an independent planner, has held several recent meetings for a financial service company at PGA National Resort & Spa in Palm Beach Gardens. "I've been using that property for the past 20 years. For at least one of the recent meetings, golf was very important because it is a highly network-oriented meeting. Golf offers an opportunity to pair executives with customers."

"Golf is involved in 70 percent of what I do," says Murray, "and so the PGA National is a natural for me."

Indeed, the PGA National Resort & Spa exudes an aura of golf greatness as the home of the PGA Tour's Honda Classic and three of the tough-

est holes on the Tour — the Jack Nicklaus-designed Bear Trap, holes 15, 16 and 17. The 2012 Honda Classic in March not only crowned Ireland's Rory McIlroy as champion, besting the world's top players — including Tiger Woods who roared back into contention in the final round — but the win also vaulted McIlroy to No. 1 in the World Golf Ranking. Herb Lyman, golf sales manager at PGA

National Resort & Spa, noted that events like this define the resort's golf pedigree, and are just the sort of thing



Edgar Benes, Partner
Law Offices of Edgar A. Benes, PA., Boca Raton, FL

that heightens excitement and enthusiasm among meeting and incentive attendees who come to play on the same Champion Course where golf greats make history.

Aside from the golf, says Murray, the property has excellent meeting space. "They have done a substantial renovation in the last couple of years. But the hotel maintains a nice style because it feels like a traditional golf facility. Many of the attendees come from Chicago and New York," says Murray, "and so they really enjoy being outside; we took advantage of all their outdoor space, even having lunches outside."

The AAA Four Diamond PGA National Resort & Spa will complete the "final round" of its \$65 million renovation this fall. Recent and ongoing renovations encompass all 379 guest rooms, public spaces, meeting spaces and all five golf courses.

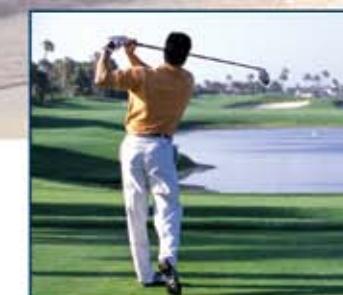
Among the latest upgrades will be the addition of new outdoor lakeside event areas and an outdoor firepit area; renovated and expanded dining outlets featuring outdoor

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Las Vegas

Everybody Wins as the City Sets Its Sights on a Record-Breaking Year

By Derek Reveron



The Strip is a 4.5-mile stretch of Las Vegas Boulevard with more lights, neon and glitz than any other place in the world.

Expect 2012 to be the best year ever for Las Vegas meetings and conventions. This year, the city will likely host a record 40 million visitors, according to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA). In 2011, Las Vegas attracted 38.9 million visitors, the second highest total ever. The number of conventions and meetings in 2011 increased 5.7 percent while convention attendance jumped 8.8 percent. Year-over-year visitor growth increased for 22 consecutive months as of the end of 2011. Mean-

while, the average daily room rate surged 10.7 percent.

Amy Riley, senior director of convention sales at the LVCVA, says, "Our primary big-picture goal for 2012 is to grow visitor volume to 40 million. That includes all markets — trade shows, leisure, gaming and business meetings. We see that industries like finance, insurance and health care are bouncing back."

The resurgence results from carefully planned LVCVA marketing efforts launched four years ago. Riley

explains: "In 2009, we hit the road for leisure international and trade show meetings. A lot of destinations didn't do that. In 2010, we did more of bringing to the destination groups that hadn't met here or hadn't done so in a while. In 2011, we hosted a ton of industry events here from PCMA to IMEX America and Site (Global). Moving forward, we are going back in-market a little more," says Riley.

Corporate groups, including insurance and financial firms, will play a key part in this year's record growth.

