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THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

**DMOs and Digital
Team Up to Enhance the Destination
and Build Attendance**

PAGE 18

**Are You
Onboard?**

**Catching a New Wave of
Excitement for Cruise Meetings
and Incentives**

PAGE 12

F&B Grows Up

**Enriching the Meeting
Experience With
Taste and Style**

PAGE 22



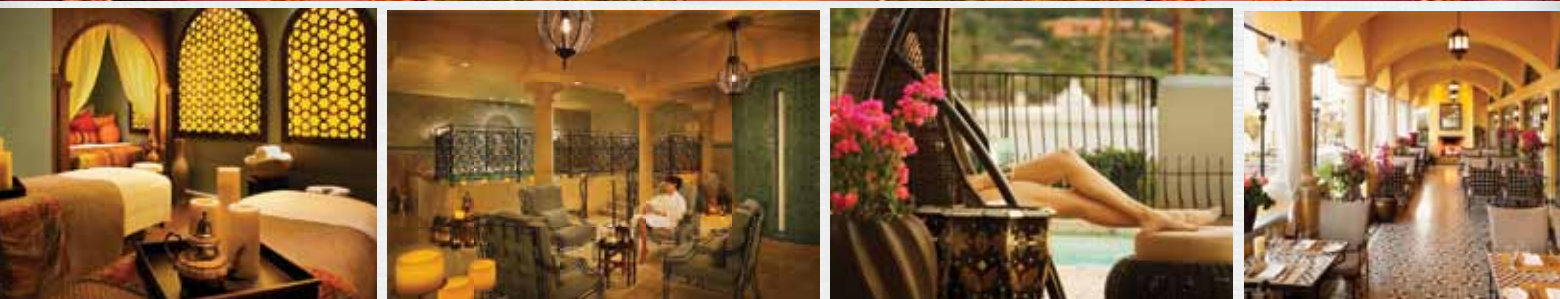
The Celebrity Solstice,
flagship of the Solstice fleet,
cruises the Virgin Islands.

Photo courtesy of Celebrity Cruises

Arizona
PAGE 26

● **Florida**
PAGE 30

● **Louisiana**
PAGE 42



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Photo courtesy of Celebrity Cruises



Page 12

COVER STORY

Are You Onboard?

Catching a New Wave
of Excitement for Cruise
Meetings and Incentives

By Timothy Herrick

The flagship of Celebrity Cruises' stylish Solstice
Class fleet is the 2,850-guest Celebrity Solstice.

FEATURES

18 <DMOs and Digital

Team Up to Enhance
the Destination and
Build Attendance
By John Buchanan

22 <F&B Grows Up

Enriching the Meeting
Experience With
Taste and Style
By John Buchanan

DESTINATIONS

26 <Arizona

Meeting Success in the
Spectacular Southwest
By Karen Brost

30 <Viva Florida!

Meet in the Sunshine
State as It Celebrates
Its 500th Birthday
By Karen Brost

42 <Louisiana

A Magical Mix of Culture,
Cuisine, Music and More
Keeps Groups Coming
Back Year After Year
By Derek Reveron

Photo courtesy of Florida's Historic Coast



Page 30

Chad Light
officially
portrays
Ponce
de Leon
throughout
the State
of Florida.
He has
been very
busy this
year as
the state
celebrates
its 500th
birthday.

DEPARTMENTS

4 <Publisher's Message

By Harvey Grotsky

6 <News & Notes

6 <Events Calendar

8 <Meeting Values

9 <Snapshots

10 <Perspective

It's Never Too Late to Set
Goals to Increase Your
Professional Development
By Jeff Hurt

50 <People on the Move

50 <Reader Services



Page 42

Photo courtesy of New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center

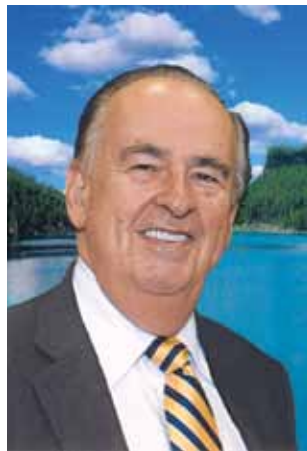
A new entrance
and The Great
Hall, a 60,300-
sf, column-free
ballroom, debuted
in January at
the New Orleans
Ernest N. Morial
Convention Center.

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PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

Build It and They Will Come

The phrase “build it and they will come,” spawned from the popular 1989 baseball movie “Field of Dreams,” is an apt way to describe how the meetings industry and the cruise lines have come together in recent times. Previously, planners selected a cruise mostly for an occasional incentive program because onboard meeting facilities and services were few and far between. But that has changed. Cruise lines listened to planners, responded by adding meeting space,



new onboard amenities and services, innovative audio-visual, and business is certainly improving. Moreover, many cruise companies are actively seeking meetings business and are building new ships that fit the unique requirements of meetings.

Christine Duffy, president of Cruise Lines International Association, spearheaded these efforts by creating a Meeting, Event and Incentive Taskforce to increase the awareness of the value of cruising. “Planners are now realizing that a cruise can support their new meetings needs,” said Duffy. “The ships today have the meeting space, the technology, the Wi-Fi. People were assuming there was not enough variety, but the fact is that most corporate groups contain different demographics, and there are activities for people who are more sedentary to full-blown spas, fitness centers, rock climbing and a range of options.”

The cruise companies, which have always been at the top of their game for hosting pure incentives, can now easily handle the newer hybrid events that merge an incentive program with meeting components, too. Jo Kling, president of cruise specialist Landry & Kling and CEO of the cruise meeting resource *Seasite.com*, says, “Cruising is becoming part of the rotation of more planners for incentive travel and a meeting program. They are looking for something a little different. Programs can be customized to meet different needs of the planner, for whatever size group.” And Shari Wallack, president of Plantation, FL-based Buy the Sea, adds, “Incentive travel by ship has grown. The ‘build it they will come’ adage applies. Years ago, the corporate decision-makers were not experienced cruisers. Today’s CEO is young, well-traveled and likely cruise-savvy. This decision-maker’s understanding of the industry is vastly different, and he or she is more open to a new experience.”

Read more about this positive win-win story in our insightful cover story “Are You Onboard?” on page 12.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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Baha Mar Casino Hotel to Open in December 2014

NASSAU, BAHAMAS — Baha Mar, the mega-resort development on the Cable Beach area of Nassau, on New Providence Island in The Islands of the Bahamas, is scheduled to debut its 1,000-room casino hotel in December 2014, according to Robert “Sandy” Sands, Baha Mar’s senior vice president, administration and external affairs, as reported in *Travel Weekly*. Three other properties are expected to open by March 2015. “We are one-third done now. We have 23 months to go before we welcome our first guest, and we will be ready,” Sands said. The brand for the casino hotel will be announced within the next six months; the other new hotels are the 200-room Rosewood at Baha Mar, the highest-end resort in the complex; the 300-room Mondrian at Baha Mar; and the 700-room Grand Hyatt at Baha Mar, a convention hotel. A 550-room Wyndham and 700-room Sheraton are already operating in the



A rendering of the aerial view of Baha Mar.

A \$3.5-billion development. When the complex is complete, Baha Mar will total 3,450 rooms (2,200 new rooms and 1,250 from Wyndham and Sheraton). Also, there will be approximately 40 restaurants and bars; 14 pools; an 18-hole Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course opening by December 2013; a 200,000-sf convention center opening in December 2013; a 100,000-sf casino; a 30,000-sf spa; the Waterside Place shopping, dining and gallery complex with choreographed water fountains; and the 20-acre Beachside Sanctuary with beaches, lagoon pools and native flora and fauna. www.bahamar.com

Hyatt Regency Chicago to Debut Renovation in April

CHICAGO, IL — The 2,019-room Hyatt Regency Chicago, the city’s largest hotel, is set to unveil a \$168 million property-wide renovation. From a chic new lobby, re-vamped guest rooms, meeting spaces and an array of exciting new and re-concepted dining experiences, the hotel will officially complete the process in April 2013. Phase three, set to conclude the project, completely renovated the East Tower Lobby, as well as all of the meeting and event space, and dining outlets. The property boasts more than 228,000 sf of expansive newly renovated, modern venues including four ballrooms, 63 meeting rooms and the 70,000-sf Riverside Exhibition Center. www.chicagoregency.hyatt.com

Music City Center Grand Opening Set for May



A rendering of Music City Center.

