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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

## In Tune With Music City

New and Improved Nashville  
Hits All the Right Notes  
for Meetings

PAGE 28



Photo by Wolf Hoffman

A total of 123 meetings representing more than 1 million room nights have been booked into Nashville's new state-of-the-art Music City Center, which opened in May.

Cities at Your Service

PAGE 12



Meetings at Sea

PAGE 20



Las Vegas

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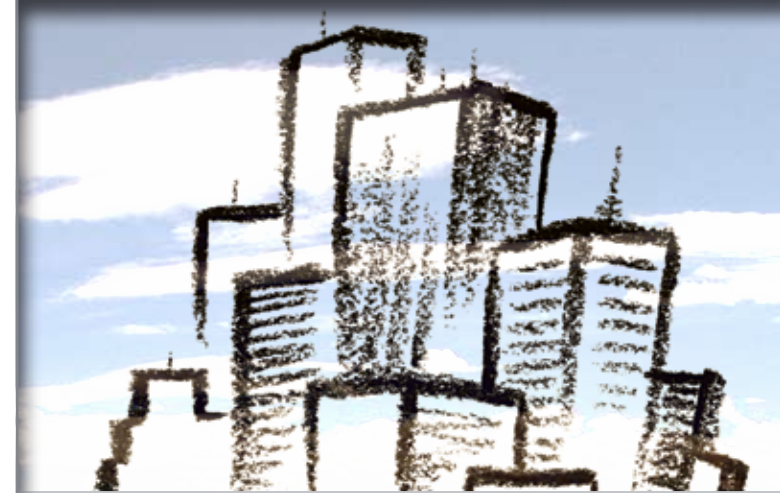
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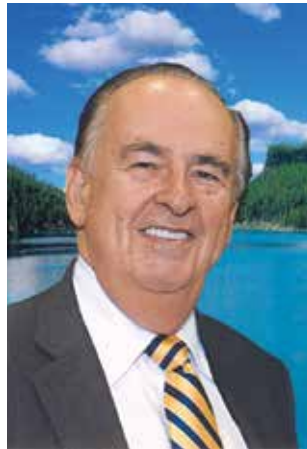
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# Publisher's Message

## Singing Nashville's Praises

Media attention — one of the prerequisites necessary for a trend to fully bloom — is being showered on Nashville nowadays. In January, *The New York Times* called Nashville the nation's newest "it" city, noting that the city "made its way to the top of all kinds of lists in 2012." Trendsetters, the young and artistic, are flocking to Music City, too, helping to spread the good news. So it's not surprising that corporate groups also are making their way to Nashville and finding everything they need and more for a memorable and successful event.



As we report in our cover story on page 28 "In Tune With Music City — New and Improved Nashville Hits All the Right Notes for Meetings," the city is quickly becoming one of the hottest meeting and convention destinations.

Planner Heather Willis, a Nashville native, is newly enamored with her hometown, which she says is "drawing a lot of attention." Willis adds, "I've been most impressed...that there have been so many new trendy restaurants and cool venues, in addition to the development of downtown with the new convention center and Omni hotel, as well as

other new hotels that have opened or are planned. That means Nashville is now more of a destination than it ever has been before."

President of the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp. Butch Spyridon and his hard-working team met their goal of selling more than 1 million room nights by the time Nashville's new state-of-the-art Music City Center opened in May. "It's within easy walking distance of Nashville's famed honky tonks, as well as countless live music venues," Spyridon says. "We are 'Music City,' so obviously we want to give delegates a unique experience filled with — you guessed it — music," says Spyridon. "Nashville isn't just where the music is played, it's also where the music is made. And that gives rise to a creative culture that permeates every aspect of the city. It is that creative vitality and Southern hospitality, paired with accessibility and affordability, that has made Nashville a popular meeting destination."

In "Cities at Your Service," our CVB update on page 12, Spyridon also noted that *Bon Appétit* referred to Nashville as "the coolest, tastiest city in the South," and invited our readers to visit soon to sample what everybody's talking about.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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# News & Notes

## The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans Undergoing Makeover

NEW ORLEANS, LA — The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans is undergoing a renovation of the Maison Orleans wing, its exclusive club level, and The Ritz-Carlton Suite, the hotel's Presidential Suite. The hotel's original interior designer, Lisambiance Interior Design, has been brought back to update these settings. Coupling this makeover with the 2011 renovation of the hotel's 415 deluxe guest rooms and 36 executive and junior suites, the hotel will have one of the most updated and luxurious collections of guest rooms in New Orleans when the renovations are complete in September 2013. The Maison Orleans lounge will feature a combination of antique furnishings and artwork with modern conveniences. In the dining room, a new presentation area will feature an island with both heating and cooling mechanisms to service the Club Level's four daily food presentations. The lobby area of the Maison Orleans will feature new cabinetry with a 55-inch television and refrigeration for beverage offerings. The refreshed Maison Orleans guest rooms also will feature commissioned artwork from various local artists as well as state-of-the-art LED lighting, custom cabinetry, espresso machines and mounted televisions. [www.ritzcarlton.com](http://www.ritzcarlton.com)



*The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans.*

## Marriott Hotels Envisions the Future of Travel

Reflecting the change happening at its properties, Marriott Hotels on August 26 launched its new global marketing campaign in Asia called "Travel Brilliantly." The campaign reflects the lifestyle of the next generation of travelers, who seamlessly blend work and play in a mobile and global world. The campaign includes online TV and digital advertising, a new brand look and logo, and enhanced social media platforms. In addition, Marriott has launched an English-language website — [www.travelbrilliantly.com](http://www.travelbrilliantly.com) — revealing innovations under development within the brand, as well as a co-creation platform to solicit user-generated ideas.

At its core, the multi-year campaign disrupts the traditional industry idea that a hotel is bound by its four walls. Rather, the campaign shifts the focus, celebrating how the global travel experience opens minds and is inspirational. As the advertising proclaims, "This is not a hotel. It's an idea that travel should be brilliant... It's not only about where you're staying. It's about where you're going." As a part of the transformation, re-designed lobbies and public spaces known as Greatrooms are being rapidly deployed for the next generation of travelers who blend work and play, demand style and substance, and require technology. [www.marriotthotels.com](http://www.marriotthotels.com)

## Marina del Rey Hotel Plans Spring 2014 Reopening

MARINA DEL REY, CA — Pacifica Hotels has announced a \$20 million top-to-bottom renovation of the historic Marina del Rey Hotel that will necessitate closing the property until it re-opens in spring 2014. The newly renovated 160-room Marina del Rey Hotel will boast four-star amenities, including a full-service restaurant and 24-hour room service; concierge assistance; an outdoor, marina-facing pool and sundeck; an outdoor event venue; and many additional offerings. Originally opened in the 1964, the historic Marina del Rey Hotel will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary next year. Marina del Rey Hotel is one of five Pacifica hotels in the half-mile radius of Marina del Rey. The company's other Marina del Rey hotels include Jamaica Bay Inn, Hilton Garden Inn Marina del Rey, Inn at Marina del Rey and Inn at Venice Beach. [www.pacificahotels.com](http://www.pacificahotels.com)

## The Broadmoor to Offer Outdoor Group Getaways

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO — The Broadmoor announced exclusive group hunting and sporting expedition packages for up to 12 guests on the privately owned Eagles Nest Ranch, which is located on three large reservoirs in northern Colorado. The all-inclusive package includes accommodations, orientation and training with the ranch's expert hunting guides, daily hunting excursions and gourmet meals featuring ranch-grown beef, estate-bottled wines and other culinary delights. The four-day/three-night group hunting packages are available Sunday through Wednesday through March 2014 for \$30,000 for 12 guests or for smaller groups, \$1,000 per person, per day, with a minimum three-night stay. Pricing is inclusive of accommodations, meals and hunting, and exclusive of alcohol, shells and targets. [www.broadmoor.com/group-activities](http://www.broadmoor.com/group-activities)

## Windstar Cruises to Renovate Staterooms

SEATTLE, WA — Windstar Cruises announced stateroom upgrades scheduled for Wind Star and Wind Spirit, the two smallest sister yachts of the fleet. Wind Star's 72 guest staterooms will be renovated in November, and Wind Spirit will have its 73 staterooms completed in April 2015. The current layout will be transformed with a sofa where guests can relax, watch TV or catch a cat-nap to replace the previous desk and vanity set-up. Staterooms on both yachts were previously enhanced as part of Windstar's \$18 million fleet-wide renovation project in 2012. Windstar Cruises also is preparing for Star Pride, the first of the company's three new power yachts, to enter its month-long dry-dock in April 2014, before sailing the Mediterranean in May 2014. [www.windstarcruises.com](http://www.windstarcruises.com)

## Doral Resort Officially Renamed Trump National Doral Miami



*Trump National Doral Miami.*

MIAMI, FL — The Trump Organization, which last year purchased the iconic Doral Resort, renamed the resort as Trump National Doral Miami. The property will feature five enhanced and expanded golf courses highlighted by the redesign of the famed Blue Monster; 640 completely remodeled guest rooms; revamped main building, lobby, fitness center, ballrooms, pools and spa; new restaurants and bar concepts; landscaping renewal; and technology upgrades to all rooms and meeting space. The resort, which is open during the renovation, also will restore and expand 100,000 sf of event space, including a 7,200-sf ballroom and 8,000-sf terrace. The Blue Monster golf course will be ready for the World Golf Championships-Cadillac Championship in March 2014. [www.trumpnationaldoral.com](http://www.trumpnationaldoral.com)

## MADE FOR DREAMERS AND DEAL-MAKERS.

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# News & Notes

## Bonaventure Resort's Conference Center Renovation Underway



Bonaventure Resort & Spa.

WESTON, FL — Bonaventure Resort & Spa announced that the refurbishment of the resort's 60,000-sf conference center, including a 175-seat amphitheater, ballrooms, individual meeting rooms and the entire conference center's communal spaces will be complete this fall. The resort recently opened the luxurious, 48,000-sf aLaya Spa, which has 30 treatment rooms, a relaxation room, a private outdoor heated pool, women's and men's sauna and steam rooms as well as a full-service salon. The resort also completed the update of its 18-hole championship East Course at the Bonaventure Country Club, which included new TifEagle Bermuda Greens, redesigned bunkers and manicured fairways, as well as a full update to the main club area including a new pro shop and locker rooms. Located near Fort Lauderdale, Bonaventure Resort & Spa features 500 luxurious guest rooms, four swimming pools, and four dining options. [www.bonaventureresortandspa.com](http://www.bonaventureresortandspa.com)

## Detroit Marriott to Renovate Meeting Spaces

DETROIT, MI — More change and investment is coming to Detroit's riverfront as the Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center announced that it will begin a \$30 million renovation project in February 2014, transforming 1,329 guest rooms and 100,000 sf of meeting space. The new meeting rooms will feature the colors of a "Michigan beach at sunset" — mauve, taupe, purple and brown. Renovations include an extensive remodeling of the ballroom and exhibit hall space to allow greater functionality of the meeting space. Detroit Marriott guests will enjoy many new amenities and technological innovations including mobile check-in as well as Workspring at Marriott, Red Coat Direct and Workspace on Demand. The Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center, located on the riverfront in the heart of downtown, offers spectacular views of Detroit with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the city skyline, the Detroit River and Canada. Guest room renovations will start in February 2014 and are expected to take about one year to complete. Meeting room remodeling will begin in spring 2014 and conclude in fall 2014. The 70-floor hotel will remain open throughout the project with a few floors undergoing reconstruction at a time. The hotel is within the General Motors Renaissance Center complex, 25 minutes from Detroit Metro Airport and five minutes from Windsor, Ontario. [www.detroitmarriott.com](http://www.detroitmarriott.com)



Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center.

## Wyndham Hotel Group Rebrands Hamilton Park Hotel and Conference Center

FLORHAM PARK, NJ — Wyndham Hotel Group has rebranded and taken on the day-to-day management of the Hamilton Park Hotel and Conference Center. The 219-room property will convert to the Wyndham Hotels and Resorts brand and will undergo a \$10 million renovation project over the next three years to enhance public spaces, dining facilities and guest rooms. Located just minutes from Wyndham Hotel Group's Parsippany, NJ-based headquarters, the hotel is approximately 30 miles from New York City and near the tri-state area's three international airports. The property features more than 27,000 sf of IACC-approved meeting facilities, including 40 multifunction meeting rooms. Spacious prefunction areas, complimentary high-speed Internet access and state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment are available. [www.wyndhamworldwide.com](http://www.wyndhamworldwide.com)

# Snapshots



**1** Michael D. Gehrisch (r), president and CEO of DMAI, with incoming DMAI Board Chair Martha Sheridan, the president and CEO of Providence Warwick CVB, and Immediate Past-Chair of the Board Greg Edwards, president and CEO Greater Des Moines CVB, in Orlando at the 2013 Annual Convention, which attracted a record 1,325 attendees. **2** "The record attendance and energy levels generated during the convention reflect the optimism within the DMO industry," said Gehrisch, shown here greeting attendees. **3,4** The GBTA Convention 2013, held in August in San Diego, CA, was a huge success. Next year, the event, which includes industry education, networking, enlightenment and entertainment, will be held in Los Angeles, CA, July 27–30. **5** At ISES Live 2013 in Atlantis, Paradise Island, Bahamas, outgoing International President Kathi Miller (4th from left) was installed along with the other International Board of Governors by incoming International President Brian Acheson, CSEP (not shown). **6** As attendees arrive for the ISES Live 2013 Gala Dinner, they pose with the human statue depicting the God Atlantis. **7** Attendees engaged in an uplifting presentation at the 2013 National Speakers Association Convention, held in Philadelphia in August. **8** "A Glittering Night at Hyatt" appreciation dinner was held in August at the Regency Ballroom of Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Tsim Sha Tsui. Guests enjoyed a special menu as an introduction to the hotel's new "Personal Preference Programme," which allows guests to choose their own main course in a banquet setting.