Companies will continue to increase the number of events and activities planned in conjunction with meetings, says Rick Forman, vice president of business development of Las Vegas-based AWG Destination Management. "There is an uptick in our revenue and overall stronger demand from our corporate clients. We have a DMC and a transportation company. The transportation company is a strong logistical partner to the city, and it is way up in volume. With our DMC, we are doing more theme parties, buying out more venues, and managing more tours and high-end activities. All of our business partners are seeing ramped-up business volume, and it's all corporate," says Forman.

He observes that financial firms are no longer self-conscious about the public's perception of meeting in Las Vegas and are carefully minding their spending. "Budgets are up a little bit but they are auditing spend in a very big way, especially with re-bookers like us. They want to see transparency in invoices and proposals. With public perception, they are over it. It's done," adds Forman.

Good Value Continues

Budget-conscious meeting planners find that, despite the growing demand for rooms and meeting space, Las Vegas still offers good value.

Tracy Waddle, a senior sales promotion specialist and meeting planner for GuideOne Insurance, a West Des Moines, IA-based property casualty insurance company, recently secured a good deal. Waddle had just two months to plan a two-day new product launch meeting for 100 insurance agents in Las Vegas last fall. Working with a site selection firm, Waddle considered several properties in Las Vegas but couldn't find exactly what she wanted until she conducted a site inspection at the M Resort Spa and Casino. Waddle selected the M Resort for several reasons, including value. "I was extremely happy with how the negotiations went. We did go back and forth several times on room rates and concessions. But I

was extremely pleased with where we landed in the end. And they have no resort fee, which made it nice. They also have a complimentary shuttle to the airport and The Strip," says Waddle. Waddle, who plans 10 to 15 meetings a year for groups ranging from 10 to 150 people, also chose the M Resort because its size, layout and location off The Strip perfectly accommodated the meeting. "Being on The Strip is

convenient, but it has its pluses and minuses. With a group of 100, it could get lost in some of the bigger hotels, and you can walk forever to get to the convention or meeting space. We loved the way the M Resort's meeting space is on one level. You never have to walk through the casino or anywhere else to get there. This was one way to keep the group together and focused," says Waddle.

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During the meeting, small touches by the M Resort's staff added even more value. For example, throughout the meeting, the hotel flashed the company's logo onto the lobby's walls and on the marquee near the front entrance.

Waddle was also impressed with the M Resort's in-house



Tracy Waddle
Senior Sales
Promotion Specialist
GuideOne Insurance
West Des Moines, IA

audio-visual department. "We had quite an elaborate AV setup. Because of the size of the group, we used a riser, had screens left and right of the stage, LCD projectors and large flat screens in the corners of the room. I'm pretty AV savvy and knew exactly what we needed, and the department was Johnny-on-the-spot," adds Waddle.

Three days prior to the meeting for 100 sales people, GuideOne held a three-day gathering for more than 30 sales managers and executives at the M Resort Spa and Casino. The first meeting included a dinner at the hotel's rooftop restaurant. The following night, the group attended KA by Cirque du Soleil at the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino. The 30-person meeting was the first that GuideOne held at the M Resort Spa and Casino, which opened in 2009. Both meetings received rave reviews from attendees who completed post-meeting questionnaires. "They had nothing but accolades for the hotel and how much they enjoyed the meeting. That was a big deal for us. And nobody complained about being off The Strip. We

are planning another small meeting there soon and possibly another large meeting next year," says Waddle.

Buyer's or Seller's Market?

With business booming once again in Las Vegas, is it a buyer's or seller's market? Riley believes that it's not quite either.

"I think we're balanced.

There are dates now where our hotels couldn't take another meeting of 10 people. And we see there are certain time frames that aren't jammed. Negotiations are still out there and available. Through the economic changes we did

increase our hotel room inventory," says Riley.