NASHVILLE, TN — Nashville Mayor Karl Dean announced that the grand opening celebration for the Music City Center will take place in May. Construction on the \$585 million facility will be completed in April. Already more than 100 meetings and 800,000 room nights have been booked. The Music City Center totals 2.1 million sf, which includes 1.2 million sf of public space. Major features include a public art collection; Sixth Avenue that runs through the building; and the 57,500-sf Grand Ballroom, which seats 6,000 people. Green features include solar panels and a green roof. The building is on track to receive LEED Silver certification. www.nashvillemusiccitycenter.com

Visit Orlando Names George Aguel as President and CEO

ORLANDO, FL — Visit Orlando Chair Paul Mears III on January 31 named George Armando Aguel president and CEO of Visit Orlando. “George is an incredibly accomplished industry leader, with extensive experience in both leisure and business travel,” said Mears. “His knowledge of the meetings and conventions industry, as well as his relationships throughout the travel and tourism segment, matches perfectly with the criteria that our search committee identified as priorities.”



AGUEL

Aguel’s distinguished career includes more than 35 years of executive-level experience in sales and marketing. Most recently as senior vice president of Global Corporate Alliances and Operating Participants at The Walt Disney Company, Aguel led worldwide management for the company’s strategic corporate alliance agreements. Previously, Aguel served for 22 years as senior vice president of Worldwide Sales and Services for Walt Disney Parks and Resorts. “Orlando is a world-class destination and the Visit Orlando team is highly respected amongst its peers and the industry. I’m looking forward to working with the team and to have the opportunity to represent the destination and the company,” stated Aguel.

A proven industry leader, Aguel has twice been recog-

nized as one of the “25 Most Extraordinary Minds in Sales and Marketing” by Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International. He received the Academy of Leaders Award from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) and was inducted into the Convention Industry Council Hall of Leaders. He’s also an ASAE Fellow and recipient of the Professional Convention Management Association Professional Achievement Award and the APEX award from Black Meetings & Tourism. He has served as chairman of Meeting Professionals International.

Aguel’s contributions to Central Florida include two years as chairman of Visit Orlando (2009-2010), vice chairman of the Central Florida Sports Commission and past member of the Orange County Tourist Development Council. He’s also a recipient of the Metro Orlando Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Don Quixote Award.

“After nearly 23 years as an Orlando resident, my desire to serve this community has never been stronger,” said Aguel. “The Visit Orlando team leads the industry in collaborating with member partners and community partners to market our region around the globe. It’s an honor to have the opportunity to lead this highly respected team toward ensuring that Orlando not only remains the vibrant travel brand it is today, but continues to be positioned for prosperity in the decades to come.” www.orlandomeeting.com

EVENTS CALENDAR

MARCH 14, 2013

DMAI DESTINATIONS SHOWCASE WASHINGTON

Walter E. Washington Convention Center
Washington, DC
www.destinationsshowcase.com

MARCH 19-22, 2013

IACC-AMERICAS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Eaglewood Resort & Spa
Itasca, IL (Chicago)
www.iacconline.org

APRIL 7-10, 2013

GMIC SUSTAINABLE MEETINGS CONFERENCE

Hyatt Regency McCormick Place and McCormick Place West
Chicago, IL
www.sustainablemeetingsconference.com

APRIL 21-23, 2013

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MAY 21-23, 2013

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Subject to availability for events held over select dates in 2013 and 2014.

400 Avenue of The Champions, Palm Beach Gardens, FL

Great Hall Debuts at New Orleans Convention Center

NEW ORLEANS, LA — Officials of the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center along with representatives from the city of New Orleans and the National Football League gathered on January 29 for a ribbon-cutting ceremony to debut the center's new entrance and The Great Hall renovation (*see photo on opposite page*). New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu and Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana Jay Dardenne called it a great day for New Orleans. "To be able to have an entranceway like this and an increase in the square footage of this magnificent arena is going to truly let New Orleans remain competitive with the cities we want to compete with. We want New Orleans to be mentioned in the same breath as all the other cities that people think of when they think of conventions," said Dardenne.

The ceremony marked the completion of the 24-month, \$52 million renovation of the former Hall A and La Louisiane Ballroom. The space was reconfigured into The Great Hall, a 60,300-sf, column-free ballroom, which is now the largest ballroom in New Orleans. The Great Hall was the official

name of the convention center at the 1984 World's Fair. The renovation also includes a 4,660-sf junior ballroom with a rooftop terrace named The Rivergate Room and 25,000 sf of prefunction space. The NFL Shop of Super Bowl XLVII (held February 3 in New Orleans) opened immediately following the ribbon-cutting, and was the first official use of the new space. www.mccno.com

The Loews Chicago to Debut in 2015

NEW YORK, NY — In 2015, Loews Hotels & Resorts will open The Loews Chicago, its first hotel in the Windy City. The 52-story tower will have 400 hotel rooms, 390 luxury condos and 25,000 sf of meeting space. In 2012, Loews acquired the 632-room Renaissance Hollywood renaming it Loews Hollywood; broke ground on the 1,800-room Cabana Bay Beach Resort in Florida at Universal Orlando Resort; and announced plans to purchase the Madison, a 356-room hotel in Washington, DC. www.loewshotels.com

MEETING VALUES



Hyatt Regency Atlanta, Atlanta, GA.

The Regency Club Level Buyout, which represents a 25 percent savings, provides the chance to have all attendees on one floor including additional amenities. Located on the 22nd floor of the Atrium Tower, the Regency Club has 33 rooms including three King Crown Suites, 22 King Rooms and eight Double Rooms. The offer, valid now through December 31, 2013, allows attendees to have access to the lounge area open daily from 5:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. and includes breakfast treats, mid-day munchies, evening bites and late-night snacks. Contact Casper van Eldik Thieme, director of sales and marketing, casper.vet@hyatt.com, 404-460-6500, atlantaregency.hyatt.com/hyatt/hotels-atlantaregency/.

■ **Sheraton New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.** Now through the end of 2013, planners are offered a 30th anniversary group offer, which includes the following: special anniversary breakfast, lunch and break menus all available for \$30, a value that is 30 percent less than regular retail pricing; 30 percent off standard AV equipment and Internet; and 30 percent more Starwood Preferred Planner Points. Contact Ken Newman, director of group sales, ken.newman@sheraton.com, 504-595-5522, www.sheratonneworleans.com/30th.

■ **Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL.** Planners who book a group or meeting by June 30, 2013 to actualize in 2013 or 2014 will receive the following rewards: double Marriott Rewards points; complimentary Internet in meeting space; complimentary meeting, meal and exhibit space; complimentary airport transfers (groups of 100 or more); 10 percent discount on catering menus. Meetings booked by February 28, 2013 are eligible to receive an Exclusive Reward of up to 5 percent rebate to the group master account — must mention code ER2013. Contact Andrea Smith, director of sales, asmith@sawgrassmarriott.com, 904-280-7033, www.sawgrassmarriott.com.



Photo credits: 1. New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, 2. IACC, 3. ALHI, 4. Omni Dallas Hotel, 5. Destination Colorado, 6. Donald Bowers/Getty Images

1 President of the Ernest N. Morial Exhibition Hall Authority Melvin Rodrigue, with the assistance of city and state officials, cuts the ribbon to the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center's Great Hall and Pedestrian Plaza renovation during opening ceremonies on January 29. **2** Shane Brassel, executive chef at Charles F. Knight Conference Center in St. Louis, MO, the winner of the U.S. position in the IACC-Americas qualifying cook-off, is presented the Copper Skillet by T.J. Fimmano, president of IACC-Americas. Brassel will represent the U.S. at the IACC's 10th annual Copper Skillet Cooking Competition at Eaglewood Resort & Spa in March to vie for the crown of the International Conference Center Chef of the Year. **3** Mary Jo Valentine Blythe, president of Masterplan Inc., received the Associated Luxury Hotels International 2013 Chairman's Award as "IAC Member of the Year," the highest recognition ALHI presents any executive/planner annually, from David Gabri (r), president and CEO of ALHI, and G.A. Taylor Fernley, president and CEO of Fernley & Fernley Inc. **4** Omni Dallas Hotel received LEED Gold New Construction Certification, making it the largest LEED Gold hotel in the U.S. outside of Las Vegas, and one of the only LEED Gold hotels in Texas. Kimberly Lewis, senior vice president of community advancement and conferences and events, the U.S. Green Building Council, presented the hotel with a ceremonial plaque commemorating the certification. Pictured (l to r) are Darren Template, senior vice president, sales and services, Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau (DCVB); Matthew Jones, executive vice president/CFO, DCVB; Dave Snell, Matthews Southwest; Lewis; Jonathan Kraatz, executive director, North Texas Green Council; and Larry Magor, managing director, Omni Dallas Hotel. **5** Meeting planners, event planners and incentive buyers throughout the state of Colorado enjoyed Destination Colorado's Front Range Trade Show in December. **6** The Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIA) Adrian Awards Gala was held in NYC on January 28. Lifetime Achievement Award winners Roger Dow (l), president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association, and Howard Feiertag (c), faculty member at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, VA, were congratulated by Robert A. Gilbert, CHME, CHBA, president and CEO of HSMIA.