# Perspective

By Eric Blanc, CMP

## Blurring the Lines Between Sales and Services: Why Evolving to a Model of Collaboration Matters Now More Than Ever

**M**ore often than not in the convention industry, there are hard lines that separate sales from services. Finding ourselves in a new era of meetings where budgets are unpredictable, a heavy emphasis must be placed on streamlining operations and creating efficiencies wherever possible. As a result of this new environment, it is imperative for professionals in both sales and services roles to collaborate and embrace each other's strengths to achieve success.

From the convention center and Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) perspective, there are many of us who recently took a hard look at our available resources and discovered that sales and services could have higher close rates and operate more efficiently and cost-effectively if they worked together rather than as separate entities. Traditionally, each has excelled in their roles often completely independent of each other. Sales works hard to bring the meeting to the destination by proac-

visit. The sales team can utilize the team as a key selling point and cultivate a long-term partnership based on performance.

As a hospitality professional with more than two decades of expertise in both sales and service, I keep an open mind as to how we can enhance our industry and the overall attendee experience. In Tampa, we capitalized on an opportunity to improve the overall experience for everyone who attends and works at conventions. When meeting planners or trade show managers select this destination, they can be assured of a team effort when it comes to not only the convention sales relationship, but the flow of destination services as well. All of our destination partners understand how their roles integrate with and support our other partners' roles in delivering a successful event to the customer.

At the heart of this concept is the GET (Guest Experience Training) Program. All members of the Tampa Bay hospital-

“These economic times demand **creative thinking** and **open minds**.”

tively prospecting, networking and tailoring pricing for meeting planner customers. Services excels in seeing the meeting through to the end, partnering with the meeting planner to ensure all details of a meeting are executed to client expectations.

### Make a Planner's Life Easier

By blurring the lines between sales and service, we force ourselves to see the meeting from the planner's point of view. It doesn't matter what kind of meeting is being planned, having a cohesive team that knows what their venue is capable of accomplishing and its unique features is one that is naturally going to make a planner's life easier and increase their success rates. In a competitive environment, anything that serves as a differentiator cannot be overlooked. A destination team that clearly demonstrates collaboration between sales professionals and event service managers can be the differentiator if used properly during the sales process. For example, the service professional adds insight and creativity regarding specific factors such as food and beverage, flow and space placement if brought along on a site

ity community have participated in ongoing training that presents hospitality from the point of view of the guest. The program includes sales and services staff from hotels, the convention center, the DMO, as well as providers from all aspects of the hospitality industry including taxi drivers, restaurant workers and other entertainment venues for the destination — taking the concept of collaboration to a whole new level. Guests now have access to many different tools such as Yelp, Trip Advisor and CitySearch to voice opinions on their experiences with various destinations. With this instantaneous feedback also available at the click of a button for our clients, it's absolutely vital for sales and services to come together to look at the guest experience from all angles like this.

### Top Lessons

With this valuable experience in mind, here are the top four lessons that can be learned when we blur the lines between sales and service.

**1. If you build it, they will come.** By integrating sales



and services, seamless transactions are facilitated. Destinations that identify the key players who can inspire success all around can present a united front early on in the process. Build a team-based atmosphere in which everyone involved is held accountable, enabling planners to be able to fully trust the team as a resource.

- 2. Collaboration = lead generation.** Forming productive relationships between sales, service partners and planners means each side of the equation will benefit. In a collaborative model, any one of the partners can generate the lead. A team-based approach to follow-through can lead to not only successful meetings, but repeat business and increased lead generation through referrals.
- 3. Keep lines of communication open.** Planning an event is no longer a linear equation that flows from sales to services sequentially. Convention services managers should be integrated into initial phone calls, meetings and other communications to ensure details about the

venue space and operational capabilities are considered in the sales process.

- 4. Never compromise quality.** Meeting planners hold the key to driving the collaborative model forward by creating demand. Ensure that the sales and services professionals at centers and DMOs are qualified to provide the highest level of service and support. Professional certifications and programs such as the Convention Sales Professionals International's own Seal of Approval — which identifies and documents the collaborative relationships between centers and DMOs on the sales level — can help prove the necessary structures and skills are in place.

These economic times demand creative thinking and open minds. The reality is that meeting planners simply tend to gravitate toward destinations that work as a team since these locations produce the most successful meetings. Traditional views of the industry are soon to fade into the rearview mirror as the collaborative model proves itself more and more. **C&IT**



**Eric Blanc, CMP**

is a tenured professional with more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry. He is currently the president of Convention Sales Professionals International and the director of sales, marketing and convention services for the Tampa Convention Center located in Tampa, Florida. He is a graduate of Florida State University with a bachelor of science in business and marketing.



# Destination Update

## Cities at Your Service

### How CVBs and Convention Centers Are Upping Their Games Across the Country

Christine “Shimo” Shimasaki, CDME, CMP, managing director of EmpowerMINT for Destination Marketing Association International, would like to clear up a few misperceptions some planners have about working with convention and visitors bureaus. “Oftentimes, CVBs are stereotyped as being only interested in large meetings,” she says. “There’s also a big misperception that CVBs would just send (leads) to all of their hotels and not qualify them. We, as an industry, are trying to get over those two stereotypes.”

“CVBs have really stepped up to be the best first point of contact for planners who are looking to find the right fit for their meeting — for any size meeting,” she continues. “When you look at what’s going on in the industry, a lot of RFPs are hitting the hotels. You hear a lot about that. Technology provides a



By Karen Brost

real opportunity for efficiency, but then sometimes technology doesn’t really provide us what we want. The net effect of that convenience is that hotels have seen this huge increase in the number of RFPs hitting their desks, and so that is kind of providing a response problem. So unless planners have their RFP well-articulated and well-targeted, they may not get to the top of the priority list at the hotel level.”

That, she explains, is one area in which seeking the advice of a local expert can be of value. “We need to target the number of hotels or the hotels which the RFP should be sent to. But if the planner is not knowledgeable about a particular

destination, not knowing the lay of the land of that destination can be a disadvantage, so we encourage a conversation to occur prior to sending out a full RFP.

“That conversation could occur with their own partners that they may have, whether it’s a third party or our local experts who can give them advice and recommendations based upon what they’re looking for,” Shimasaki notes. “I did a survey recently of our CVB sales professionals, and eight out of 10 sales professionals are consultative in nature. That’s where they really feel their role is. They provide planners with recommendations and advice.”

She says that CVB representatives

*“CVBs have really stepped up to be the best first point of contact for planners who are looking to find the right fit for their meeting — for any size meeting.”*

Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP, Managing Director, EmpowerMINT  
Destination Marketing Association International, Washington, DC



that if they get an economic impact number, then they can take that number with them from destination to destination and use it to articulate the value of their meeting. That’s highly erroneous, because economic impact, as far as we’re concerned, is about net new spending to the destination.”

She explained why economic impact differs among cities. “Taxes differ from destination to destination, payroll taxes are different, the cost of living is differ-

have the advantage of being locals who know their city. For example, airport transfer times can be a key issue when planning a meeting. “When you look at (hotel) literature, everything is ‘conveniently located’ and everything is ‘20 minutes away,’” she laughs, adding that it takes someone with local knowledge to understand what the actual travel times are at all times of the day. She says that a CVB representative can use their insider’s knowledge to help planners narrow down their hotel choices based on specific criteria.

When asked if there is a size of meeting that would be too small for a CVB to handle, she responded, “Probably less than 10 rooms.” That certainly dispels the notion of CVBs only being interested in large meetings.

#### The Art of the RFP

Shimasaki says that another key to success is to have a well-written RFP. She recommends the Convention Industry Council’s newly revised APEX RFP workbook. “I happen to be part of that APEX committee,” she explains. “We went through it, and now there are templates

for the single hotel meeting versus the citywide meeting. There are also templates for your DMC, your AV company, as well as general service contractors.”

She says that it’s also important for planners to understand the pluses and minuses of their meeting as they begin the negotiation process. “Not all meetings are created equal,” she notes. She says that factors to consider include arrival and departure patterns and seasonality (for example, you can usually get a great deal in Minneapolis in the winter) and it helps if the group can be flexible on dates within one or two weeks.

Shimasaki added that the proven track record of the group is also important, and that yes, CVBs and hotels do exchange information about groups’ histories on a regular basis. “If you’re a hotel, at the end of the day, it’s about risk, so hotels need some assurances and history just like a credit report for financial institutions.

“The final factor, of course, is their total revenue. If you’re a citywide, we’re going to want to understand what your economic impact is. And that’s a highly localized conversation. Planners think



A rendering of the San Jose Convention Center’s expansion.

ent, and the cost of a meal is different. You can’t take your economic impact with you from year to year.”

#### Marketing Support

The services that CVBs offer extend far beyond the booking date of a meeting. Some, for example, offer customized websites and/or apps for events. “They’re there for marketing support and public relations support,” Shimasaki explains. “CVBs have access to local media, and they have relationships built with those local media. They can connect you with local political figures in the destination that are related to the topic of the meeting or local industries related to it.”

#### Staying on the Move with CVBs

Cindy Wilhelm, executive assistant to the CEO and special events coordinator for Two Men and a Truck International Inc., a franchise moving company with operations in 36 states, plans an annual conference for approximately 400 attendees. The event moves to a different



Nashville’s new Music City Center.





The new Grand Plaza at the Anaheim Convention Center.

city each year, so she relies on CVBs for support and advice.

As Wilhelm begins the planning process, she works with a third-party planning firm to narrow down the choices. "Then we usually go and tour the properties, and that's when the CVBs help us out so much," she says. "Usually, we fly into the town, and the CVB is always there picking us up, which we appreciate. They take us to the hotels, make sure we're all checked in. We always have a golf outing, so they help us with the golf courses that are nearby. They usually take us to the golf course. We usually plan a tour, and the CVB helps us with tour options, and they also take us to the tour locations to check them out. They always take us to dinner; always take us to lunch."

She also finds the CVBs' local knowledge to be invaluable in other ways. "We

have a keynote speaker, and we try to use a local person so they always have names for us. We prefer to use in-town entertainment for our awards night, so they always help us with that." Last year, she worked with Visit Jacksonville for her event and was very pleased with the results. "They did (all the things I mentioned) plus more." Her next event will take place in Las Vegas. "I've been there twice for a site visit, and we met with the CVB both times. They've been very easy to work with, as well."

"We've even had CVBs offer concessions to us to come to their town," she adds. "Say, for instance, if we're in a site that doesn't really have a golf course nearby, and we're going to hire buses for golf, they will offer to compensate, to give us so many dollars per person to offset the cost of the buses. We've probably had that two or three times in the 10 years that I've been doing this."

Here's an update of what's new at CVBs and convention centers around the country:



***"It is really amazing...when I'm talking to other meeting planners, and they don't use the CVBs — I tell them all the things they do for us. I think they're the best things on this Earth."***

**Cindy Wilhelm**, Executive Assistant to the CEO and Special Events Coordinator, Two Men and a Truck International Inc., Lansing, MI

## Nashville

There's a lot going on in Music City, not the least of which is the grand opening in May of the 1.2-million-sf Music City Center, which offers 350,000 sf of exhibit space and the largest Grand Ballroom in the state. "The city has undergone a tremendous metamorphosis, all the while retaining its unique character and authenticity, which is really not easy to do," explains Butch Spyridon, president of the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp. "Our new convention center, we believe, is the next generation of buildings in this country. Its finishes are top of the line, its functionality is second to none, and it is beautiful

One of three ballrooms recently renovated at the Albuquerque Convention Center.

inside and out. In order to make that work, we knew we needed to improve the dining alternatives and options in the city, and we have done that to the point where *Bon Appétit* referred to us as 'the coolest, tastiest city in the South.'



Orlando's Orange County Convention Center recently embarked on a five-year improvement project.

It's a nice accolade. And then, of course, you've got to have the right hotel package, and the new Omni opens September

30th. Adjacent to it is a new Hyatt Place, which will open in January, and all of the downtown hotels are undergoing major renovations to the tune of \$15-\$25 million each. So the Hilton, the Renaissance, the Loews, DoubleTree, Sheraton, everybody is spit-shining. There's nothing like a little bit of peer pressure.

"We have built a great urban package that really the city deserves," he continues. "It's on par with what Opryland offers under one roof. So now we have a great resort, all-encompassing in Gaylord Opryland, and we have the newest, most state-of-the-art urban convention package."

Spyridon has been pleased with the response to the new Music City Center. "We have had great success pre-selling

the building before it opened. Groups of all types — corporate, association, medical education, you name it, the response has been overwhelming. The average size group in the new building is 6,000 people, so that's a step up for us. The city is really on a tremendous positive roll.