Hotels on and off The Strip that are popular among meeting planners include MGM Resorts International's Aria Resort & Casino at CityCenter. Located on The Strip, Aria is home to 300,000 sf of technologically advanced meeting and convention space, and 4,004 guest rooms and suites. There are 36 meeting rooms and four ball-

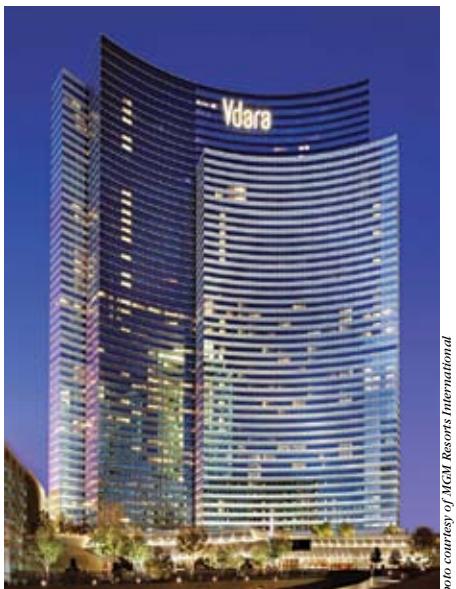


Photo courtesy of MGM Resorts International

Vdara Hotel & Spa at CityCenter is a non-gaming, smoke-free, eco-friendly, all-suite boutique hotel located between Aria Resort & Casino and Bellagio.

rooms ranging from 20,000 to 51,000 sf. Three of the ballrooms have theatrical stages. Aria was one of the first Las Vegas hotels to be awarded LEED Gold certification by the U.S. Green Building council.

Vdara Hotel & Spa at CityCenter, another MGM Resorts International property, is a non-gaming, smoke-free, eco-friendly, all-suite boutique hotel located between Aria Resort & Casino and Bellagio. Vdara offers a rooftop pool and lounge, spa and salon, and 4,000 sf of intimate meeting space. Private events also can be staged at the pool providing a spectacular backdrop of CityCenter and The Las Vegas Strip. Vdara's Silk Road, a fine dining setting, is another option for a special event.

Also located on The Strip, New York-New York Hotel & Casino features facades that recreate Manhattan's iconic skyline and structures. These include replicas of the Statue of Liberty, the Brooklyn Bridge and the Empire State Building. The replicas serve as unique venues, offering space for meeting and receptions. The entire hotel provides 2,024 guest rooms and 21,000 sf of meeting space.

Located just minutes away from The Strip, the South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa provides 2,163 rooms with views of the Las Vegas Valley. All rooms on the top floor are suites. The hotel offers 170,000 sf of indoor meeting space that includes 22 breakout rooms, a 22,000-sf ballroom and an 80,000-sf exhibit hall. Extras include a 16-screen movie complex and a 64-lane bowling center. There is also a 4,600-sf arena.

For an intimate setting located just off The Strip, small and mid-sized groups can consider The Westin Casuarina Hotel, Casino & Spa. The 826-room hotel provides 15 meeting and event spaces covering 20,000 sf. The largest space is the 6,700-sf Acacia Ballroom. For presentations, a 2,000-sf theater seats 175 attendees.

Located in the middle of The Strip, The Mirage is built for pleasure and business. Owned by MGM Resorts

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Canopied day beds offer a tranquil retreat at M Resort's pool complex.

International, The Mirage features 3,044 guest rooms and 170,000 sf of meeting space.

One of the nation's largest financial institutions recently held a three-day strategic planning meeting for 600 sales people and executives at The Mirage. This was the second time the group has met at the hotel and the seventh consecutive year it has met in Las Vegas. "When times were tough, it became more of a buyer's market and worked in our favor," says an in-house meeting planner with the financial institution. "Now, everything's gone up a little bit. We have a procurement department that may put out a bid on, say, five or seven properties. It boils down to availability, price, dates, accommodations and other factors. Without getting specific, The Mirage pretty much gave us the best deal."