By Jeff Hurt

It's Never Too Late to Set Goals to Increase Your Professional Development

It's February, and I wouldn't be surprised if those people who made New Year's resolutions for January 1 have broken them already. But, it's never too late to set goals for 2013.

Personally, I don't make New Year's resolutions. I make goals during the entire year. And I set personal commitments as I need them.

If one of your goals or New Year's resolutions is to increase your personal and professional development, here are a few ideas that you might want to consider. (Thanks to Catherine Lombardozi, learning and development consultant at Learning 4 Learning Professionals, who helped further this thinking.)

Top 10 List of Resolutions to Increase Your Professional Development

1 Identify what you want to learn.

If you'll state your intentions in writing, you'll be surprised at how often you'll find resources that can help you. Books, blog posts, magazine articles, research documents, presentations and other like-minded individuals will cross your path.

2 As Jennifer Lopez sings, "Follow the leader!"

Many thought leaders use social media to share their ideas. Find some in the areas of specialization that interest you and follow their information flow. Blog posts, white papers, research, tweets, and online and face-to-face presentations are a few ways to follow those leaders. Let them challenge you to think differently.



3 Read, read, read!

I'm an information junkie! I read a lot from blog posts to books to research. The Internet makes it so easy to read in short spurts or extended time. Reading information outside of the meetings and hospitality industry gives me new ideas of what I can apply in my conferences and meetings. I also like Brain Pickings Weekly (www.brainpickings.org), which is a weekly review and summary of some of the latest and coolest writings on what matters in the world today.

4 Find a mentor.

There's nothing like having people around you who challenge your thinking, give honest feedback, and serve as a sounding board and source of inspiration! We all need that human interaction to accelerate our learning.



5 Join like-minded communities.

Similar to finding a mentor, it's great to be part of an online community that challenges your thinking and provides support. Join a community in the area in which you want to grow personally and professionally. Sit back and observe the conversations and jump in when you are ready to engage.

6 Eliminate barriers.

Think about those things that keep you from reaching your development goals. Whether those barriers are your own habits, other people or circumstances, consider how to minimize their impact.

7 Capture your thoughts, insights and reflections.

Write it down or type it. When you capture your learnings, it allows you to refer to those notes again and again. Consider journaling or blogging to share your thoughts. Comment directly on the pages of books that you read, write notes on top of blog posts and consider a bookmarking site of some type.

8 Become a saver and sharer.

Create a good electronic filing system to keep track of those interesting articles, blog posts and Web pages that you discover. Share interesting posts with your like-minded community, friends, colleagues and mentors.



9 Schedule daily time to think.

Find time and a space to think on a daily basis. When I was in an office, I would shut my door, open my blinds and just stare at the horizon. I'd let my mind drift and daydream. Sometimes I would think about a specific subject, meditate on it and chew the cud so to speak. It's amazing what can become clear in moments of quiet reflection.

10 Take time to smell the roses.

We Americans are taking fewer and fewer vacations. It's important to take time off from work and restore your soul. Don't get caught up in the fear that if you take a vacation you'll lose your job. Your body and mind need the time off from work, so take those vacations. What personal and professional resolutions would you add to this list? What tips do you have for ensuring that you grow professionally each year?

C&IT



“Reading information outside of the meetings and hospitality industry gives me new ideas of what I can apply in my conferences and meetings.”



Jeff Hurt

is executive vice president, education and engagement, Velvet Chainsaw Consulting, and is based in Dallas, TX. Velvet Chainsaw Consulting exclusively services companies and associations with their annual meetings, conferences, education and events. They also help technology, service and membership organizations establish and execute plans and processes that result in improved business results. Hurt has worked in the events/nonprofit arena for more than 20 years including Keep America Beautiful as a consultant/trainer/writer; Keep Texas Beautiful as education coordinator; professional development manager for Meeting Professionals

International; professional development manager for Promotional Products Association International; and director of education and events for the National Association of Dental Plans. He also has served on the board of directors for several North Texas, state and national charities and organizations. Contact Hurt at 214-886-3174 or jhurt@velvetchainsaw.com. www.velvetchainsaw.com

Are You Onboard?

Catching a New Wave of Excitement for Cruise Meetings and Incentives

By Timothy Herrick

When it came to cruise ships as a venue for incentive programs and meetings, the potential was long acknowledged, but far from being maximized. The cruise lines seemed to settle on an industry-wide attitude of benign neglect towards this market, even as a loyal and steadily increasing (although still small) portion of incentive travel program managers and meeting planner professionals continued to select the cruise ship option.

In recent years, that attitude has notably changed. Cruise lines are now actively cultivating the meeting and incentive (M&I) market with new onboard amenities and services designed specifically for meetings and events. The proactive attitude towards planners is now undeniable among floating facilities.

The cruise line industry — both as a coalition of companies and individual providers — has increased its presence within the meetings industry in multiple ways, including increased exhibition at industry conventions. The latest generations of luxury liners and other vessels have been designed to include conference facilities and technological capabilities, making



The new Carnival Breeze, shown here cruising in St. Thomas, features six- and eight-day Caribbean cruises out of Miami.

Photo courtesy of Carnival Cruise Lines

the Complete Meeting Package now available at sea more competitive with the traditional CMPs on land. Cruise lines have added scores of executives whose main duty is to target and accommodate planners, which includes not just sales and marketing but devising packages more conducive to the unique demands of the incentive and meeting industry.

"The industry is very interested in this segment, and I feel that in 2013 we will see continued growth in this segment of passengers," says Christine Duffy, president of Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA). "New ships have been built with innovative audio-visual technology and meeting space capacity. The product lends itself to incentive and meeting travel."

Growing Market

Although still a small percentage of overall cruise ship passengers, indications are that the numbers of M&I passengers onboard are growing. Few quantifiable figures on the market — either its size by number of M&I passengers or the dollars being generated by them — are currently available. Informal estimations from cruise lines indicate that between 5–10

percent of passengers currently fall into the M&I category. In truth, most cruise lines are only now adequately tracking these figures. Distinguishing different categories of group travel passengers — which some industry observers estimate to account for more than 25 percent of all cruise passengers — and clearly identifying who are incentive and meeting travelers remains a relatively new enterprise.

In 2010, a study by PhocusWright "Groups and Meetings: Driving Success in Business Travel's Most Complex Segment," for the first time queried planners about cruise ships as meeting venues. The report stated: "Six percent of meeting planners/overseers reported using a cruise ship as a meeting venue in 2009, versus 8 percent who planned to do so in 2010." Although still single digits, this figure does show a year-to-year increase of nearly a third. The study surveyed 630 planners; it is unclear how indicative this sample size is of the meeting planner profession, which a 2011 PhocusWright study estimated to number 90,000.

Duffy came to CLIA last year, after serving as president and CEO of Maritz Travel, one of the world's largest M&I



Top Sea Suites

Cruise meeting and incentive specialists Landry & Kling offer their top eight cruise suites ideal for planning and networking, private meetings and dining, or as an incentive reward. Suites were evaluated based on size and layout, meeting areas, hospitality features, and concierge-level service and amenities. The top eight picks (in order of ascending size) are:

1. SeaDream Yacht I or II: Owner's Suite
2. Silver Cloud: Owner's Suite
3. MSC Divina: MSC Yacht Club Royal Suite
4. Seven Seas Voyager: Master Suite
5. Oasis of the Seas: Royal Loft Suite
6. Celebrity Reflection: Reflection Suite (pictured)
7. Oceania Marina: Owner's Suite
8. Norwegian Pearl: The Haven Garden Villa

Photo courtesy of Celebrity Cruises

travel management companies. She not only is optimistic about the untapped potential of the M&I market, she has the experience and motivation to lead the industry to better tap into that market.

Cruise Meetings Taskforce

In 2011, Duffy organized the Meeting, Event & Incentive Taskforce (ME&I Taskforce), made up of incentive specialists from CLIA member lines, with the specific mission of "building stronger relationships and partnerships with meeting and incentive industry leaders...develop and deliver education and research to raise the cruise industry's visibility and overall profile in this market."

During its inaugural year in 2012, the ME&I Taskforce partnered with Meeting Professionals International (MPI) Foundation, and hosted two focus groups with MPI corporate meeting professionals: one onboard the Celebrity Silhouette and another conducted at MPI's 2012 World Education Conference (WEC).

The taskforce was a step in the right direction, but its initial accomplishment was finding out how much more there is to do in order for this segment to grow. "We had a lot of basic questions, like how do you book a cruise, and how is that differ-

ent than booking a hotel. A lot of the planners were shocked about what is available; there were a lot of ah-ha moments." Duffy adds, "We recognize the need to provide a lot more education for meetings and incentive professionals, who are booking groups, about the benefits of a cruise."