"As we're growing and freshening, we're making sure we haven't forgotten our Southern hospitality roots, how important music is to the city and the brand," he states. "We offer free music in this city 365 days a year, and that's in downtown clubs, and then we have a number of annual festivals which also offer free music. The media attention that Nashville has garnered over the last year from *The New York Times* to *Bon Appétit* to the *Rolling Stone* to *GQ* has all put Nashville at the top of the list of places to visit. I think your readers should come on (over to Nashville)." (See more on Nashville on page 28.)

## San Jose

The meetings-related excitement in California's third-largest city revolves around the San Jose Convention Center's \$130 million renovation project, which is expected to be unveiled in September, on time and under budget. The project will add 125,000 sf of meeting space to the convention center's existing 425,000 sf. Some features include a large balcony, floor-to-ceiling windows and an amphitheater.

Team San Jose, the city's highly regarded convention and visitors bureau, has been a key driver for many planners who have used the destination in recent years. Team San Jose provides comprehensive, fully integrated support services in housing, event services, food and beverage, permitting, marketing support and technical consultation.

Earlier this year, Team San Jose introduced a unique online tool to aid in the planning process. Located at [www.sanjosemeetings.com](http://www.sanjosemeetings.com), the new 3-D interactive Web platform enables planners to take virtual tours of the city's downtown area, newly expanded San Jose McEnery Convention Center, Mineta San Jose International Airport, hotels and attractions.

Team San Jose is also offering up to three days free convention center rental for bookings made through 2014. The offer includes a number of amenities, including a free move-in/move-out day, free wireless in public areas, housing registration for groups using three hotels or more and discounted parking.

## Anaheim

In January, The Anaheim Convention



The Moscone Center in San Francisco will begin renovations in 2014.

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center opened its Grand Plaza, a 100,000-sf multiuse area for outdoor events. Planners considering the venue will want to check out “Grand Plazaville,” an interactive app that allows them to “drag and drop” different setups for the venue to see what they might look like.

## Albuquerque

The Albuquerque Convention Center recently wrapped up the first phase of its \$20 million renewal project. It included renovation of the West Building’s three upper-level ballrooms and lower-level kitchen. Phase two, which will include upgrades to the center’s interior, is scheduled to begin in the fall with a projected completion time frame of summer 2014.

## Orlando

Impressive accolades just keep piling up for Orlando as a meetings mecca.



Oklahoma City's Cox Convention Center and the Bricktown Canal.

This popular Central Florida destination received the No. 1 ranking on Cvent’s recently released list of the “Top 50 Meeting Destinations in the United States” for 2013, followed by Chicago and Las Vegas. The ranking was based on the past year’s booking data.

Also, in 2012, Orlando hosted the second largest number of trade shows on the Trade Show News Network’s list of “Top 250 Trade Shows.”

The OCCC has just begun a five-year, \$187 million capital improvements project. The West Building is undergoing a major renovation, which includes aesthetic enhancements, life safety update, and retrofitting to provide flexible



The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center just added The Great Hall and other new spaces.

space for groups. And new furniture groupings and an upgraded system for wireless communications are designed to enhance both face-to-face and device-to-device connectivity. The OCCC is the second largest convention facility in America, and each year attracts more than 200 events, bringing in approximately 1.4 million attendees. The convention center was recently nominated as the No. 1 convention center in the U.S. by *Business Review USA*. In other convention center news, the OCCC has become the third convention center in the world to be certified to the new international sustainability standards developed by the American Society for Testing and Materials.

Visit Orlando’s 2013–2014 Orlando Creative Meeting Professionals Guide is now available for downloading at [www.orlandomeeting.com](http://www.orlandomeeting.com) under the “Orlando Toolkit” tab.

## San Francisco

The San Francisco Travel Association (SFTA) reports that lawmakers have approved the creation of the Moscone



Photo courtesy of NOMCC

Photo courtesy of Greater Miami CVB

## Miami

Plans are also underway to expand the Miami Beach Convention Center. A developer has been chosen for the \$600 million project, which will include outdoor function areas, movable walls and a concourse that will

A rendering of the Washington Marriott Marquis, which will connect to the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in DC.

Expansion District. The new entity will provide the majority of the funding for an estimated \$500 million expansion of the Moscone Center, which will add 200,000 sf of underground and above-ground exhibition space. Construction is scheduled to begin in late 2014. The SFTA also announced that Super Bowl 50 will be held in the San Francisco Bay area in 2016.

## New Orleans

The renovation of the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (NOMCC), which reconfigured an existing hall into the new 60,000-sf, column-free Great Hall with a grand entryway, has won an award from the Structural Engineering Association of



Plans are in the works for an expansion of the Miami Beach Convention Center.

Kansas and Missouri. Offering 1.1 million sf of contiguous exhibit space, the NOMCC is the sixth largest convention center in the nation. The renovation project also added 25,400 sf of multi-use prefunction space, a 4,660-sf junior ballroom, a 3,420-sf rooftop terrace, a 5,700-sf executive club lounge and a 980-sf indoor balcony.

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The Las Vegas Convention Center just completed a \$20 million makeover, with more to come.

Photo courtesy of Las Vegas Convention Center

## Las Vegas

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority has announced plans to create the Las Vegas Global Business District, a \$2.5 billion phased project that will include a major renovation and expansion of the Las Vegas Convention

Center and creation of a convention district campus. Other phases include the creation of a dedicated World Trade Center facility and a centralized transportation hub. A construction schedule has not yet been announced.

## Oklahoma City

The words “within walking distance” are music to many planners’ ears, and Oklahoma City’s Cox Convention Center is just steps away from seven hotels and the city’s Bricktown Entertainment District, a former warehouse area that has been converted into restaurants and nightlife venues fronting the Bricktown Canal. Four additional hotels are under construction. The convention center, which connects to the Renaissance Oklahoma City Convention Center Hotel via skybridge, contains 100,000 sf of exhibit space, a 25,000-sf ballroom, 21 meeting rooms with a total of 27,500 sf, and a 15,000-seat arena.

Planning is in the works for a new \$252 million downtown convention center, with a projected completion date of 2018.

## Washington, DC

Construction has begun on the 1,175-room Washington Marriott Marquis, which will be connected via underground concourse to the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. The new hotel, which will become DC’s largest, will contain more than 105,000 sf of meeting space including a 30,000-sf ballroom; a grand lobby; and a 5,200-sf rooftop terrace. The hotel is scheduled to open in the spring of 2014. The historic Samuel Gompers AFL-CIO headquarters, known as the “Plumbers Building,” will be incorporated into the property and used as a separate guest tower.

In the meantime, the Las Vegas Convention Center recently completed \$20 million in enhancements including a newly painted exterior and interior, new carpet, upgraded lighting and the opening of the American Express Open Business Lounge inside the main entrance.



The newly opened Cleveland Convention Center.

Photo courtesy of Cleveland Convention Center

## Cleveland

The new Cleveland Convention Center recently opened in the city’s downtown area on the shores of Lake Erie. The unique facility, which was built below grade and topped with a “green” roof, contains 225,000 sf of Class A exhibit space, 35 meeting rooms, 17 truck bays and a 32,000-sf, column-free ballroom offering lakefront views. The new center is located adjacent to

the new 235,000-sf Global Center for Health Innovation, opening in October, that features four themed floors dedicated to the future of health and healthcare and is the only facility of its kind in the world.

## San Antonio

The \$325 million transformation of San Antonio’s Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center is moving forward with the release of schematic design plans and renderings. Set for completion during the spring of 2016, plans call for approximately 835,000 gross sf of new construction and approximately 78,000 sf of renovation to existing spaces. The center remains operational, with no disruptions to events and customers.

## Free Advice? Priceless

Shimasaki emphasizes the value of working with CVBs. “It’s about not going it alone. Some planners do not understand why CVBs are free. In their minds, there must be a catch. What we like to say is that our services aren’t free, but they’re free to planners. Our services are already paid for by occupancy taxes and assessments.”

Wilhelm is a big fan of CVBs. “They help us with everything. It is really amazing when I go to any kind of meeting planning event and I’m talking to other meeting planners, and they don’t



A rendering of the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center’s North Entry, part of a major expansion and renovation.

Courtesy of Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center

use the CVBs — I tell them all the things they do for us. I think they’re the best things on this Earth.”

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\*According to Business Review USA.



# Cruise Meetings



## Try It, You'll Like It

New Ships, Unique Experiences and Matchless Value Entice Groups to Meet at Sea

In June, in a ceremony in Southampton, England, Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cambridge (left) released a bottle of champagne that smashed against the hull of the Royal Princess — the newest ship in the Princess Cruises fleet.

By Derek Reveron

Once upon a time, designing ships with the meeting space, services, amenities and itineraries to accommodate groups wasn't the highest of priorities for cruise lines. Those days are long gone.

Cruise lines are catering to meetings and incentives with new and refurbished ships that offer more flexible meeting and breakout space, services, amenities and technology. Groups have more options to charter ships and customize meetings and itineraries. There is a cruise package to fit every meeting and incentive budget.

Most important, cruise lines offer value through a growing variety of all-inclusive packages that include meeting

space, meals, cabins, amenities, audio-visual and more. "Corporations can save up to 30–35 percent," says Roy Duckworth, chairman, Global Enterprises Inc., a Burnet, TX-based meeting management and travel company. "People are looking for a bigger bang for their buck. They want more excitement, more options. The incentive market is finding they can do a better incentive with a cruise at a lesser cost, take more people, and it's very enjoyable. They always want to do it again."

That is the case with one of Duckworth's clients, a company that sends a group on a cruise every three or four years. In April, the company sent 150 salespeople and executives on a six-day cruise aboard the Carnival Elation, which accommodates 2,052 passengers. The group departed New Orleans and stopped in Mexico at Progreso and Cozumel. Most of the time was spent at sea, says Duckworth. "The group chose that itinerary based on cost, the inclu-

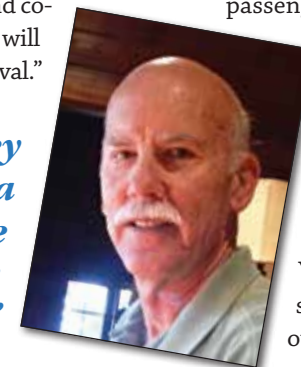
sive package and the time spent at sea. They wanted a captive audience, if you will, to do sales training every day. They didn't want to spend most of the time, as many groups do, going to a different port every day," says Duckworth.

The Carnival Elation offered plenty of meeting space. The group held its awards dinner in a 1,300-person capacity theater, says Duckworth. "We set up a main

job. We did a survey afterwards, and the results were extremely high."

The Elation's entertainment received superb marks. "They enjoyed the entertainment the most," says Duckworth. "The ship had four venues that had great acts every night. They had singers, dancers, show magicians and comedians. I'm sure they will cruise again with Carnival."

*"The incentive market is finding they can do a better incentive with a cruise at a lesser cost, take more people, and it's very enjoyable. They always want to do it again."*



Roy Duckworth, Chairman  
Global Enterprises Inc., Burnet, TX

head table for all the senior corporate officers on the stage. The lighting and AV were provided by the ship at no cost. It worked very well. We also had training sessions during the day in a club that was used for comedy acts at night. It held about 200 people and was perfect for a group our size."

### Exemplary Service

Service was impeccable. The staff's attention to detail was impressive, says Duckworth. He cites the wait staff as an example. "We talked to the maître d' before the cruise to make sure they knew which people at which tables had certain food preferences or issues. During meals, if someone at a table had an allergy to saffron or was on a low-sodium diet, the people working the tables knew it. It was impressive," adds Duckworth.

Duckworth said the group felt special although the ship carried individual passengers as well as two other larger groups. "Those groups had booked before we did, and we shared the larger meeting spaces with them," says Duckworth. "In those cases, ships are very good at juggling groups' schedules, meeting spaces and times. Our group felt the cruise line did a great

Indeed, cruise lines are stepping up their game. "Ships have improved over the last 10 years and are a lot more focused on meetings and incentives," says Rebecca Jones, manager of event purchasing and industry relations, BCD M&I, a Chicago-based meeting, incentives and event solutions company. "They understand the value of that market segment — that we need function space for group dinners and gala events, dine-around opportunities, customization aboard ship and a memorable experience. They offer the right combination of cruise products, destinations and price points."

Cruise lines also know the importance of helping planners nail down meeting specifics up front. "They are willing to confirm



Rebecca Jones, Manager of Event Purchasing and Industry Relations  
BCD M&I, Chicago, IL

things at the contracting stage because they understand its importance," says Jones. "For example, they will tell you the exact hours that you can have the theater

for a reception and the ice skating rink for a general session. That wasn't a big priority 10 years ago," says Jones.

### Charters Your Way

Groups that charter ships needn't worry about scheduling events around passengers or other groups. "You can customize what you bring on board, how people are dressed, the décor, and food and beverage, as well as itineraries," says Jones. "You can brand the ship by flying the company flag and putting logos on daily programs. You can even put your logo on the side of the ship and make it your own," she says.

During charters, says Josephine Kling, president of Fort Lauderdale-based Landry & Kling Inc., specialists in meetings events at sea, "You can use any room on board at any time. You can do away with shipboard programming, or you can reschedule the elements you like every day. You can name drinks after your CEO or new products. You can also put signage all over the ship. And every crew member can wear a custom button, ribbon or hat welcoming you."