The group continues to return to Las Vegas for several reasons. "It's an easy city to get to with a lot of available non-stop flights, and the airport is close to the hotel," says the planner. "You always get good service. If you need something at the last minute, the hotels produce it. At The Mirage, we had full days of meetings from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. We had a sales contact that did an excellent job of literally staying by my side and responding right away to anything we needed."

New and Renovated

Several hotels have started or completed renovations, upgrades or expansions over the last year. MGM Grand is remodeling the 3,570 guest rooms and 642 suites in the property's main tower. The \$160 million project is scheduled for completion by September 2012. The redesign will feature interior accents, headboard walls, mirrors, dressers, a flat-screen HDTV and a mini-bar. Some of the redesigned one- and two-bedroom suites feature terraces overlooking The Strip. As part of the project, the MGM Grand closed its famous night-club, Studio 54.

The oldest hotel on The Strip, Flamingo Las Vegas, is beginning to open some of its renovated rooms to the public.

The hotel has been refurbishing 2,307 of its more than 3,500 total rooms, and the project is scheduled for completion by March 2012.

Caesars Palace has opened Octavius Tower. It is the hotel's sixth tower and the crowning piece of an

\$860 million expansion started in 2008. The 23-story tower brings the total number of rooms at Caesars Palace to nearly 4,000. Rooms in Octavius Tower feature chrome fixtures, marble floors, granite-topped desks, 42-inch HDTVs and large whirlpool bathtubs.

Described as a hotel within a hotel, Octavius Tower features a separate lobby and private valet entrance. The tower also has its own concierge staff and a Starbucks near the registration desk. Octavius Tower also provides its own app that guests can use to contact hotel services such as housekeeping, the concierge, room service and wakeup calls.

In other developments at Caesars Palace, the hotel plans to rebrand its Centurion tower as the Nobu Hotel and open it later in 2012. The Nobu will feature an 11,200-sf Nobu restaurant and lounge with teppanyaki grill tables, private dining areas, a sushi bar and large lounge.

Seeking to add even more fun to the center of The Strip, Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment will build the Linq, a \$550 million, 200,000 sf entertainment, dining and retail destination. The Linq will include restaurants, retail stores, nightclubs, bars and the Las Vegas High Roller — a 550-foot-high observation wheel featuring cabins offering food service for up to 40 people. The Linq is scheduled to debut in June 2013.

Also, late last year Caesars Entertainment expanded its consolidated meetings sales and services. The services originally offered one point of contact for 25,000 hotel rooms and 1 million sf of meeting space in Caesars' eight Las Vegas resorts. Now, the service provides one-stop-shopping service to all 38 U.S. properties.

The M Resort Spa and Casino debuted LUX — a 7,200-sf special event suite on the 16th floor with an outdoor terrace with fireplace and views of the Las Vegas Valley. The hotel now has more than 92,000 sf of meeting and event space.

The Bellagio has completed a \$70 million redesign of 2,568 guest rooms in the hotel's main tower. Each room includes a state-of-the-art media center for digital devices, a laptop safe and 40-inch flat-screen TV. The renovations also include energy-saving LED lighting, organic carpeting and improved air circulation. **I&FMM**

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L'Auberge Del Mar, Del Mar, CA, has announced a new sales team: **Robert Harter** was named director of sales. He formerly was associate director of group sales at La Costa Resort and Spa, Carlsbad, CA. **Jeffrey Livingston** was named associate director of sales. He was national sales manager for both L'Auberge and its former sister property, Estancia La Jolla. **Christina Benson** was named sales manager, overseeing the Western territory. She was senior sales manager at the Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel in Portland, OR. **Lindsey Dollahon** was named sales manager for corporate and leisure markets. She was global sales manager at Aspen Meadows, Aspen, CO.

Thomas J. Egan was named director of sales at the Orlando World Center Marriott, Orlando, FL. He formerly served as area director of sales and marketing for White Lodging Services in Chicago, IL.