M&I Hybrids

The overall trend in 2012 was that incentive travel grew faster and accounts for a larger percentage of passengers than pure meetings bookings. "Incentive travel by ship has grown," says Shari Wallack, president of Plantation, FL-based Buy the Sea. "The 'build it they will come' adage applies. Years ago, the corporate decision-makers were not experienced cruisers. Today's CEO is young, well-traveled and likely cruise-savvy. This decision-maker's understanding of the industry is vastly different, and he or she is more open to a new experience."

The dominant trend in the incentive market is to interweave meeting components into an incentive program, a kind of two-for-one hybrid that also creates more teambuilding, morale-boosting and even networking opportunities. "Cruising is becoming part of the rotation of more planners for incentive travel and a meet-

ing program," says Jo Kling, president of cruise specialist Landry & Kling and CEO of the cruise meeting resource *Seasite.com*. "They are looking for something a little different. Programs can be customized to meet different needs of the planner, for whatever size group."

As overlap continues to blur the lines dividing incentive and meetings — and planners of all variety of events continue to seek out innovative settings that will spur attendance — onboard meetings are gradually becoming more the rule than the exception. "Cruise meetings are getting more popular," adds Kling. "But not in one specific segment as in the past when cruise venues were used mainly for incentive travel programs: Now it's an ever widening variety of meetings or events."

"Planners are now realizing that a cruise can support their new meetings needs, whether it is more a strict meeting or a meeting-incentive hybrid," says Duffy. "The ships today have the meeting space, the technology, the Wi-Fi. People were assuming there was not enough variety, but the fact is that most corporate groups contain different demographics, and there are activities for people who are more sedentary to full-blown spas, fitness centers, rock climbing and a range of options."

Cruising Covers All Clothier's Bases

The potentially wide appeal of cruising is why Jonathan Kierman, senior director of store operations for Catherine's Plus Sizes, has planned his programs exclusively with cruise ships for the last three of the past 15 years. "We have a very diverse work force in terms of age — we have baby boomers to Generation Y associates. "Finding an incentive that is attractive to all is a challenge. We have discovered that by offering a cruise, the options of what our associates would be interested in participating are tremendous and give us a broad base to work from."

Like most incentive programs, a ship

"We recognize the need to provide a lot more education for meetings and incentive professionals... about the benefits of a cruise."



Christine Duffy
President and CEO
Cruise Lines International Association
Fort Lauderdale, FL

must accommodate meeting components for Kierman's program. "We need a meeting room with AV capability for our 'town hall meeting' as well as an upscale venue for our awards ceremony."

In addition to having the facility to accommodate meetings, cruise lines offer streamlined pricing, inclusive packages and other aspects that enhance the return on investment (ROI) of an event. Compared to other venues, Kierman calls cruising, "extremely affordable and in a lot of cases it is cheaper. Our intentions for 2013 are to keep our budget flat to 2012. It seems like there are more options today than four years ago when I first began exploring these options. I believe this is because of the economy and more venues looking to acquire corporate business."

Unlike other destinations that Kierman has utilized, which include popular resorts and cities, he discovered that cruising offers a built-in motivation

for the targeted employees, eventually optimizing ROI. "Achieving the status of President's Club has its own inherent ROI, but over the last three years since we have changed our venue to a cruise, we have seen a much larger ROI and even more so, it has become a driver of our culture. The phrase 'Are you on the boat?' is alive in all of our stores and a big motivator for the teams."

Value and Flexibility

Simplified pricing — as opposed to à la carte — is an in-demand contracting issue in an era of widespread belt-tightening and heightened emphasis on ROI. "Planners understand that (with cruises) there are so many more inclusions, and it becomes unnecessary to bring in décor, entertainment, AV, etc.," says Wallack. "What they may not know is how much more flexible the cruise lines have become in terms of confirming exclusive group events, offering alternative restaurant dining buyouts, customizing group shore excursions, allowing complete takeover of the conference space."

Cruise lines are now also able to handle the needs of large groups. "Some programs have gotten so large that only a mega ship can accommodate everyone at one time," says Wallack. "If you look at Mexico and the Caribbean, there are only a handful of hotels that work for large groups needing over 1,000 rooms for example."

Unlike what is often the case when an event grows, making vendor and venue negotiations more complex, cruising contracting can remain less costly and convoluted. "A cruise is generally less expensive and is by far more inclusive," says Wallack. "One rate covers meals, entertainment, onboard activities, port charges, taxes and gratuities. There is one rate for inclusive liquor. Onboard credit can help a client handle spa treatments, shore excursions, alternative restaurant charges, etc. It is very simple."

The cost differential between a land-based and sea-based M&I program is significant. "Costs can range from 15–40 percent less with a ship, but participants

feel they're getting more," agrees Kling. "Planners save time and shrink budgets, because there's no need to plan menus: Multicourse meals are provided in a lovely dining room where there's no need to pay for centerpieces or lighting, or linens or AV equipment. It surprises us to see the many 'gotcha items' that planners have to try to negotiate from the resort fee to the Internet, AV services, charges to pick up packages shipped for your trade show, parking. Whereas there just aren't that many negotiable items with the cruise structure."

For Duffy, the ME&I Taskforce was only the beginning of conveying the value of cruising to the planner profession. "Planners aren't aware of how an event can be customized on a ship, or the air-to-sea options available that make flying into one destination and out of another affordable, or that cruise lines can work with you on how close to the date you need to book. Planners assume their needs cannot be accommodated by a cruise, and the opposite is true."

International Reach

International cruising options are a natural fit for companies that are expanding their global reach and international work forces. "We are seeing more globalization of companies, and cruise ships cater to that global market," says Duffy. "You rarely see pure incentive programs, so as the popularity of meetings-incentives hybrids grows, more companies are running these programs around the world. The companies themselves are now global. The ships not only go around the world, they are able to accommodate all the language and food demands of international attendees and participants more easily than any other venues. As companies become more global, cruise ships as settings for events will grow."

Cruise News

Celebrity Cruises. In 2012, Celebrity Cruises invested \$140 million to update its four Millennium-class ships, adding several popular Solstice-class dining venues and other enhancements. In the summer of 2013, Celebrity Cruises will be offering its broadest lineup of modern luxury op-

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tions in Europe, and bringing Solstice Class style to Alaska for the first time. The newly “Solsticized” ships will visit 25 countries from seven departure ports and a total of 88 destinations in Europe alone. Celebrity Solstice, the sleek, 2,850-passenger flagship of the Solstice Class fleet, will become the first of its class to offer Alaska excursions, joining Celebrity Century and Celebrity Millennium in pairing Celebrity’s signature cuisine, activities and service with the region’s breathtaking scenery. Rounding out

“Since we have changed our venue to a cruise...it has become a driver of our culture. The phrase ‘Are you on the boat?’ is...a big motivator for the teams.”



Jonathan Kierman
Senior Director, Store Operations
Catherines
Bensalem, PA

Celebrity’s 2013 summer season will be the Celebrity Summit, which, in February 2012, became the third in Celebrity’s Millennium Class fleet to complete the brand’s noted Solsticizing initiative — for voyages to Bermuda, Canada and New England beginning in September. The intimate, 96-guest Celebrity Xpedition, ranked among the top small ships, will continue to offer experiences in the enchanting Galapagos Islands.

Carnival Cruise Lines. “At Carnival, we’ve seen an increase across the board with all types of meeting requests including small board meetings, corporate meetings of all sizes and those that actually have a large enough program to charter the entire ship,” says Ann Sedgwick, senior director, corporate and incentive sales. “We saw an increase with both meeting and incentive programs in 2012. We anticipate this trend to continue.”

The Carnival Breeze, which debuted late last year, is a 3,690-passenger, state-of-the-art ship featuring year-round six-

and eight-day Caribbean cruises from Miami, becoming the largest Carnival ship ever based in South Florida. In addition to many popular features that debuted on Carnival Magic — including the Caribbean-inspired RedFrog Pub, Cucina del Capitano family-style Italian restaurant, and SportSquare outdoor recreation area — Carnival Breeze features the first Thrill Theater. Carnival Destiny will undergo a \$155 million makeover incorporating all of the “Fun Ship 2.0” dining, bar and entertainment features, as well as adding 182 new cabins, new dining choices, a three-level Serenity adults-only retreat and a massive racing-themed water park. The ship will be renamed Carnival Sunshine following a 49-day dry dock this spring, then operate a summer schedule of Mediterranean voyages before repositioning to New Orleans on year-round Caribbean cruises in the fall.

Carnival Cruise Lines will expand capacity on the West Coast with the introduction of year-round three-day cruises to Ensenada, Mexico, and four-day cruises to Ensenada and Catalina Island on the 2,052-passenger Carnival Imagination from Long Beach, CA, beginning January 26, 2014. The move will bring the total number of Carnival ships operating from Long Beach to three.