Planners also can customize the ship's itinerary and shore excursions. "As long as you start and end with where the ship needs to be, you can customize the itinerary," says Kling. "Let's say you like beaches. We can create an itinerary that includes more beaches than usual."

Earlier this year, a company chartered an incentive cruise for 1,200 attendees aboard the 2,850-person capacity

*"Ships have improved over the last 10 years and are a lot more focused on meetings and incentives. They offer the right combination of cruise products, destinations and price points."*





3D Destinations arranged a special event on NCL's Epic at the adults-only Spice H2O, which transforms to an outdoor nightclub after dark.

The company has sent groups on cruises at least four times over the last 10 years. However, the cruise earlier this year was unique, says Ramon Santos, vice president of global events, Landry & Kling Inc. "This time the company combined four business units into one cruise. In the past, they would have one business unit on a cruise. A lot of companies are doing it. The beauty of it is that companies save lots of money, have a whole ship, get more meetings done at once and still incentivize people."



Karen Devine, President  
3D Destinations, Mundelein, IL

During the charter, the Celebrity Equinox served as one giant meeting destination with multiple venues that the group used for pleasure and business.

The group held a poolside welcome reception that included a live band and hors d'oeuvres. The pool was adjacent to an area that served a buffet. The next day, the group held its general session, and awards and recognition ceremony in the ship's 1,200-person capacity Equinox Theater. After the session, attendees broke up into four business units for meetings in four locations including the Sky Conference Center, two lounges and a theater. Attendees also took their meals in the main dining room as a group and hosted dinners in the ship's specialty restaurants, which feature French, Italian and Asian cuisine.

Santos raves about the service. "Although the ship had half of its occu-

pancy, we still had the full complement of the crew cater to the group. We never waited for anything," he says. "There were three or four different people working each table. Nobody had to stand in line or wait for anything. The ship was perfect for this group."

Charters offer great flex-

ibility for large meetings and incentives. For example, a direct marketing company recently chartered the Norwegian Sky for an incentive cruise to the Bahamas for 4,000 salespeople and executives from around the world. The cruise was divided into two sailings of three and four nights on the same ship. The Sky, which has a capacity of 2,450 people, went out for three nights with the first group, came back into port, and then returned to sea for four nights with the second group.

Both groups had the full run of the ship for meetings. "They conducted meetings every day of each cruise, using the main theater and every inch of meeting space" says Karen Devine, president of Mundelein, IL-based 3D Destinations. "They had a ton of breakouts. They used all six restaurants, the conference center

and three or four lounges that provide entertainment at night. We set up a meeting space in the main foyer because it has an LCD screen and could receive a simulcast of the general session, along with the main theater, three restaurants and two lounges."

Each group that sailed held an awards presentation on two different nights because the theater seats about half of the ship's capacity. "There was also a reception for everyone on the pool deck, which was the only space that fit the ship's entire capacity at once," says Devine. "We used a lot more than the pool bars. We set up satellite bars and waiter stations all over the place. It went exceptionally well."

Attendees also enjoyed the Sky's 13 dining options including the specialty restaurants — Le Bistro French restaurant, Cagneys restaurant and Il Adagio Italian restaurant. "We took over three or four tables at each of the specialty restau-

rants every night for VIPs to host their guests. Otherwise, guests could use the restaurants at their leisure," says Devine.

The company is no stranger to cruising and will do it again. "They do a lot of charters. They have different divisions that cruise, and they do it at least once a year because they love the flexibility and budget control that it provides," says Devine.

#### First-Timers Often Repeat

Planners find that some corporate groups hesitate to take that first meeting or incentive cruise because they have never done it before and know little about how it works. However, after taking the first cruise, groups usually want to do it again. For example, a company recently sent 300 salespeople, executive

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officers and their significant others on a seven-day incentive cruise to Alaska aboard the Celebrity Solstice. The ship stopped in Juneau, Skagway, Ketchikan as well as Victoria, Canada.

It was the company's first cruise. "I had pitched it to them off and on over the years," says Tamra Sipes, CSEP, owner, Platinum Travel, Oak Harbor, WA. "Then, when they started thinking more seriously about it, we started going over different options. We went back and forth for three or four months, going through the numbers on the cost and savings, and showing how it could work for them. Altogether, it was a year and a half process."

Aboard the Celebrity Solstice, the group held meetings, including breakouts, in the ship's conference room. "The AV is top-notch and included at no extra cost," says Sipes. "They have professional staff to help with meetings. We also used the theater and other areas of the ship. They will work with you so you can get your entire conference agenda comfortably scheduled."

Onboard functions included a meet-and-greet cocktail party next to the Sky Observation Lounge, which features live music and dancing at night. They dined in a reserved section of the dining room. And for entertainment, they enjoyed a comedian, aerialists, acrobats and a cabaret show.

The incentive was full of Alaska-related activities. Experts on the region came aboard to give talks about the environment, animals and glaciers. One of the Celebrity Solstice's officers explained how the ship navigates glaciers. On land, the group visited the Mendenhall Glacier located about 13 miles from Juneau. They rode the White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad, which was built in the late 1800s during the Gold Rush and offers

In the theater on the Caribbean Princess, conference attendees at a dockside charter in Trinidad connect via translation headphones.

breathtaking views of glaciers, mountains and gorges. They also saw the "Great Alaskan Lumberjack Show" in Ketchikan.

Attendees also enjoyed a treasure hunt aboard ship. "It was a week-long hunt," says Sipes. "People divided into at least four-person teams. The group finding the most items listed on a form won prizes. They had to search the ship and at some ports of call. It was a fun hunt, searching for silly things like a red sock, a potato and coasters from restaurants. We asked them to take pictures, which we presented in a slide show at the last meeting. We announced that their prizes were the things they found. They loved it."



**Tamra Sipes**, CSEP, Owner  
Platinum Travel, Oak Harbor, WA

This won't be the last time the group cruises. "They want to do it again, eventually. I sent them a survey, and the cruise got great reviews, better than most land meetings I've done," says Sipes.

### The Price Is Right

Last year an incentive group of 25 salespeople for a medical device company cruised the Adriatic Sea, an arm of the Mediterranean Sea separating the Italian Peninsula from the Balkan Peninsula. "The client wanted something very unique for his President's Club, and this is what we came up with," says Andy



Photo courtesy of Landry & Kling

McNeill, CEO of Fort Lauderdale-based American Meetings Inc., a full-service corporate meeting planning company. "It was an incredible and unique itinerary. It was a seven-day cruise on a higher end ship. Because it was a smaller ship, they could pull into small ports and create a great itinerary."

The cruise started in Rome and included Montenegro, Dubrovnik, two stops in Croatia, Slovenia, Albania and Venice. "We went to a small town in Albania where we saw a UNESCO World Heritage site featuring Roman ruins," says McNeill. "That was very special because it was something that you would never do on your own. You had to take a 20-minute bus ride into Albania

to a very rural area. We hunted for truffles in Slovenia and did wine tasting at an intimate vineyard, which we had to ourselves."

Attendees found the experience to be memorable and special, says McNeill, who recommends such a cruise if it meets a group's goals. "High-end ships provide a special experience. If you are looking for an affordable alternative, there are lots of options out there. You can always fit a client into the right price point," McNeill says.

### New-Product-Launch Cruise

Most seaborne meetings and incentives aren't full-ship charters but can be every bit as memorable. Last September, for example, Kling arranged a four-night cruise for about 400 sales staff and executives of a manufacturing company. The group conducted a new product introduction meeting aboard a Royal Caribbean ship cruising to the Bahamas, including Nassau and Coco Cay, the cruise line's private island.

*"They want to do it again, eventually. I sent them a survey, and the cruise got great reviews, better than most land meetings I've done."*

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- **Seafood Restaurants by Iron Chef Geoffrey Zakarian** – Are among the 29 dining experiences, 11 are included in the cruise fare
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The Celebrity Reflection off the Florida coastline during its inaugural cruise in December 2012.

## New and Noteworthy

Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cambridge, the godmother of the new 3,600-passenger Royal Princess, presided over the ceremony in Southampton, England in June. She released a bottle of champagne that smashed against the hull of the Royal Princess — the newest ship in the **Princess Cruises** fleet.

The group had ample space for meetings. “They had the general session and meetings in the main theater, and educated people on new products using a talk show format,” says Kling. The group also learned about new products via laptop presentations and from computer kiosks located in one of the ship’s function rooms.

Shipboard fun functions included a nighttime party on the spacious outdoor basketball court. The group brought aboard lighting, a sound system and outdoor furniture for the party before the cruise sailed from Miami, says Kling. In Coco Cay, the group enjoyed a buffet served in a thatched hut surrounded by picnic tables. Other activities included snorkeling, hang gliding, shopping, and playing beach games and volleyball.

Cruise ships are rolling out more meeting space options. According to Kling, “All cruise ships today want to have group capability, and many have purpose-built meeting rooms with doors that close. Some are multipurpose rooms that they use for other types of events as well. And some are large theaters where there are performances but can be used for group meetings or presentations. A theater might have two or three levels that seat up to 1,300 people.”

While ships don’t have huge ballrooms, they still provide breakout space. “Some newer ships have conference centers with air walls,” says Kling. “You can open the air walls and seat about 400 in that environment. They can be used for breakouts.” Large spaces for 400 exhibits are not available on ships. However, Kling says 20 or 30 or maybe even 40 exhibits of the tabletop type can be accommodated on a number of ships.

The Royal Princess is a new-generation ship, which features a dramatic multistory atrium serving as the social hub of the ship offering a host of dining and entertainment options.

**Celebrity Cruises** launched Celebrity Reflection late last year. Celebrity Reflection is the fifth Solstice class ship launched since 2008. The new ship features a dedicated multifunctional, reconfigurable conference center that accommodates 220 guests and serves as a ballroom and space for meetings, parties and functions.

**Disney Cruise Line** plans to offer new itineraries in 2014 including nine-night excursions to the Greek Isles. Next year, the cruise line will depart for the first time from ports in San Juan, PR, and Venice, Italy. The Disney Magic is undergoing a renovation this fall and will re-launch with new features for meetings and incentives, an enhanced Senses Spa & Salon and new dining options including Carioca’s and Cabanas.

Last year, Disney Cruise Line launched the Disney Fantasy, the fourth ship in the Disney Cruise Line fleet.

**Carnival Cruise Lines** recently relaunched Carnival Destiny as Carnival Sunshine after it received a makeover. The 3,006-passenger ship has 182 new cabins and additional restaurants. The ship also features an expanded water park, a new adults-only lounge and the largest pub of any Carnival ship.

**Norwegian Cruise Line** debuted its iConcierge smart phone app on the Norwegian Epic. The app allows guests to use their device to access guest information and service systems. Norwegian also is installing energy-efficient scrubbing technology on the 4,200-passenger,

code-named ships Breakaway Plus, set to launch in 2015, and Breakaway Plus II, scheduled to debut in 2017.

**Royal Caribbean’s** 16-deck Quantum of the Seas, which accommodates 4,180 passengers, is scheduled to make its inaugural voyage in November 2014. The ship features a modern conference center and meeting rooms. Quantum’s sister ship, Anthem of the Seas, will debut in 2015.

## Safer Than Ever

The cruise industry is taking steps to ensure that all ships are safer than ever. The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) is educating planners about the cruise industry. “Many planners are interested but don’t really have the experience of what it’s like working on a cruise ship,” says Christine Duffy, president and CEO of CLIA. “We have engaged with Meeting Professionals International (MPI) to do education at their conferences to give planners a better understanding of what to expect. We also have focus groups aboard ships. I participated in one where some planners haven’t been on a cruise ship ever or in many years. They were amazed at the level of opportunity for meetings.”

Despite isolated incidents involving cruise ships, meetings at sea are safer than ever, and the cruise industry is doing even more to keep it that way. “We as an industry have implemented some things that are important for consumers, our travel agent community and meeting planners to be aware of,” says Duffy.

In May, CLIA announced a “Cruise Industry Passenger Bill of Rights” outlining its members’ commitment to safety. This year, the industry also introduced a Preparedness Risk Assessment to review ship power system redundancies in the event of a power loss. Last year, the industry launched an Operational Safety Review.