The Shores Resort & Spa, Daytona Beach Shores, FL, has named **Jason Kern** as director of sales, groups. He previously served as director of sales and marketing at Hammock Beach Resort in Palm Coast, FL.

Michael Aylmer was named mid-Atlantic regional director of sales for KSL Resorts, La Quinta, CA. He formerly

served as director of sales and marketing at The Homestead, Hot Springs, VA.

Preferred Hotel Group has named **Christie Weller** as director of group sales for Southern California and the Southwest. She was group sales manager at Leading Hotels of the World in Southern California.

PGA National Resort & Spa, Palm Beach Gardens, FL, has named **Murrial Boulware** as director of national accounts. She was senior regional sales manager for RockResorts Mountain and Coastal collections.

Pinehurst Resort, Village of Pinehurst, NC, has named **Jennifer Kenwell** as director of national accounts, responsible for the Southwest, West, Washington, DC, and Illinois markets. She was most recently director of catering and conference services at Sea Island Resort, Sea Island, GA.

Colleen Pace was named director of sales for Cheyenne Mountain Resort, Colorado Springs, CO. She most recently served as director of group sales for the Vail Cascade Resort & Spa, Vail, CO.

The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club, Naples, FL, has announced two sales appointments: **Charles Mullins** was named director of group sales respon-

sible for the mid-Atlantic region. He was senior national sales manager for Station Casinos in Las Vegas. **Elizabeth Kintzing** was named sales manager responsible for the Southeast region. She was sales manager at the Sheraton Norfolk Waterside Hotel in Norfolk, VA.

Mary Hutchcraft was named director of sales and marketing at Reunion Resort in Orlando, FL. She most recently served as director of sales at The Shores Resort & Spa in Daytona Beach Shores, FL.

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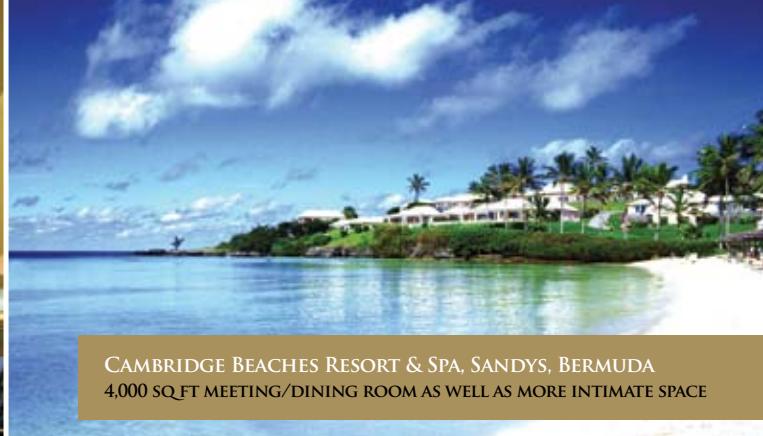
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The Venetian/The Palazzo	702-414-4202	www.venetianpalazzomeetings.com	Chandra Allison	chandra.allison@venetianpalazzo.com
Walt Disney World	321-939-7112	www.disneymeetings.com	Anne Hamilton	meetings@disneyworld.com
Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort	800-524-4939	www.swandalphinmeetings.com	Eric Opron	meetings@swandalphin.com
Washington Hilton	202-328-2080	www.hiltonsofdc.com	Group Sales	dcawh-salesadm@hilton.com
Washington State Convention & Trade Center	206-694-5030	www.wsctc.com	Michael T. McQuade	sales@wsctc.com
The Westin Casuarina Las Vegas Hotel, Casino & Spa	702-836-5934	www.westin.com/lasvegas	Sandra Horvath	shorvath@westinlv.com
The Westin La Cantera Resort	210-558-2229	www.westinlacantera.com	Group Sales	info@westinlacantera.com
Wild Horse Pass Hotel & Casino	520-796-4923	www.wingilariver.com	Denise Heintz	denise.heintz@wingilariver.com
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