Disney Cruise Line. The Disney Fantasy set sail last year, a sister ship to Disney Dream, and the fourth ship in the fleet. Among the ship’s new features are Europa, a nighttime entertainment district exclusively for the over-18 crowd; two Broadway-style shows; and AquaLab, a water play area. Both ships have 1,250 staterooms and suites with a 4,000-passenger capacity. The Disney Fantasy also features the 1,340-seat Walt Disney Theatre, the 399-seat Buena Vista Theatre, plus other venues for group events and a full-service onboard events team.

Royal Caribbean International. “We are seeing more and more meetings/conferences/leadership retreats being booked on Royal Caribbean due to the fact that we have dedicated conference center facilities on all 22 of our ships,” says Lori

Cassidy, director, corporate, incentive and charter sales. “Our overall M&I booked business increased in 2012 over 2011. We anticipate additional growth in 2013.”

The state-of-the-art, 5,400-passenger Oasis-class vessels — Oasis of the Seas and Allure of the Seas — in the Royal Caribbean fleet offer meeting planners the most versatility available in the industry. Meeting facilities accommodate from 16 to 1,400 guests, and setups range from boardroom to classroom to theater to mini-trade show configurations. Four dedicated conference rooms can be configured to suit 18–330 attendees. Royal Caribbean invested \$300 million to add popular Oasis-class features fleet-wide, including additional dining venues, more entertainment options, new staterooms and advanced onboard technology. By summer 2013, guests will have access to ultra-fast Internet, thanks to a new agreement with global satellite service provider O3b.

Royal Caribbean recently announced names and launch dates for their new Quantum class of ships: Quantum of the Seas will make its debut in 2014; and Anthem of the Seas in spring 2015.

Norwegian Cruise Line. “Based on the tremendous value that a cruise offers, we are definitely seeing an increase in interest from both corporate meeting planners and buyers,” says Camille Olivere, senior vice president of sales. “With the addition of Norwegian Epic to our fleet in 2010, we saw a definite increase as soon as the ship was launched.”

The Norwegian Breakaway, the newest ship in NCL’s fleet, debuts this spring in New York City and will feature an exciting fireworks show on every cruise, a grand finale to a 1980s-themed deck party. The 4,000-passenger ship will arrive in her year-round homeport of New York City on May 7 and begin weekly summer seven-day cruises to Bermuda on May 12, 2013. The vessel’s groundbreaking design features The Waterfront and 678 Ocean Place with shops along an oceanfront boardwalk and three decks of dining and entertainment. The top decks of Norwegian Breakaway will feature the first Aqua Park at sea, and a three-story sports complex with the largest ropes course at sea. **C&IT**

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DMOs and Digital

Team Up to Enhance the Destination and Build Attendance

By John Buchanan

It wasn't that long ago, before the pervasive and cumulative powers of the Internet, social networking and mobile media began to transform the meeting industry in astonishingly short order, that destination marketing meant a well-rehearsed sales pitch from a DMO (a.k.a. CVB) or a slick Meeting Planning Guide in the mail. Today, however, destination marketing has taken on much more dimension — and that includes not just how a destination sells itself to meeting planners, but how planners, in turn, sell it to attendees.

At the moment, however, it's still the Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) that have the most to gain — or lose.

"Meeting planners nowadays don't have to be as reliant as they once were on CVBs for marketing information, especially before the meeting," says Tom Martin, founder and principal of New Orleans-based digital marketing firm Converse Digital, which launched a Digital Strategy Practice customized for DMOs in 2011. "The key factor has been that there is so much information available from so many sources other than the CVBs in today's digital world."

But at the same time, Martin notes, the information-gathering process is time-consuming for planners constantly being tasked to do more with less. Therein, he says, lies the current oppor-

tunity for innovative DMOs to regain the high ground when it comes to tactical and logistical assistance. "And that's why progressive CVBs are beginning to curate current destination information and provide it in a digital manner," Martin says, "so that planners can just pull that information directly into their own marketing materials and push it right through to attendees in an almost frictionless way."

Planner Appreciation

Cara Bergeson, conference manager at Portland, OR-based industrial business publisher Resource Recycling, agrees that such progressive services

And, she adds, because she has been getting just such in-depth insights from Orlando, she has brought one of her major conferences there five times since 2003, and also is booked in Orlando for September 2013. "The reason that kind of support is so important to me," Bergeson says, "is that our attendees are very social, so having a city that offers good restaurants and bars and other activities is very important to us. But all destinations, even second-tier destinations, have restaurants and bars and attractions. The difference to me is between being left to your own devices to learn what those are and how individual ones might benefit your



"CVBs are beginning to curate current destination information and provide it in a digital manner. Planners can just pull that information directly into their own marketing materials and push it right through to attendees in an almost frictionless way."

Tom Martin, founder and principal, Converse Digital, New Orleans, LA

from DMOs offer distinct benefits to planners. The key to success for her and her attendees, she says, is a broader and more personalized sense of a destination. "I rely on a CVB to really learn what a city is about," says Bergeson, who plans three major voluntary-attendance conferences a year that draw as many as 1,400 attendees and 140 exhibitors. "I want the CVB to really show me what my attendees can do in their city."

meeting, versus being given an in-depth portrait of the city, from the very beginning of the process." The real practical benefits to her, she says, are a less stressful planning process and a more productive, enjoyable experience for attendees.

And by that measure, she says, "Orlando is probably hands-down the best CVB I have ever worked with. They know the city inside and out. But they also take the time to get to know me as a planner

and what my meeting is really about and what my attendees are looking for. And in my experience, that extra level of knowledge and service is fairly unusual."

Mark Champa, director of meetings and events at H&R Block in Kansas City, MO, enjoyed such comprehensive service when he booked his first-ever major meeting in New Orleans. "The role of the CVB and the hospitality community in general was definitely one of the influences on and benefits of our selection of New Orleans as the destination for our annual conference, which draws 3,000 attendees," says Champa, who plans 35-40 meetings a year across the U.S.

"With the growing number of restaurants and the different price points that are available in New Orleans," Champa says, "the CVB has really done an excellent job — both through their website



"The CVB just made it very easy for us. Knowing as much as possible about what there is to do in the destination is very important to the overall success of the meeting."

Mark Champa, Director of Meetings and Events
H&R Block, Kansas City, MO

and also through various forms of electronic communication — of giving us information we could take advantage of via our own convention website. So, rather than having to go out and research activities and all of the things that would be going on while we were there, including new restaurants and popular attractions and activities, we were able to tap into the CVB's site to provide links to our attendees. And as they provided updated information on to our attendees. The CVB just made it very easy for us to get the most up-to-date information to our attendees so they could plan their free time. That's critical to us for our annual conference, because it's an opportunity for all of our people to get together once a year and network among themselves, as well as with our vendor partners. So knowing as much as possible about what there is to do in the destination is very important to the overall success of the meeting."

Raising the DMO Bar

Tammi Runzler, senior vice president of convention sales and services for Visit Orlando, is a prominent team member of one of the most innovative and effective DMOs in the country, especially when it comes to selling Orlando as a premier

meetings destination. And she notes one simple but powerful secret to success. "The DMOs that are truly more successful than others today," she says, "are those that have a history or a track record of working with the entire community as a whole. In Orlando, we have been doing that for a number of years. It has become a major focus for us whether we're going after a major trade show-type event or a conference or a meeting. No matter what kind of meeting it is, if it's a major event that we really want to pursue, we believe in getting the entire community

involved, because we believe that enhances our chances of success for landing and hosting that meeting."

She cites one major example from 2010. "We were working on a major meeting that involved a large number of attendees and a large number of exhibitors," she says. "And there was a lot of competition among major destinations to get that meeting. And we could not have achieved the success that we did without working with the entire community as a whole. What that meant was that when we went to meet with the hosts and planners of the meeting, we brought a number of people with us, including a county commissioner, a representative of the mayor's office, and a top local business executive in the company's industry. We also brought our chairman and the vice-president/general manager of one of our major hotels, the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress. And we even went so far as to bring in a major food critic who could talk about Orlando as a culinary destination."

For another meeting, a large healthcare conference, Visit Orlando leveraged the city's growing medical infrastructure and brought in representatives of Florida Hospital and Orlando Health to explain the unique benefits that Orlando offers to medical and healthcare meetings.

The essential point, Runzler says, is to bring more scope and context to a destination's selling proposition. "I can talk about the number of hotel rooms and our infrastructure and what we deliver for a major meeting," she says. "But what I think really sells a destination today is an integrated community all singing from the same hymnal. And part of that is showing that a range of representatives of the community are all in tune with each other when it comes to showing what we can deliver for a meeting. And the other point is to bring in

real experts to make important points about what sets a particular destination apart. It's also one thing for me to talk about the culinary scene in Orlando. It's another thing entirely for a recognized food critic to explain what the city has to offer. And for a meeting today, the quality and diversity of the food in a destination is an important part of a meeting, whether that's a dine-around program or it's a matter of attendees entertaining their colleagues or clients."