Meeting aboard cruise ships provides value, flexible meeting space, a variety of activities, excellent service and memorable experiences — all of which keep groups coming back again and again. As Kling says, once they have tried meeting at sea “practically everybody repeats.” **C&IT**

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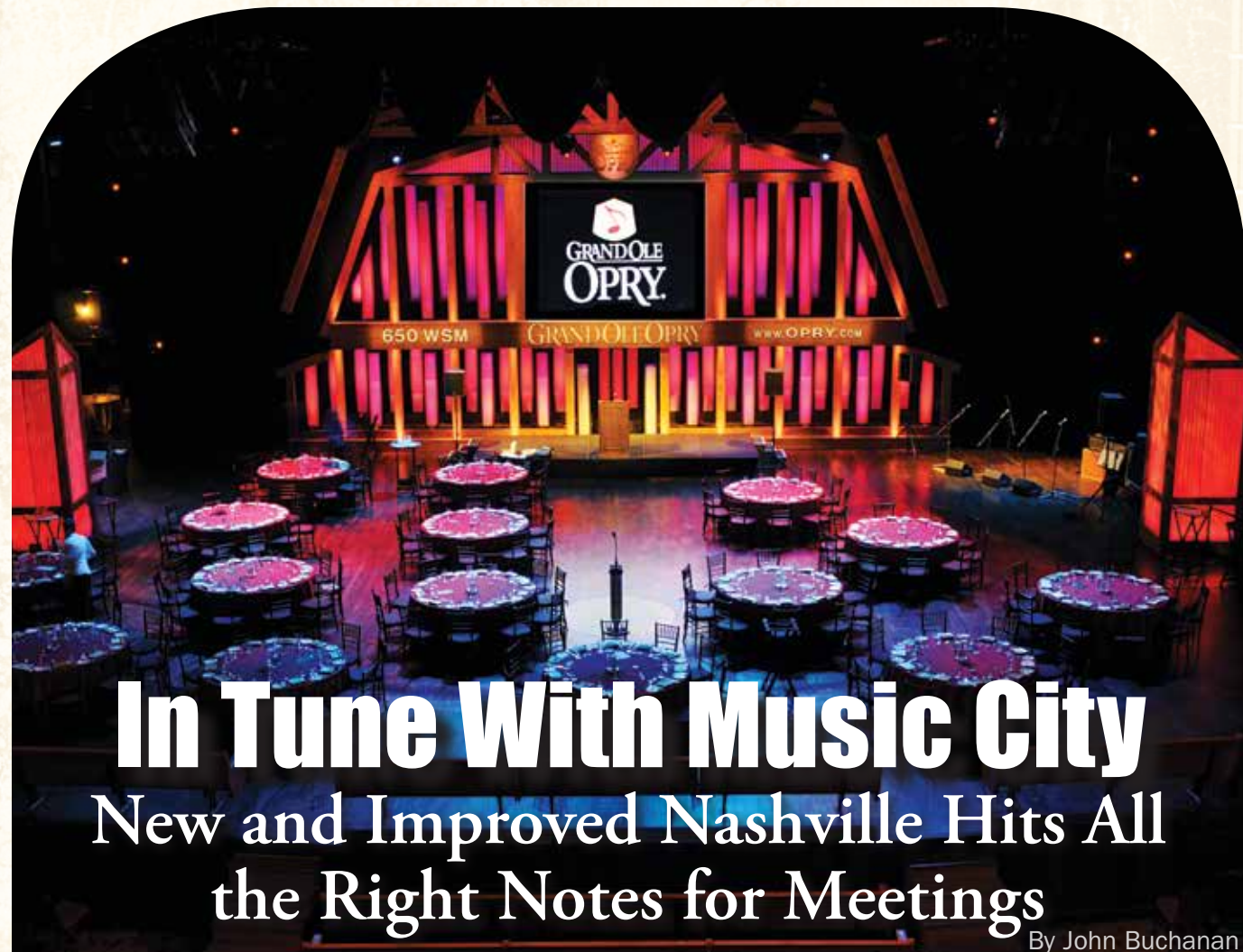


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# Destination



## In Tune With Music City New and Improved Nashville Hits All the Right Notes for Meetings

By John Buchanan

Destination Nashville produced this corporate event on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry, "the show that made country music famous."

In the past, Portland and Austin have reigned as America's darling hip cities.

"Now, it's Nashville's turn," *The New York Times* noted in January. Last year, *Food & Wine* named the Music City one of

***"It is that creative vitality and Southern hospitality, paired with accessibility and affordability, that has made Nashville a popular meeting destination."***



Butch Spyridon, President  
Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp., Nashville, TN

the country's top metropolises for foodies. And the accolades, whether they're for food, stunning new hotels or an art exhibit, just keep on coming.

It's no coincidence, then, that Nashville has emerged over the last year as one of the country's hottest meeting and convention destinations.

### The New Music City Center

That lofty status has been aided and abetted by the opening of the new \$623 million Music City Center, a 1.2-million-sf convention center; a major expansion of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum to be completed in 2014; and the \$250 million, 800-room Omni Nashville Hotel, across from the Music City Center, set to open in September. The hotel, which has 80,000 sf of meeting space, will be fully integrated with the Country Music Hall of Fame's expansion.

Meanwhile, Nashville continues its long and historic run as the center of the music universe, with country music as its brightest star.

"We are 'Music City,' so obviously we want to give delegates a unique experience filled with — you guessed it — music," says Butch Spyridon, president of the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp. "Nashville isn't just where the music is played, it's also where the music is made. And that gives rise to a creative culture that permeates every aspect of the city. It is that creative vitality and Southern hospitality, paired with accessibility and affordability, that has made Nashville a popular meeting destination."

Given the city's internationally known personality and profile, it's no wonder the new Music City Center was built at the heart of downtown. The state-of-the-art facility includes 350,000 sf of exhibit hall space and 60 individual meeting rooms that total 90,000 sf. Ballrooms include the 57,500-sf Grand Ballroom and 18,000-sf Davidson Ballroom. In addition, the complex, which features a green roof with a 200-kilowatt solar panel, is designed for environmental sustainability and is on track to achieve LEED Silver certification.

"It's within easy walking distance of Nashville's famed honky tonks, as well as countless live music venues," Spyridon says. So far, a total of 123 meetings representing more than 1 million room nights have been booked into the world-class convention center. And many of those want easy proximity to the unparalleled nightlife and entertainment Nashville has to offer.

Bob Whittemore, manager, marketing communications, at Chandler, AZ-based Aclara, which sells advanced metering services to gas, water and electric utilities, discovered Nashville by accident when he attended an industry convention there several years ago. After getting enthusiastic support from the CVB, he booked back-to-back annual customer conferences at the Renaissance Nashville Hotel for 600 attendees.

And both Whittemore and his attendees took full advantage



A rendering of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum's 10,000-sf Event Hall. This and other new event spaces will be unveiled in October as part of a large expansion project.

of the magic of Music City, visiting such iconic landmarks as The Bluebird Cafe, an intimate honky tonk where on any given night, any country music superstar might be having a beer at the bar; and Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, another landmark honky tonk that presents live music and is alive with the ghosts of Nashville legends such as Lefty Frizzell or Ernest Tubb.

Whittemore also had high praise for the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, which is currently being expanded with a new \$75 million, 220,000-sf addition that will almost double its size when it is completed in early 2014. New event spaces will debut in October and will include a 10,000-sf Event Hall, the 800-seat CMA Theater, a terrace with skyline views, a private dining room and more.

As a result of such unique venues, Nashville has been gaining favor with meeting planners for years now, even if it has reached a new apex this year.

Heather Willis, employee development and event planning coordinator at Nashville-based retailer Journeys, is herself a Nashville native with a newfound passion for her hometown. "The thing I've been most impressed with about the city is that in the past five years," Willis says, "there have been so many new trendy restaurants and cool venues, in addition to the development of downtown with the new convention center and Omni hotel, as well as other new hotels that have opened or are planned. That means Nashville is now more of a destination than it ever has been before."

As a result of the new convention center and the new Omni headquarters hotel, Willis is seeing an unprecedented spike in interest in Nashville as a meeting destination. "Those are big draws," she says. "And they are drawing a lot of attention."

### Music-Themed Venues Strike a Chord

Because Nashville has long been known as Music City, it's no surprise that many of its most popular and unique offsite venues are music-related.

For his first meeting, Whittemore used Wildhorse Saloon, a three-story, historic warehouse that now serves as a landmark 66,000-sf dining, live music and dance destination. Its restaurant and catering operation is famous for Southern barbecue, steaks and fried pickles.

Whittemore staged an evening that included dinner, live music and line-dancing lessons.



The 1.2-million-sf Music City Center made its debut in May.



***“It’s easy to get (country superstars) when they’re in town. They love to do it, and because they’re local, you get a much-reduced rate.”***



**Rhonda Marko, CMP, CMM, DMCP, President and CEO**  
Destination Nashville, a Global Events Partner

“Wildhorse Saloon was very easy to use, because you just sign a contract and they do everything,” Whittemore says. “They provide the venue, the food, the entertainment — that means as a planner, I don’t have to hire a band or rent chairs.”

Rhonda Marko, CMP, CMM, DMCP, president and CEO of top destination management company Destination Nashville, a Global Events Partner, also uses Wildhorse Saloon regularly. “It can hold up to 1,500 people,” she says. “But you can do a buyout and also use adjacent Riverfront Park to stage an evening for 5,000 attendees. And some of the best bands in town started there as house bands, so they have established relationships with all of those bands.”

For his return to Nashville, Whittemore used Honky Tonk Central, another popular country music venue with good food and live bands — and again scored a big success with attendees.

In addition to its music-related venues, Nashville also offers an eclectic mix of one-of-a-kind venues for groups of all sizes.

For small groups, Willis likes Sambuca, an upscale, strikingly modern restaurant and bar located in Nashville’s trendy and red-hot Gulch warehouse district. “It’s a really cool, modern place that has great music like jazz and piano, and great views from its upstairs dining room,” Willis says.

For small groups, Marko favors Belle Meade Plantation, an antebellum plantation that features a carriage house that can accommodate 140 attendees for a sit-down dinner.

For medium-sized groups, Willis recommends Cannery Ballroom. “It’s a unique space, because it has four venues in one,” she says. “We ended up using three of the four spaces for a ‘Rock Stars and Groupies’ party we did.” In addition to Cannery Ballroom, individual venues include Mercy Lounge, concert venues, plus the new High Watt — a smaller live music venue — and One, which offers great views of the city and new convention center. “It’s a very special venue,” Willis says.

For large groups, Willis enthusiastically suggests fabled Ryman Auditorium, a restored church that served as home to the Grand Ole Opry until 1974 when the Opry was moved to the sprawling Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center complex, which is now one of the city’s biggest attractions. Over the years, Ryman Auditorium became known as “the mother church of country music” and is still featured in movies and TV shows and used as the venue for major concerts.

“We had our awards show for our own annual meeting at Ryman Auditorium last year,” Willis says. “It’s an awesome venue. To sit in those historic pews, with the stained glass windows behind you, in a place where all the greats of country music have performed, is a really special experience.”

Marko also makes frequent use of the Ryman. She often creates sit-down dinners on the fabled stage for up to about 200 attendees. She has also done concerts with superstars such as Cheryl Crow, Keith Urban and Tim McGraw. “And it’s easy to get them when they’re in town,” Marko says. “They love to do it and because they’re local, you get a much-reduced rate, and you don’t have to pay their travel expenses or fly their band in.”

Yet another venue that Willis likes is Cheekwood, a botanical garden that stages major art exhibits, such as its current Light: Installation by Bruce Munro, a stunning outdoor installation by the acclaimed British artist. “And no matter what is going on there at the moment,” Willis says, “Cheekwood is just a gorgeous botanical garden and another very unique venue that is great for groups.”

Marko also stages unique offsite events at some of Nashville’s most famous recording studios, where a catered dinner is followed by a recording session backed by top Nashville musicians. Attendees get to record and take home a disc of them singing — an unforgettable experience.

### New Themed Event-Space Options

Meanwhile, Nashville continues to debut new venues.

Anthem, located in the North Gulch neighborhood, is a new live music venue that can accommodate 1,000 attendees and features a VIP room with a capacity of 400, a boutique “dive bar” dubbed Revelry, and a full kitchen.



Country music superstars like Keith Urban who call Nashville home can be booked for corporate groups, eliminating the cost of transportation for the band.

Marathon Music Works, located in the Marathon Village neighborhood, is housed in an historic building from the early 1900s that has been lovingly restored and transformed into yet another new music venue and event space.

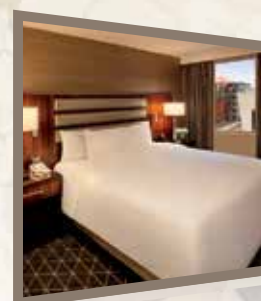
Events on 3rd is another historic, multispace venue in the heart of downtown. Two adjoining spaces can accommodate groups of up to 300.

The Johnny Cash Museum, officially authorized by the estate of the country legend and member of both the country music and rock & roll halls of fame, opened in May and showcases the



The Wildhorse Saloon, housed in a three-level, historic warehouse, boasts the largest dance floor in Nashville at 3,300 sf. Buyouts and private event spaces are available at the 66,000-sf venue, which has a restaurant and bar along with live music and dancing.

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***“To sit in (Ryman Auditorium’s) historic pews, with the stained glass windows behind you, in a place where all the greats of country music have performed, is a really special experience.”***



**Heather Willis**, Employee Development and Event Planning Coordinator, Journeys, Nashville, TN

most comprehensive collection of Cash artifacts and memorabilia in the world. The venue also features a 250-seat auditorium.

Houston Station, a renovated warehouse located in East Nashville near Greer Stadium, features multiple individual venues, including The Ambrose House, a Victorian mansion that offers a unique environment and ambience for small to medium-sized groups.

## The Dining Scene

One of the factors that has catapulted Nashville to its elite status as a meeting destination over the last few years has been its eclectic and acclaimed local dining scene. The city now ranks as one of America’s top enclaves for foodies, notes Marko, herself a foodie and part-time food writer.

“We have a lot of new restaurants,” Marko says. And we have one of the hottest restaurants in the country right now: Catbird Seat opened two years ago.” The Catbird Seat is an intimate, exclusive fine-dining restaurant owned by renowned chef Erik Anderson.

Marko’s other favorites from the current list of hot spots



Photo courtesy of Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.

include Kayne Prime, a critically acclaimed local steak house, and Husk Nashville, housed in a building that dates back to 1895 and a sister outpost to the famous Husk Restaurant in Charleston, SC, from chef Sean Brock, a James Beard Award-winner and a pioneer in the farm-to-table movement. “Husk is so good,” Marko says. “The food and the presentation are magnificent. And 90 percent of what they serve is produced locally.”