Building Attendance

Closely related to such efforts, Runzler says — and a key benefit to planners whose meetings are voluntary in attendance, such as conferences for independent salespeople or customers — is a synergistic ability to help build attendance.

Nikki Moon, vice president of convention sales at the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau, agrees. "That is more important now than ever," she says, "and for many clients that is an expensive and time-consuming process, so we have come to be known for doing a lot of that for them. We're their right arm in terms of creating marketing tools and making the meeting a success."

Moon preaches a doctrine of well-organized, community-based marketing

efforts. “Today,” she says, “a good CVB is an important part of a company’s meetings department. And there are still a lot of planners who don’t realize that 99 percent of our services are complimentary.”

Moreover, Moon says, such comprehensive services, based on the most current information available, such as new restaurants or a particular attraction that will offer something special during a meeting’s dates, are especially important for a destination as diverse as New Orleans, whose broad culture and distinct individual neighborhoods require an education for planners. Given that, Moon says, the CVB works hard to match the destination to the needs of a particular meeting, then merchandises what it has to offer via micro-websites or electronic newsletters that keep attendees informed.

Getting Social

Although there are CVBs that are creating genuine innovation when it comes to marketing, the next great frontier will be innovative use



“I rely on a CVB to really learn what a city is about. I want the CVB to really show me what my attendees can do in their city.”

Cara Bergeson, Conference Manager
Resource Recycling, Portland, OR

of digital marketing and social media to drive attendee interest in and benefit from a destination before and during the meeting, says Martin.

“But at this point,” he says, “I would also say that even the most progressive CVBs that are doing it have only begun to scratch the surface. Right now, the innovation we’re seeing among CVBs is really around platforms and execution. So they’re curating information or bundling it at a platform level, like a website or a blog that a meeting planner can point to. But the reason they’ve only scratched the surface is that they’re not yet far enough along in the process to think behaviorally about a meeting attendee. They haven’t begun to really think about a meeting attendee’s behavior toward information, both in terms of searching for it and using it, and how that behavior changes through the entire lifecycle of a meeting — from when they’re making plans to go until they’re in the destination. And then there is the ‘day after’ or post-meeting piece, which is the big thing that no one is really looking at yet. And that

‘after the meeting’ piece represents an opportunity for destinations to convert attendees who have just left there into ambassadors for the destination.”

So, Martin says, CVBs and planners should not only be thinking about the most effective ways to get information out to attendees, they should also be thinking about truly creating memorable, exceptional experiences for attendees. “That means CVBs should be working with planners to really create those little memorable moments and experiences that attendees can’t wait to tell others about via social channels and when they get home,” Martin explains. “And that goes beyond doing the obvious things, such as going to Preservation Hall or Acme Oyster House in New Orleans. You have to go deeper into the destination than that, because those kinds

of things are at the typical expectation of a tourist level. You have to help them discover ‘what’s around the corner.’”

To get to the next level of deriving maximum enjoyment from a destination, he says, “you have to understand that in a place like New Orleans, around every corner is some little mom and pop restaurant that the locals all know about, but tourists don’t. Take them in and let them have oysters in an oyster bar that isn’t so well known. Or better yet, take them somewhere that can teach them how to shuck oysters. Or take them to a local crawfish boil that is authentic. It’s about doing things that really allow people to attend something that is truly local and not the kind of things that tourists or meeting attendees normally do. The idea is to give attendees experiences that most people will never have.”

The Power of Random

In order to get to that level of individualized experience, Martin encourages truly forward-thinking CVBs and planners to embrace what he calls “the power

of random.” And that’s because random experiences are where real memories are created, he says.

For example, Martin relates, instead of a traditional dine-around program that features the best-known tourist restaurants in a given city, give attendees the freedom to go out on their own, in small groups, and find their own memorable dining experiences where they’ll encounter locals instead of other visitors. Maybe even recruit locals to guide these mini-tours.

And such genuine innovation requires courage, Martin says. “The idea of random scares the hell out of people, including meeting planners,” he says. “And that is especially true of marketers, because we’ve been taught for 50 years to plan every aspect of what we’re doing.”

But once embraced, he says, social

media can be used to aggregate enthusiasm for a particular place or activity and empower attendees to get together and participate with tremendous enthusiasm.

On yet another level, Martin says, the ever-increasing use of mobile media will be used to help meeting attendees have a better experience in the destination. As a result, CVBs and planners will soon come to realize that mobile platforms provide a new world of opportunities for enhancing the meeting experience. “It’s a conduit to an end-user experience,” Martin says.

For example, he predicts, the smartest and most innovative CVBs — or planners — will learn to use mobile technology to create a mobile-based wayfinder program around the convention center or hotel. And that information will be delivered simply and clearly via mobile platforms such as smartphones before and during the meeting. It will be like having a personal city guide (a person not a book) in your pocket.

Another example: In a destination such as New York, where there are not

many restaurants within walking distance of the Javits Center, a mobile app could show attendees where to get a taxi — and where the best restaurants are for the lowest fare. Or where to get a subway train and which one to take to get to and from the hotel.

Yet another example: at a major conference, provide a mobile platform listing of where all of the evening’s social events are and how to best get there including maps, key contact information and maybe even the ability to have your ticket (if required) saved on your phone.

“That’s the kind of information that needs to be focused on in the future,” Martin says, because that really enhances the meeting experience from a purely practical point of view.”

Although he knows of no CVB actively doing those kinds of things, or helping planners do them, Martin predicts that such innovation will really start to gain momentum in 2013 and become a relatively common practice over the next 18 months. “You’re going to see a couple of really smart, innovative CVBs leverage the first mover advantage of digital innovation to capture the minds and business of meeting planners before the rest of the industry figures it out,” says Martin.

Putting It All Together

As destination marketing becomes more innovative, it is really the attendees who will benefit most, everyone agrees. “Eighty percent of our attendees are men, so they are interested in steak houses and bars and the best golf courses,” says Bergeson, who agrees that such information on what’s best or new and hot in the destination will become more and more important to attendees. And like many other planners, she is now looking to have social media play more of a role in getting that information to attendees — before and during the meeting.

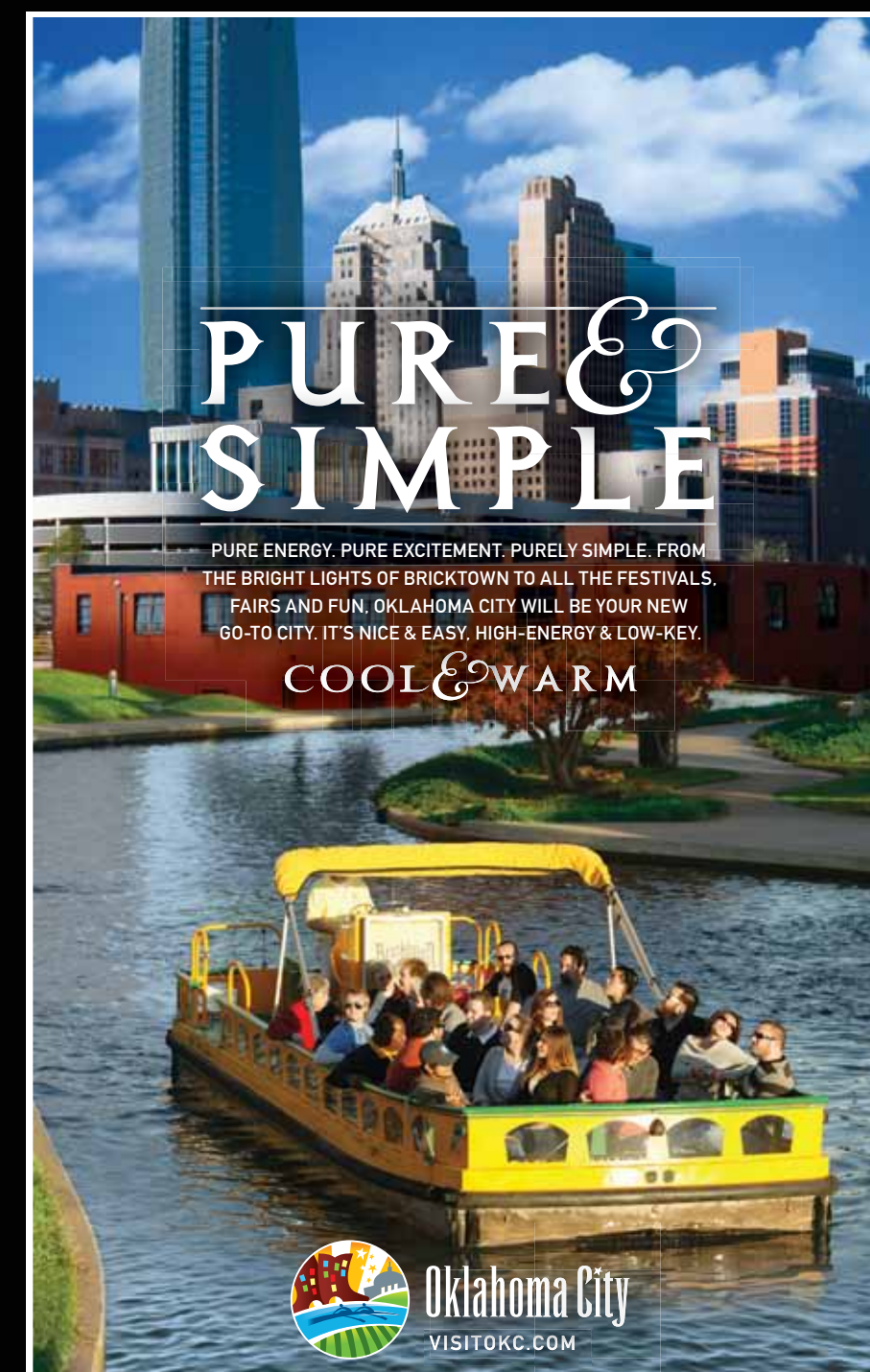
“A lot of our attendees are not familiar with a particular destination for a particular meeting,” she says. “So they rely on me and my team to know what’s really going on. And I rely on the CVB. In that sense, a good CVB today is like a concierge service.”