Another eatery highly recommended by Marko is Etch, located in the Encore condominium in the hot SoBro neighborhood located South of Broadway and offering prized global cuisine from female chef Deb Paquette. “They are now expanding



Towering over a private event at the Parthenon is a 42-foot statue of Athena. Built in 1897 for the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, the venue is a full-scale replica of the original Parthenon in Athens.

Photo courtesy of Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.

and doubling their size because they have lines around the block for lunch and dinner,” Marko says.

Willis likes some of Nashville’s more eclectic new restaurants, such as Fido coffee shop, frequented by local music superstars such as Taylor Swift. She also likes Frothy Monkey, Bongo Java and new burger joints such as The Pharmacy Burger Parlor and Beer Garden, and Burger Up, which specializes in grass-fed beef. “It serves one of the best burgers I’ve ever had,” says Willis, who also recommends Edley’s Bar-B-Que and Urban Grub Fish Pit and Southern Cantina for popular local fare.

## Gaylord Opryland

Despite its many new attractions, to many planners, Nashville is still often best known for one of its most famous and celebrated meeting landmarks, the massive Gaylord Opryland resort complex, which features the largest non-gaming hotel property in the U.S.

Ruth Hensley, who retired earlier this year after planning her fifth consecutive annual managers conference for Marshfield, OH-based O’Reilly Auto Parts at Gaylord Opryland for 5,400 attendees, loves the hotel.

The historic Ryman Auditorium, steps from the new Music City Center, was once home to the Grand Ole Opry. Groups can relive history and hold dinners and events on its fabled stage.

“Gaylord Opryland is just awesome,” Hensley says. “The staff is incredible. I had the same conference coordinator for five years. She got to the point where she knew what we wanted before we knew we wanted it. Meeting and convention business is their bread and butter, and they just do an amazing job. And that’s true of everybody you work with.”

Because of Gaylord’s formidable infrastructure and capabilities, O’Reilly Auto Parts had no need to go offsite for anything. Hensley also singled out the resort’s meeting space for praise. “They have such a good variety of meeting rooms, in terms of size,” she says. “They also have a fabulous exhibit hall and ballrooms that are just beautiful. We held our general sessions for 5,400 in the Delta Ballroom. But they also have very nice rooms for smaller meetings. They pretty much have you covered, no matter what you need.”

## Golf

Somewhat surprisingly to many planners who visit Nashville for the first time, golf ranks high among the city’s major obsessions. Some country music superstars such as Vince Gill play every chance they get, and it’s said that a lot of local music business gets done on the city’s links.

“And you can play golf in Nashville for most of the year because it’s pretty warm for a lot of the year,” Willis says.

“We have many golf courses,” Marko says. “But the one that is most popular is Gaylord Springs at Gaylord Opryland. They just remodeled their clubhouse, and it is a fabulous venue for groups. And the course is an 18-hole Scottish links-style course.”

Nashville’s other top course is Hermitage Golf Course.

## Hotel News

In addition to the new Omni hotel, Nashville has bold plans for expanding its hotel room inventory. A total of 2,300 new rooms will be added over the next several years, says Nashville CVB president Butch Spyridon.

For example, a new \$135 million, 450-room Hyatt Regency will be developed near Broadway and Second Avenue at the heart of the downtown convention district, with 25,000 sf of meeting space and several retail and dining options. Construction of the Hyatt Regency could start this year, and completion is expected in the fall of 2015.

The 340-room Loews Vanderbilt Hotel, with 24,000 sf of meeting space, recently completed a \$17 million renovation.

The 673-room Renaissance Nashville Hotel will soon begin work on a \$20 million guest room renovation to be completed next spring. The hotel recently announced acquisition of additional meeting space at the Nashville Convention Center, which is directly connected to the hotel. The new 70,000-sf meeting and prefunction space is in addition to the hotel’s existing 30,000-sf space.

The AAA Four Diamond Hilton Nashville Downtown (15,000 sf of meeting space) will emerge from an extensive multimillion-dollar re-invention in December 2013 that will include upgrades to all 330 guest suites, the grand atrium lobby and lounge, grand ballroom, hallways, meeting rooms and fitness center, which

A rendering of the Omni Nashville Hotel, a headquarters hotel for the Music City Center. The hotel will connect to the newly expanded Country Music Hall of Fame.

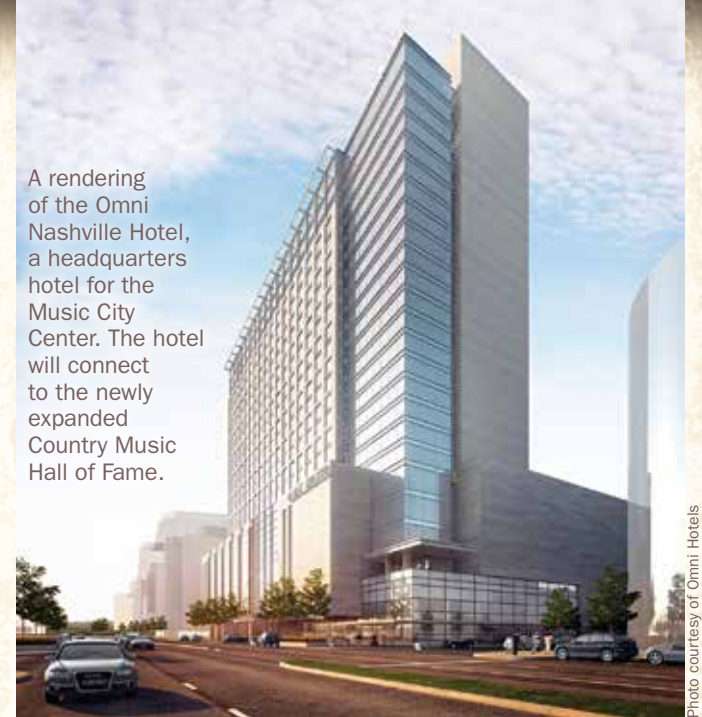


Photo courtesy of Omni Hotels

will double in size. The hotel also will introduce a concierge lounge featuring sophisticated spaces for work and leisure, window walls, a centerpiece fireplace, private meeting room, and food and beverage service. Hilton Nashville Downtown — the only all-suites hotel in downtown Nashville — will remain open during the phased enhancements with minimal guest impact. Guest suites will be updated floor by floor. Each guest suite’s private parlor will feature a centerpiece sofa, custom entertainment center with flat-screen TV and contemporary workstation. Bathroom upgrades include glass-enclosed walk-in showers for king guest suites.

In July, the 247-room Hutton Hotel received *Travel + Leisure*’s coveted “World’s Best” award as one of the top large city ho-



***“Wildhorse Saloon was very easy to use, because you just sign a contract and they do everything. They provide the venue, the food, the entertainment.”***

**Bob Whittemore**, Manager, Marketing Communications Aclara, Chandler, AZ

tels in the Continental U.S. The hotel, which offers 13,900 sf of meeting space, opened in 2009 and is now a AAA Four Diamond and Forbes Four Star property.

Whether it’s music, dining and entertainment, cool off-site venues or even golf, Nashville aims to please — by offering a thoroughly unique and authentic experience. “We want to offer an ‘only in Nashville’ experience to everyone who comes here for a meeting,” says CVB President Spyridon. And now, he says, Nashville is better situated than ever to be able to do that.

**C&IT**





The brilliant Las Vegas Strip lights up the night as seen from Mandalay Bay.

**I**f there's one thing that's constant about Las Vegas, it's that it's always changing.

Long known as the country's gaming mecca, today the city is just one of many gambling destinations in the U.S. — a motivating force for Las Vegas to constantly reinvent itself. Visitors — and incentive groups — no longer come to Vegas ready to empty their pockets in its many casinos. Instead they are hitting the nightclubs, attending concerts and shows, and dining at high-end restaurants. They want the kind of luxury experience only Las Vegas can offer.

"The idea of luxury still resonates with people," says Heather Heidbrink, director of sourcing at St. Louis-based Maritz Travel. "Especially if they are incentive award winners. If they've earned the trip, they really want to have an experience that is worthy of all the hard work they've put in

to earn it. So luxury is really important — and Las Vegas has no shortage of that."

That kind of luxurious experience was what Shane Stender, senior manager, regional merchandising, Southern region, Hyundai Motor America, was looking for when he brought an incentive trip to the Aria Resort & Casino in Las Vegas in August.

Stender, who is based in Marietta, GA, has organized summer sales incentive trips for the past five years, all of which were centered on casinos in the eastern U.S. "But we wanted a change of scenery for the dealers this year to keep the promotion fresh," he says. "And Las Vegas is seen as the epitome of gaming and luxury and resorts, so we wanted to step it up with this incentive."

During the three-day, two-night incentive, Stender's group of 25 dealers hardly made it

offsite, staying within the Aria to sample the resort's restaurants and nightlife, and its casino and poker room. He also reserved three cabanas for his group to use at the adults-only Liquid Day Club & Lounge, "so I guess that's about as close to offsite as we got."

His attendees represented Hyundai dealerships on the East Coast from Florida to Maryland, so they had quite a distance to travel to get to Las Vegas, particularly compared to previous summer sales incentives. "We had some late flights and delayed flights," Stender says. "But this was Las Vegas, and no one complained."

For incentive travelers, Las Vegas "offers experiences and value that are unmatched," says Rossi Ralenkotter, president and CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA). "In addition, businesses and corporations recog-

nize and research supports that employees will improve their performance when they are motivated by a well-designed incentive program with clear goals, controls and measures. A Las Vegas visit provides an incredible incentive for people."

While Las Vegas is known as a destination that can handle huge meetings and conventions, in-



Incentive winners enjoy luxurious experiences at Aria Resort & Casino's adults-only Liquid Day Club & Lounge.





**Rossi Ralenkotter**  
President and CEO  
Las Vegas Convention and  
Visitors Authority  
Las Vegas, NV

“*Employees will improve their performance when they are motivated by a well-designed incentive program. A Las Vegas visit provides an incredible incentive for people.*”

centive programs have unique needs for luxury accommodations and a very high standard of service, says Marty Doyle, director of travel programs at NJ-based Dittman Incentive Marketing.

“Historically, it has been easy for incentive programs to get lost in large Las Vegas hotels with many simultaneous groups,” says Doyle. “But in recent years a number of smaller, boutique properties have opened, and it’s possible to cater to incentive groups in a way that competes with other luxury desert destinations.”

Additionally, says Doyle, planners should consider properties off The Strip in order to achieve a desert retreat ambience. “We recently ran an incentive program at the JW Marriott Las Vegas Resort & Spa near (Red Rock Canyon),” Doyle points out. “Groups can enjoy the pool and spa and play the TPC Las Vegas. With the entertainment of The Strip nearby, it can compete with Scottsdale and Palm Springs as a destination.” The TPC Las Vegas, formerly TPC at The Canyons, is an 18-hole golf course located in Summerlin near the cliffs of Red Rock Canyon.

There also are plenty of other entertainment options off The Strip, whether it involves bicycle tours of Red Rock Canyon, trips to Hoover Dam, or helicopter trips over the Grand Canyon, says Francine McKanna, DMCP, president of AlliedPRA Las Vegas. “So there’s plenty for an incentive planner to choose from for their group.”

The salient point, says Heidbrink, is that while gaming is obviously an important part of the casino experience, “there is no shortage of venues

exceptional experiences, says Doyle, and the combination of dining experiences provided by world-class chefs and availability of shows such as Cirque du Soleil can make for luxuriously memorable events.

Earlier this year Doyle and his colleagues planned an incentive for a corporate client that was the ninth in a series of incentive and recognition events that are part of a Great Cities of North America theme. “And Las Vegas is one of those uniquely American cities,” says Doyle.

Doyle’s group stayed at the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. Evening events included an exclusive cocktail reception and dinner with food stations at ghostbar, a sleek nightclub atop the Palms Casino Resort, which, Doyle says, offered an only-in-Vegas ambience and spectacular city views.

“We also created one of our signature Great Restaurants Evenings, inviting participants to pair the restaurant and show of their choice for a night tailored to every guest’s personal taste,” Doyle says. The final night awards event was held at the hotel and featured iconic Las Vegas décor and dynamic entertainment, including human cocktail tables, showgirls, a stomp troupe, and a paranormal mentalist.

“When considering Las Vegas, we often think of casinos and The Strip, but there are also some unforgettable excursion and activity options in the desert,” Doyle says. “These include flat water river rafting, dune buggy adventures, ziplining, and driving road rallies through Death Valley. For this recent program, we also created a Mission to Vegas foot rally teambuilding event. Guests conquered challenges and built their business network as they raced in teams through The Strip and captured specific sights with their digital cameras. They all finished at the Hard Rock Cafe for lunch with their rally photos projected on video walls around the club.”

With all incentives, the proof is in the program results, Doyle says. “Employees were so motivated to achieve their goals and to qualify for the trip that they turned in the single biggest sales month in the history of the company. This was accomplished during what is historically the slowest sales season for the company and the industry. There was an 18 percent sales increase, 2011 over 2012. Las Vegas proved to be a great motivator.”

The appeal of Las Vegas is demonstrated by the desire of planners to repeatedly bring their incentives back to the destination says Francine McKanna. She recently worked with an automotive company that — for the third year in a row — chose Las Vegas to honor more than 100



DragonRidge Country Club is but one of more than 100 golf courses in the greater Las Vegas area.

or activities that aren’t casino oriented, whether it’s a nightclub or a signature restaurant featuring a world-famous chef.”

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Thrills galore await attendees at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway.



Photo courtesy of Las Vegas Motor Speedway

award winners. This group took full advantage of off-The-Strip activities available in Las Vegas, McKanna points out, including off-road trucking combined with skeet shooting, golf at TPC Las Vegas, indoor skydiving and a fixed-wing airplane ride over the Grand Canyon.

"And the final night was a Texas hold 'em tournament, which is very popular with this group, and something they don't get tired of," she says.

### Easy Accessibility

A significant transportation development has been the opening of the new Terminal 3 at McCarran International Airport — a state-of-the-art facility that also makes the process of entering the country and clearing U.S. Customs faster and easier than it has ever been.

The LVCVA, the airport authority and the city are working closely with major airlines to increase the airlift and deliver even more flexible flight times during the day. The key to success, according to the LVCVA, has been a well-coordinated effort to convince route planners to address the burgeoning demand for flights into and out of the destination now that its meeting and convention industry is flourishing again.

In April, Virgin America began offering three daily nonstop round-trip flights from Los Angeles International Airport, adding capacity to its existing lift from San Francisco and New York's JFK International Airport.

"With mood lighting, custom-designed leather seats and touch-screen entertainment at every seat, we think our guests will agree that Virgin America is the perfect way to escape to one of the most iconic travel destinations in the world," said John MacLeod, Virgin America's senior vice president of planning and sales, in a January announcement. "This route has been one of the most requested by our frequent flyers, and whether guests are traveling for a fun weekend getaway or headed to one of the many trade events or business conferences that Las Vegas hosts each year, we think this new 'ride' will be a stylish, welcome alternative."



Photo by Tomasz Rossa

"Le Rêve - The Dream," the exotic show at Wynn Las Vegas, has been described as haunting and captivating.

In early June, MGM Resorts International, which operates a portfolio of some of the city's most acclaimed and popular meeting hotels announced a new strategic alliance with Southwest Airlines that leverages their loyalty rewards programs to earn free flights and special perks at qualifying MGM Resorts properties. "The sky now, quite literally, is the limit for M life members," stated Bill Hornbuckle, president and chief marketing officer for MGM Resorts International. "Teaming up with Southwest Airlines provides more experience options and rewards for our members traveling to Las Vegas," he said in a news release.

This initiative is particularly significant because Southwest Airlines is the largest carrier of passengers to and from Las Vegas.

"With Southwest Airlines being the largest carrier at McCarran International Airport, it's clear how much our Rapid Rewards Members enjoy visiting Las Vegas," said Jonathan Clarkson, director of rapid rewards at Southwest Airlines, in a statement. "We're excited that this partnership with MGM Resorts International and their M life members will now allow Rapid Rewards Members the ability to earn points for stays in nearly half of the rooms on the Las Vegas Strip."

### What's New

Las Vegas is recognized as the convention capital of the world, says Ralenkotter, "and for good reason. We have more than 10.7 million sf of meeting and convention space, and for the past 19 years, Las Vegas has been named the No. 1 trade show destination in North America, hosting 53 of the 250 largest trade shows in the country — more than our next two competitors combined. In addition, with more than 21,000 meetings, conventions and events and nearly 5 million convention delegates in 2012, we're a serious place to do business."

And also a place that is constantly evolving.

According to the LVCVA, every major meeting property in the city has now completed a renovation or addition of a new amenity such as a restaurant or nightclub — or soon will.

The completely renovated Tropicana Las Vegas — a DoubleTree by Hilton is one of the few remaining landmark properties from the 1950s golden age of Las Vegas. After a \$200 million transformation, the Tropicana recently announced plans to significantly expand its meeting and convention facilities to more than 100,000 sf.

Currently offering more than 60,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space, the conference



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**Heather Heidbrink**  
Director of Sourcing  
Maritz Travel  
St. Louis, MO

*“If incentive winners earned the trip, they really want to have an experience that is worthy of all the hard work they’ve put in to earn it. So luxury is really important — and Las Vegas has no shortage of that.”*

center at Tropicana Las Vegas can accommodate large events for up to 3,000 delegates. The hotel will build five 650-sf breakout rooms on the second floor of the Club Tower, adding to its three ballrooms, which comprise 19 breakout rooms in the conference center.

Additionally, the resort will expand the Tropicana Pavilion, which is a wing of Tropicana Las Vegas’ conference center. When combined with existing space in the Tropicana Pavilion, the venue will offer more than 55,000 sf that can be used for large exhibits and general sessions.

The recent transformation of the resort includes a fresh redesign of every guest room and suite, the 50,000-sf casino, more than 100,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space, several new restaurants and bars, and the all-new Tropicana Theater.

Early next year, Gansevoort Hotel Group and nightlife promoted Victor Drai, in partnership with Caesars Entertainment, will open Gansevoort Las Vegas, a completely renovated \$185 million hotel on the site of another old Las Vegas landmark, Bill’s Gamblin’ Hall and Saloon, at the heart of The Strip at the corner of Las Vegas Boulevard and Flamingo Road. The property, which will open in 2014, will become the first standalone boutique hotel situated on the Las Vegas Strip and will feature the 65,000-sf, indoor/outdoor Drai’s Beach Club and Nightclub.

And in another recent development, Malaysia-based Genting Group announced the acquisition of the partially completed Echelon project from Boyd Gaming. The once highly touted project, on the former site of the Stardust Hotel, fell apart during the recession after construction had begun. Genting, which operates casinos in Singapore and New York, bought the project for less than \$500 million and will invest an additional \$1.5 billion to develop an 87-acre, Asian-themed casino hotel complex under its Resorts World brand. The new property is expected to open in 2016.

MGM Resorts will develop a new plaza connecting New York-New York and Monte Carlo in early 2014. The plaza will connect with a new 20,000-seat indoor arena to be built in a joint venture between MGM Resorts International and AEG. The new arena is set to open in 2016. Jim Murren, chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts International, said in a statement, “All great cities offer vibrant pedestrian experiences, and Las



A new Stripside public park at New York-New York and Monte Carlo will lead to the new arena.

Vegas is certainly no exception, as The Strip is one of the world’s greatest boulevards. Our vision is to extend the excitement we traditionally create within our world-class resorts outside onto The Strip, and ultimately in an entertainment district leading to our new arena.”

The front facades of New York-New York and Monte Carlo will be transformed into an outdoor plaza experience featuring a series of casual bars, eateries and retail destinations. Hershey’s Chocolate World retail flagship will anchor the new experience. The company promises an engaging and interactive space for guests as they “taste new treats, personalize sweet gifts and create keepsake photos.”

Recently, South Point Hotel & Spa, the United States Bowling Congress (USBC), Las Vegas Events, and the LVCVA announced a 12-year deal to host several annual USBC events, both citywide and inside a new, \$30 million bowling tournament facility with more than 60 lanes at South Point, which is expected to be completed by fall 2015. The property’s current bowling center annually hosts top events such as the World Series of Bowling.

#### Hotels Within Hotels

Hotels within hotels such as The Signature at MGM Grand Hotel & Casino, which is a non-gaming luxurious property composed of three distinct towers each with 576 suites, are becoming more and more popular.

The first of two new hotels within hotels opened recently, and it was already named one of the “Hottest New Hotels of 2013” by CNN Travel. The hot new property is the Nobu Hotel and Restaurant, which opened this past spring. The 181-room hotel-in-hotel now sits in the old Centurion Tower at Caesars Palace. The joint project of Robert DeNiro, famed Japan-born chef Nobu Matsuhisa and Caesars Entertainment offers what Caesars calls “comfortable simplicity,” with Zen beds, a contemporary take on Japanese lanterns for lighting, and spa-like bathrooms. Considering the hotel is chef branded, the 327-seat Nobu restaurant is bound to be the hotel’s major draw. The first-ever Nobu Hotel Restaurant



At the Linq, the Las Vegas High Roller will be the tallest observation wheel in the world, with 28 cabins that each hold up to 40 people.

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Tom Colicchio's Heritage Steak, a new 230-seat restaurant, is located within The Mirage's garden atrium.



Photo courtesy of MGM Resorts International

and Lounge Caesars Palace opened earlier this year offering several Teppanyaki tables, a sushi bar and a private dining area. A collaboration between Caesars Palace, Chef Nobu Matsuhisa and Nobu Hospitality primary shareholders — actor Robert De Niro and Hollywood film producer Meir Teper — the hotel now has available 18 distinctive Nobu Hotel suites that can accommodate groups of five up to 45, and range in size from 1,000 sf to 4,350 sf. Available in suites, the Nobu Hotel hospitality menu features bite-sized portions of the chef's signature dishes. For planners seeking unique and memorable experiences, the Nobu Hospitality team provides live food demonstrations such as a sushi bar with a master chef. Total Experiences, the cost-free in-house concierge team for groups booking five or more hotel rooms, can plan a special event.

South Beach's iconic Delano is coming to Las Vegas. The 1,100-room, all-suite property will be the newest addition to Mandalay Bay, taking the place of THEhotel. Mandalay Bay and Morgans Hotel Group will unveil the new Delano Las Vegas in early 2014.

With a separate entrance and accessed by private express elevators, the Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas, located on floors 35–39 of the Mandalay Bay tower, completely renovated all 424 guest rooms and suites inspired in part by the vibrant art deco period. Also, Four

Seasons debuted Press, a new indoor/outdoor lobby bar that creates an energetic social hub that evolves from espressos in the morning to draft beers and wine at night.

### Dining Experiences

On top of its game in all categories, Las Vegas shines when it comes to dining and entertainment. Including chef Nobu — who also operates Nobu Las Vegas at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino — just about every celebrity chef has an outpost in Las Vegas. From fantastic dine-

arounds to unique experiences, Las Vegas leaves nothing to be desired. The long list of celebrated eateries include Bobby Flay's Mesa Grill, located in Caesars Palace, and Hubert Keller's Fleur de Lys in Mandalay Bay. Also, superstar chef Mario Batali operates Carnevino Italian Steakhouse in The Palazzo, sister hotel to The Venetian and Sands Expo complex.

Chef, author and television personality Giada De Laurentiis plans to open her first restaurant in early 2014 in Las Vegas at the upcoming Gansevoort Las Vegas. Open for lunch and dinner, the 300-seat restaurant will feature an open and airy kitchen, daily pasta specials and a signature antipasto station — a first for Italian eateries on The Strip.

At MGM Grand Hotel & Casino, Joël Robuchon, hailed as France's Chef of the Century by the Gault Millau restaurant guide, operates two restaurants: Joël Robuchon, his fine-dining masterpiece, and L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon featuring tapas, a tasting menu, select wines and unique counter service. Winner of Michelin's Three Star, Forbes Five Star and AAA Five Diamond awards and more, Robuchon has redefined Las Vegas fine dining. Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill and Emeril's New Orleans Fish House by renowned chef and TV personality Emeril Lagasse are two more celebrity chef standouts at MGM Grand. The landmark hotel also is home to Tom Colicchio's Craftsteak — a famed steak house that uses only the finest ingredients from small family farms.

Recently, he opened a new steak house at The Mirage: Tom Colicchio's Heritage Steak presents open flame cooking — the culinary art of preparing meats using wood-burning ovens and charcoal grills. The 230-seat restaurant is located within the resort's garden atrium. Colicchio uses a variety of specialized cooking methods when preparing the restaurant's antibiotic-free meats, including Brandt Beef and Snake River Farms, which he sources from ranchers across the United States.

Not all of the city's most critically acclaimed restaurants are attached to celebrity chefs. Two of the most popular are Le Cirque, located at Bellagio and a sister establishment to its long-running and critically hailed sister outpost in New York City, and Rao's, a shrine to Italian home cooking that has been located in a tiny location in New York's East Harlem for decades.

New dining establishments that are creating even more excitement include renowned chef Daniel Boulud's return to Las Vegas with

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Photo courtesy of Las Vegas News Bureau

Sunbathe and relax at Soleil, a two-acre rooftop pool next to the replica Eiffel Tower, at Paris Las Vegas.

his DBGB Kitchen and Bar. Described as “French Brasserie meets American Tavern,” the restaurant will open later this year at The Venetian. Also, a new partnership between French champagne maker Krug and chef Guy Savoy, who operates the Michelin Two Star Restaurant Guy Savoy in Caesars Palace, which will offer a Krug Chef’s Table at the restaurant. The rumors are true: Next year, Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto will open Morimoto Las Vegas at The Mirage, another jewel in the MGM Resorts crown.

At Mandalay Bay, local restaurant operator The Light Group will debut the new Kumi Japanese restaurant this summer, where it will join the new Citizens Kitchen & Bar, a refreshed Red Square. Light Nightclub and Daylight Beach Club.

New steak houses Gordon Ramsay Steak at Paris Las Vegas and Center Cut Steakhouse at Flamingo Las Vegas join the popular Old Homestead Steakhouse at Caesars Palace.

Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino is home to a new KJ Dim Sum & Seafood.

Meanwhile, Ruth’s Chris Steak House has debuted a new location at Harrah’s Las Vegas, the brand’s first restaurant on The Strip.