And in turn, she is using social me-

dia like Facebook and Twitter, as well as an electronic newsletter and a message board during the conference, to keep attendees informed and excited about what there is to do in the destination. And, she also concurs, such proactive marketing is also helping to drive stronger attendance.

And for DMOs, Runzler says, there is also new reality. “As a DMO, we no longer control the brand identity of our destination,” she says. “In the era of social media,

that control is in the hands of planners and attendees. Our brand is being shaped now by those who use the destination and communicate that experience, not what we say about it. So, that fact also makes it more important than ever that we do everything we can to make sure that planners and attendees have a good time in the destination. Now our goal is to turn every meeting planner and attendee into a brand ambassador.” **C&IT**



CATERING TRENDS

F&B Grows Up

Enriching the Meeting Experience With Taste and Style

By John Buchanan



After a half-century of relative predictability, with “rubber chicken” becoming a clichéd reference to the typical food and beverage served at many meetings and conventions, the fare being delivered to attendees has undergone a transformational upgrade.

Rubber chicken and traditional buffet lines have been supplanted by fresher foods and more creative choices, notes Karla Spaeth, chair of hospitality management program and director of facilities and events management at Northwood University in Midland, MI, and operations director at a small hotel owned and operated by the school.

Erik Pedersen, food and beverage director at the Garden of the Gods Club in Colorado Springs, a rustic venue located at the boutique hotel Lodge at the Garden of the Gods, also observes a sea change when it comes to F&B. “What we’re seeing is more customized menus,” he says. “Planners can no longer assume that one meal or menu will suit every attendee. Many people are allergic to or sensitive about certain foods, such as salt or gluten. Others, such as vegetarians or calorie counters, prefer to eat what they want rather than what someone else chose for

them. And people are also more cognizant, in general, about the foods they eat. So all of those things are contributing to the change in how F&B is being handled.”

Eddie Allen, executive chef at Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, CT, is on the same page. From a banquet perspective, Allen finds that most planners are looking for things that aren’t on a standard menu. “The days have changed when you email a client a menu, they pick what they want, and we make it happen. Now, our catering team works with clients to develop menus that meet their needs. We talk to the client about their customer base, the theme of event, what they are trying to achieve. Then we customize. We find ways to bring the client’s event to life through food.”

Putting the Fun Back in Food

And after a recession that led to an unprecedented slowdown in the meeting industry, the notion of fun is finally returning as a critical component of a successful meeting, says Lyndsay Picciano, director of catering and conference services at the Fairmont Copley Plaza in Boston. “And that trend is not just about the food,” says Picciano, who also serves as the

current president of the New England chapter of the National Association of Catering and Events. “We’re also seeing it with florists and decorators and entertainment companies. Companies are personalizing events and making them memorable more and more now that the market is returning to normal.”

And, she emphasizes, the overarching trend is putting the fun back in meetings. “For example,” she says, “we’re seeing fewer sit-down dinners and more heavy receptions where people can move around and network and enjoy the company of their coworkers and colleagues. And that means more music and dancing and more themed events, rather than just a meal.”

Chef Allen says “the days of thinking about banquet food looking like banquet food are long gone.” He says the chafing dish is out because planners want individual plated items and interactive food stations. “Action stations serve two purposes for planners — the food is fresh, prepared right there, and it allows people to interact, move around the room and socialize.” Allen adds, “Food is a catalyst for interaction. Also, with cooking shows becoming incredibly popular, meeting planners and

attendees alike want that ‘wow’ look. People like to see beauty on a plate.”

Food is no longer an isolated consideration, Picciano says. As the meeting industry continues its long-awaited recovery, food and beverage is being more integrated into the overall experience.

Courtney Ermac, event specialist at third-party planning company Dynamic Events in Vancouver, WA, says that ever-growing demand for special dietary restrictions or preferences is another current trend.

“We do a lot of meetings for Microsoft that have a very international attendee base,” says Ermac, who hosted a 10,000-attendee conference for the software giant at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas last November. “So our dietary requirements often go beyond just simple religious restrictions like kosher or Halal diets. We’re now seeing a lot of requests for gluten-free food. That is skyrocketing. We also see a lot of requests now for vegetarian food.”

Ermac sees the broadening trend as a natural evolution of the increased role of attendees in shaping and personalizing meetings to their personal preferences. “It’s no longer about attendees just checking off chicken or beef on a card,” she says. “We ask them if they have allergies or any special requests for food. And as a result of that, we’re seeing a lot more requests. But we’re also definitely seeing more requests for kosher and Halal food, too.”

A related and growing trend, Ermac says, is growing demand for more healthful food. And that, she says, is a natural outgrowth of the ever-increasing awareness of and interest in health and wellness. “They are understanding more and more that lighter, healthier food means more alert, attentive attendees and therefore a more successful meeting,” Ermac says. “Lighter food usually makes people less likely to fall asleep.”

Chef Allen says dining in the U.S. is changing, especially from a nutritional standpoint. “The industry is aware people are worried about their health, salt intake, fat and calories, so, at Foxwoods, we use herbs to utilize and enhance flavor. We find ways to do breaded products without the fryer

Karla Spaeth
Chair of Hospitality
Management
Program and Director
of Facilities and
Events Management
Northwood University
Midland, MI



“Attendees are tired of the same old chicken and vegetable combinations. Today’s catering is about more uniqueness and variety.”

or bring back the long-lost poaching method instead of pan frying.”

However, even though people are leaning towards a more healthful approach, desserts are always the trump card at Foxwoods, Allen adds. “Again, it’s all about the visual effect. Planners want a mind-blowing experience. For chocolate desserts, it has to be beyond chocolate; an explosion of chocolate. With desserts, we are going for a sensory journey.”

Going Local

An increasingly important part in the experience is now being played by locally sourced food and beverages, from beef, fruits and vegetables, to locally made wines, beers and cheeses, explains John Zahn, CMP, director of catering and conference services at Stowe Mountain Lodge in Stowe, VT. F&B is no longer confined to banquet rooms and standard menus, he says. “There’s much more emphasis on seasonal foods and ingredients that are unique to the region,” he says.

In fact, says Picciano, a trend toward fresh seasonal bounty sourced from local producers is now the No. 1 trend driving change in how planners perceive and practice F&B.

“Because New England has so much to offer, we focus on locally sourced artisanal products,” she says. “We’ve even gone ‘hyper-local’ by incorporating honey from our own rooftop hives into menus and dishes. Another good current ex-

ample of what’s happening is a food station that serves fresh local mushrooms with items such as locally sourced goat cheese. And that kind of thing doesn’t just mean better food. It also means there’s a story behind your food.”

Fairmont Copley Plaza now follows what Picciano calls a 100-mile menu. “We try to source everything from within 100 miles of the hotel,” she says. “That means fresher ingredients, but it also reduces a meeting’s carbon footprint, which is increasingly important to corporate groups. It also helps clients get a little more for their money because they’re not paying the shipping costs to bring food in from across the country or around the world.”

Pedersen notes that when local foods are served, attendees tend to comment more on — and better remember — what they’re eating. “They also go home and talk about the food when they get back to the office,” he says. “For example, we hear more attendees talking about the fact that they’re eating locally sourced Colorado beef or a micro-beer from a local brewery.”

Kendra Clough, director of conference services at the acclaimed The Woodlands Resort & Conference Center near Houston, agrees that a powerful trend toward local foods is changing how planners execute their F&B. “We hit our local farmer’s markets and local producers,” she says, “before we go anywhere else to do our sourcing from national distributors.”

Related to that is increasing interest in and participation by the farmers and ranchers and other producers who supply the food.