And for more budget-conscious planners still looking for something new and name-driven, there is Gordon Ramsay’s BurGR, which brings a master chef’s touch to burgers, fries and shakes at Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino. A new Carlos ‘n’ Charlie’s has made its debut at the Flamingo, and Caesars Palace has a new Bacchanal Buffet.

Restaurateur and TV host Guy Fieri has signed on to open his first Las Vegas restaurant in late 2013 at the entrance of The Quad Resort & Casino. Touted as a new restaurant concept from Fieri, the restaurant will feature a large outdoor patio and dining area adjacent to the Carnival Court and The Quad’s main entrance.

Wynn Las Vegas has more Forbes Four Star restaurants than any other casino hotel in North America. One of the newest is Wing Lei voted Best Chinese Restaurant by *Las Vegas Life*. The only Asian restaurant in North America to earn a Michelin star, Wing Lei’s offerings include a mix of Cantonese, Shanghai and Szechwan dishes.

New offerings at Aria Resort & Casino include FIVE50 Pizza Bar, the first casual concept

by James Beard Award-winning chef Shawn McClain, whose first venue at Aria is the popular Sage restaurant. The décor and menu offerings at Aria Buffet were recently updated as well. At Javier’s, a favorite hot spot for Mexican fare that opened last fall, guests will delight in Javier’s famous hand-shaken, made-to-order margaritas. Culinary entertainment is the order of the day at Tetsu, located inside chef Masa Takayama’s famed Japanese restaurant barMASA. At chef Masa’s first teppan restaurant, highly skilled chefs prep, cook and plate orders specific to each guest’s request.

## Entertainment and Shows

The Las Vegas entertainment scene is fueled by superstar headliners such as Celine Dion, Shania Twain and Elton John, world-renowned



Photo courtesy of Wynn Las Vegas

The championship 18-hole golf course at Wynn Las Vegas.

theatrical presentations such as exotic Cirque du Soleil shows and the interactive masterpieces from Blue Man Group, not to mention award-winning Broadway shows such as “Jersey Boys,” now at Paris Las Vegas. There’s something for every group size, budget and taste.

Country superstar Shania Twain is the latest attraction at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace. Like Celine Dion and Elton John who have multi-year arrangements, Twain started a two-year stint last December. The first national tour of the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical hit “Priscilla Queen of the Desert” started an 11-week run at The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino in mid-June.

With the opening of his eponymous comedy club, Emmy Award-winning comedian and actor Brad Garrett brings his comedy to MGM Grand’s entertainment lineup. Brad Garrett’s Comedy Club, a 250-seat venue, provides Garrett, as well



Photo courtesy of MGM Resorts International

“O” by Cirque du Soleil at the Bellagio is an ethereal, visually stunning show that incorporates the elements of air, fire and — most prominently — water.

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Cirque du Soleil's "Michael Jackson ONE," which premiered at Mandalay Bay this summer, is receiving rave reviews.

Photo by Isaac Brecken/Getty Images



**Marty Doyle**  
Director, Travel Programs  
Dittman Incentive Marketing  
New Brunswick, NJ

“Employees were so motivated to achieve their goals and to qualify for the trip that they turned in the single biggest sales month in the history of the company. Las Vegas proved to be a great motivator.”

as legendary comedians and the next generation of comics, a place to call “home” in Las Vegas.

One of the city's most anticipated new shows, Cirque du Soleil's "Michael Jackson ONE," premiered at Mandalay Bay on June 29. According to a statement, "ONE" is a "state-of-the-art visual and audio experience creating a theatrical evocation of Michael's creative genius. Guided and inspired by his music, four misfits set out on a transformative adventure. By journey's end, they will personify Michael's agility, courage, playfulness and love."

Celebrity reporter Robin Leach, reviewing the extravaganza in the *Las Vegas Sun*, said, "ONE" is such a riveting and immersive experience, you'll want to return time and again to catch what you miss. The nonstop action is throughout the theater, up in the ceiling and in the aisles alongside the audience, as well as on the stage and sidewalls.

"The dancing is beyond superb," he continued. "The multi-colored costumes and illuminated wardrobe creations are beyond dazzling. The video imagery is beyond perfection. Without a shadow of doubt, this is Cirque's best spectacular in its nearly 30-year history. The pyrotechnics and fireworks onstage add to the explosive show."

Also by Cirque du Soleil, the awe-inspiring "Zarkana" is now at Aria. An acrobatic spectacle, the diverse cast of more than 75 international artists transports the audience into a fantastical



The Blue Man Group — known for its engaging interactive experience — is appearing at Monte Carlo Resort & Casino.

©Paul Kottik

and suspenseful world, blurring the boundaries between the real and imaginary.

Located on the third floor of Hakkasan at MGM Grand Hotel & Casino, the 10,000-sf Ling Ling Club provides guests with live performances by the industry's top hip-hop disc jockeys. Lined with LED lights and complete with its own bars and VIP tables, look for the DJ booth on top of the dance floor.

In January, DJ Pauly D launched his latest residency at Haze Nightclub at Aria. The reality star, best known for appearing on MTV's "Jersey Shore," brings his Turnt Up party to the cutting-edge nightlife venue, providing guests with a fist-pumping good time. Hyde Bellagio, the fountain-side lounge, transforms into one of the city's hottest spots after dark featuring established and up-and-coming DJs.

### Unique Experiences and Venues

When planners go offsite for a party or special event, Las Vegas offers a phenomenal list of venue options.



Photo courtesy of MGM Resorts International

The main room at Hakkasan — a five-level culinary and nightlife mecca at MGM Grand Hotel & Casino.

High marks are being given to the aforementioned Hakkasan venue at MGM Grand. One planner raved, "It's an amazing space. Very high end." Hakkasan Las Vegas is a five-level culinary and nightlife mecca featuring modern Cantonese cuisine, world-class mixology and exclusive collaborations with in-demand artists across numerous genres. The Hakkasan Nightclub opened to the public in April, and the restaurant debuted in May. Hakkasan offers a variety of environments, including the restaurant, private dining room, Ling Ling level, main nightclub, pavilion and mezzanine.

Caesars Entertainment is in the midst of completing the Linq — a \$550 million outdoor dining, entertainment and retail district that will be anchored by the High Roller — a 550-foot-high

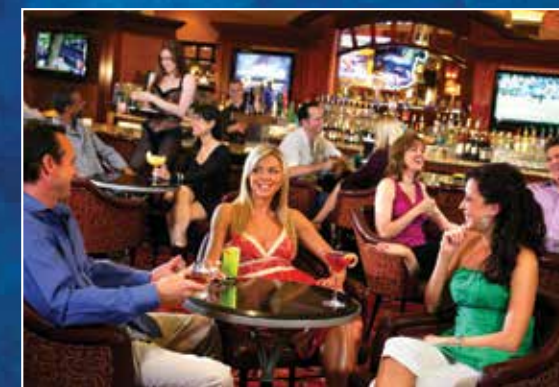
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DMCP  
President  
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Las Vegas, NV

*“And the final night was a Texas hold ‘em tournament, which is very popular with this group, and something they don’t get tired of.”*

observation wheel fitted with 28 giant glass-enclosed cabins.

This sprawling new complex will surround the new Quad Resort & Casino also being developed by Caesars Entertainment on the site of its former Imperial Palace. Set to open in December, the new district should attract a young, hip audience. Another ultra-cool new venue is the Brooklyn Bowl, an example of the hybrid restaurant-bowling alley concept that is spreading across the country. The Las Vegas outpost, which is named for its innovative namesake located in Brooklyn, NY, is slated to open at the Linq in 2014.

Las Vegas’ reputation for extraordinary experiences is well-deserved. Attendees will never forget the ultimate experience of dining or networking at the newly opened Seascope Ballroom at Mandalay Bay’s 1.3-million-gallon Shark Reef Aquarium featuring 2,000 animals including Golden Crocodiles, sawfish, piranhas, shark rays and two rare male juvenile Komodo dragons. The ballroom was designed to highlight the 30 sharks and other aquatic creatures that make their home in the aquarium. An adjoining outdoor patio and lounge, with a pergola for ambience and privacy, allows for flexible use of the space. The 1,675-sf ballroom accommodates up to 125 guests for receptions and up to 80 guests for a seated event. Guided group tours of the aquarium also are available.

#### The Future

And there’s more: The city’s \$2.5 billion development of the new Las Vegas Global Business District will add a new dimension to its identity — as the innovator and leader in delivering state-of-the-art 21st century infrastructure that reinforces the value and productivity of face-to-face meetings. To be completed in three phases over

the next decade, the project will first focus on the renovation and expansion of the Las Vegas Convention Center and the creation of a convention district campus. During the past two years, more than \$20 million in improvements were completed at the Las Vegas Convention Center: The façade of the center was painted two different shades of gray paint, and the interior was painted; the green parking lot was expanded, and designs are underway on two more parking lots to allow for more convenience and access; more than 1 million sf of new red carpet was installed inside; lighting was upgraded in the Central and North Halls and delivers up to 20 percent more light with 42 percent less energy; Starbucks added a double-sided counter inside its recently expanded store, resulting in faster service; and American Express opened its Open Business Lounge inside the main entrance of the center.

Designated in 2011 as an official World Trade Center site through an agreement between the LVCVA and the Consumer Electronics Association, the second phase is the creation of a dedicated World Trade Center facility to attract more meetings and conventions to the destination.

A centralized transportation hub designed to improve connectivity in the resort corridor and improve the overall customer experience is the third and final stage of the project.

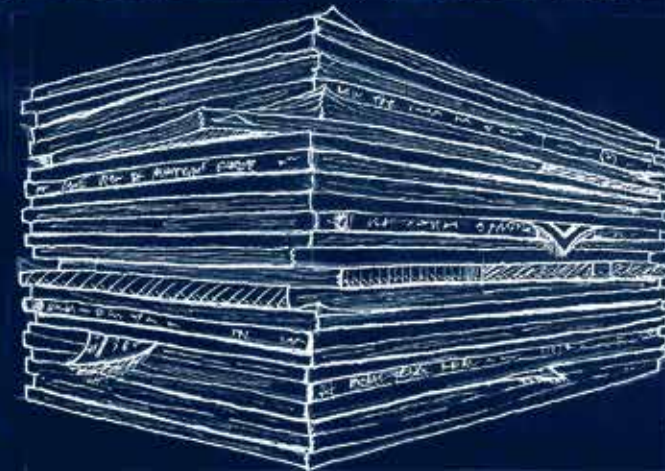
“Las Vegas will continue to be a top incentive destination because of its history of successfully reinventing itself to make sure the customer experience is always fresh and new,” says Ralenkotter. “With \$6.6 billion dollars being invested into the destination over the next several years, Las Vegas continues to offer new and unique experiences that are key components in attracting repeat business.” **C&IT**



A rendering of the new Las Vegas Global Business District.

Photo courtesy of Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

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# On The Move



The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa, Henderson, NV, has named **Michael Pramshafer** as resort vice president of sales and marketing. He was executive director of sales at Stratosphere Hotel & Tower in Las Vegas.

**Darius Deavours** was named director of group sales for Melia Hotels International's global collection of hotels and resorts, responsible for the regions of Kentucky, Tennessee, North

Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. He formerly served as group sales manager for Starwood with the Atlanta metro market.

**Jerry Jensen** was named director of sales and marketing for Scottsdale Resort & Conference Center, Scottsdale, AZ. A veteran of more than 30 years in hospitality sales and marketing, he previously served as director of sales and marketing for

the Westward Look Wyndham Grand Resort & Spa in Tucson, AZ.

**Jake Megrikian** was named director of sales and marketing at the InterContinental Los Angeles Century City. He formerly served as the hotel's senior sales manager.

Experience Columbus, Columbus, OH, has named **Melanie Hickey** as national sales manager, responsible

for the East Coast corporate and national association segments outside of Virginia, Maryland and Washington, DC. She most recently was the director of sales for both the Holiday Inn and The Residence Inn Chicago Midway in Chicago, IL.

L'Auberge Del Mar, Del Mar, CA, has named **Jennifer Chapman** as national sales manager responsible for the Orange County, CA, and Southeast U.S. markets. She most recently served as sales manager for the Omni Interlocken Resort, Broomfield, CO.

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, Lake Buena Vista, FL, has named **Jared McLachlan** as director of sales and marketing, replacing Eric Opron who was promoted to hotel manager. McLachlan previously served as director of sales for the hotel.

The Resort at Squaw Creek, Olympic Valley, CA, has named **Larry Colton** as director of sales and marketing. He formerly served as area director of sales and marketing for Pointe Hilton Resorts in Phoenix, AZ.

The Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel, Chicago has named **Gordon A. Taylor III** as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing at the Hyatt Regency Austin, Austin, TX.

The Chattanooga, Chattanooga, TN, has named **Adriane Elrod** as group sales manager. She most recently served as director of sales for Candlewood Suites in Tuscaloosa, AL.

**Lisa Tiernan** was named director of sales and marketing for Loews Boston Hotel, Boston, MA. She was director of sales and marketing at The Fairmont Battery Wharf Hotel in Boston.

**Ragini Stearns** was named director of sales for Naples Bay Resort, Naples, FL. She was previously senior sales manager for the Waldorf Astoria Orlando and the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek in Orlando, FL. **C&IT**

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