“For example,” Zahn says, “we now see a trend toward meetings featuring a local cheesemaker who serves and talks about his artisanal cheeses and how they’re made. Or a local winemaker who talks about the wines and his winemaking process. And often now, creative planners will combine a cheesemaker with a winemaker and turn that into an interesting evening. Attendees love those kinds of things because they’re very interactive and educational.”



Photo courtesy of JW Marriott Los Angeles L.A. LIVE

JW Marriott Los Angeles L.A. LIVE offers gourmet food truck luncheon options for group meetings and events.

Getting Creative

As a result of such basic trends, another trend is evolving: planners are becoming more creative in their use of F&B. And the reason is simple, Spaeth says. “Attendees are tired of the same old chicken and vegetable combinations. Today’s catering is about more uniqueness and variety.”

That’s especially important to younger attendees, she says. “They are demanding a lot more variety in what they eat and drink. They want more options. Younger people do not like to be dictated to and told that ‘these are your choices for dinner.’ That is no longer acceptable to young attendees. Their palettes are more sophisticated, and their expectations are higher.”

Picciano also sees a lot more F&B creativity and innovation. “We’re seeing more specialty bars and more creative food and drinks,” she says. “And the food and beverage are being more tied to the company, whether that means incorporating corporate colors or naming dishes or drinks after significant milestones in the organization. For example, we’ve recently seen a lot of anniversary celebrations and the companies are being very creative in how they tie the F&B to that.”

Serving meals or feeding attendees at a reception is also making a transition from a passive process to active engagement, Spaeth says. “One good example of that is a setup that includes pasta bars or yoga bars,” she says. “And it’s not just about putting out an array of items. It’s more about inviting attendees to be creative and build their own parfaits in a martini glass or make their own mashed potato dish from a potato bar where they can choose the ingredients and condiments they want. That’s just another good example of how attendees today are looking for more personal

satisfaction from the food they eat. But they also want to have more of a part in creating it.”

Yet another trend is one toward small plates or small bites, as opposed to traditional three- or four-course dinners. “That allows attendees to taste more things and hotels to show more creativity and uniqueness in their presentation,” Spaeth says. “And chefs like to do that because it provides a better showcase for their talents.”

A companion to that trend, Clough says, is a move toward fully inclusive F&B packages, as opposed to more traditional menus that vary more in final cost. “More and more planners want to develop a package and negotiate a price up front so they don’t have to use standard buffets,” she says. “And that allows them to provide more options to their attendees than just standing in a standard buffet line with food in chafing dishes.”

It also allows planners more precise pricing and budgeting. “You know ahead of time exactly what the package includes and so there’s no nickel-and-diming for various add-ons or enhancements that carry additional charges,” Clough says.

Jacy Russell, CMP, senior meeting manager at independent meeting planning company Spear One in Irving, TX, sees an evolution of the popularity of food trucks as a current trend.

“The concept originally was to actually bring in local food trucks to an event as a way of adding variety to the meeting,” Russell says. “People had the chance to walk up and get a burger and fries or a taco. But then planners started to realize that if you’re having an event in a ballroom or some other venue inside a hotel, bringing in a real food truck isn’t feasible. And in other instances, it was just that hotels started to view food trucks as competition for their food-and-business operations. So what I’m seeing now is that people are still doing the food truck concept. But instead of a real food truck, you have your normal banquet table with food on it, but behind it you have a life-sized cutout of a food truck that also portrays the kind of food that is being served at that food truck station.”

Russell actually experienced that iteration of the concept at MPI’s 2012 World Education Conference in St. Louis. “They did it as part of their opening night reception,” she says.

There are a few notable exceptions, Russell says. “The new Omni Dallas hotel, which generates a lot of traffic because it’s located next to the convention center, actually invites food trucks to come and be there outside the hotel,” she says. “And that can serve as a middle-ground solution for meeting planners because attendees can leave the hotel and go a short distance to get real food-truck food. That can be a nice option if you’re not providing lunch to attendees. It gives them a chance to get a taste of real local food instead of eating every meal in the hotel.”

Russell agrees that making F&B more creative and interactive is a major current trend. “For example,” she says, “a lot of planners now treat F&B as more of a teambuilding experience by doing things like cooking contests. ‘I participated in one at a meeting where they gave us certain foods and people had to come up with a dish that you presented for judging.’”

She also agrees that buffet lines are becoming more creative by allowing attendees more options for putting together a personalized pasta dinner or a creative mashed potato dish or dessert.

“And if you really start to think creatively, the possibilities are limitless,” Russell says.

Budgets Are Back

Thankfully for planners and hotels, F&B budgets are returning to relatively normal levels, Zahn says. “Companies are finally spending a little bit more on food and beverage and functions,” he says.

But, he cautions, he also expects budgets to remain tight — and scrutinized — into the foreseeable future. “I don’t think budgets will ever get back to the free-spending days of 2007 and 2008, before the recession,” he says. “And I definitely think budgets will continue to be scrutinized. But that said, I also think planners are putting more emphasis on food and beverage as part of their meet-

ings. They’re just looking for value and creativity.”

Picciano agrees, however, she says, “that also means that planners are being smarter about where and how they spend their money, so they can still end up being creative and also get good value.”

Bottom-Line Concerns

One concern among planners is the proverbial pendulum swinging back to a seller’s market and the resulting pricing.

“Hotels are recovering from the recession, and their business and revenues are coming back,” says Beverly Buehler, CTC, CTIE, executive vice president of independent meeting, incentive and event planning company Wyndham Jade in Plano, TX. “So when it comes to food and beverage, it takes a little more knowledge and understanding now of what things can be negotiated and how you can get around some of their pricing. It’s more important than ever that planners know what is available and what things can and can’t be negotiated.”

Even though hotels are getting tough on pricing, Buehler says, there are ways that planners can extract maximum bottom-line value for their meetings.

“One good example of what can be negotiated these days is free beverages for your attendees upon arrival,” she says. “And depending on the type of client and the culture of the company, those beverages can be alcoholic or they can be soft drinks or juices. You can also negotiate a free cocktail reception on your arrival day. And something that is often overlooked because planners don’t always think about it is staff offices. You can also negotiate free beverages and breaks for your staff offices. And if you don’t do that, that’s one of the miscellaneous costs that can creep up on you at the end of your meeting. And not only are those costs (ones) that maybe were not planned, but they’re also costs that can be avoided if you know how to negotiate properly based on the current market.”

Unfortunately, not all current F&B trends favor planners and make for a better meeting.



Beverly Buehler, CTC, CTIE
Executive Vice President
Wyndham Jade
Plano, TX

“Historical data can also help you upfront in negotiating... because you will know what your past data and metrics are.”

Based on her experience, a key concern of Buehler’s at the moment is mistakes in catering bills. Far too many invoices contain substantial errors that result in overcharges, she says.

“We see a lot of discrepancies in catering bills,” she says. “So it’s important for planners to take steps to eliminate those mistakes. And one way to do that is to really know your group and have historical consumption data so you can make comparisons to prior meetings. That kind of historical data can also help you upfront in negotiating your food-and-beverage package going in, because you will know what your past data and metrics are.”

Equally important, however, is an effective strategy for catching costly mistakes and making sure that invoices are accurate. “I’ve seen bills come in for 20 bottles of wine,” Buehler says. “And in fact there were only 20 glasses of wine consumed. That is a huge discrepancy and an expensive mistake.”

Her recommended remedy is to require that bartenders collect corks so that bottles can be accurately accounted for at the end of the event. “Then everybody can agree on what was actually consumed,” she says. “And we get the bartenders to sign off on what we agreed to.”

Buehler and many other planners share another concern when it comes to costs — rising F&B service fees. Although fees of 15–18 percent were considered

standard for years, fees as high as 22–24 percent are not uncommon now, as hotels try to recoup their losses.

“In some places, fees are a definite concern,” Buehler says. “But it also depends on what region of the country you’re in. It’s particularly common on the East Coast, in places like New York. The fees there have just gotten out of control. In New York, they just come back to you and say, ‘We’re New York. Demand is high for what we have available, and we don’t have to negotiate or make concessions. We can get the prices we want.’ And based on that, there are now some hotels that we will just not go back to.”

A countervailing tactic, Buehler says, is to negotiate an F&B credit based on total expenditures or the size of the meeting.

The larger issue, she says, is to have planners better understand what the hotel’s real costs are and where they can save money. “One good example is what most hotels charge for coffee,” she says. “In the past, planners shied away from doing soft drink breaks and did standard coffee breaks. But on a per cup basis, coffee is usually quite a bit more expensive than a bottle of soda or juice.”

Lobster, Champagne on Hold

Although there is plenty of good news about how F&B is recovering its role as an essential component of a meeting, there is one negative that will likely linger: Thanks to ongoing concerns about optics, or perceptions from shareholders or the media, lobster and champagne have virtually disappeared from most menus.

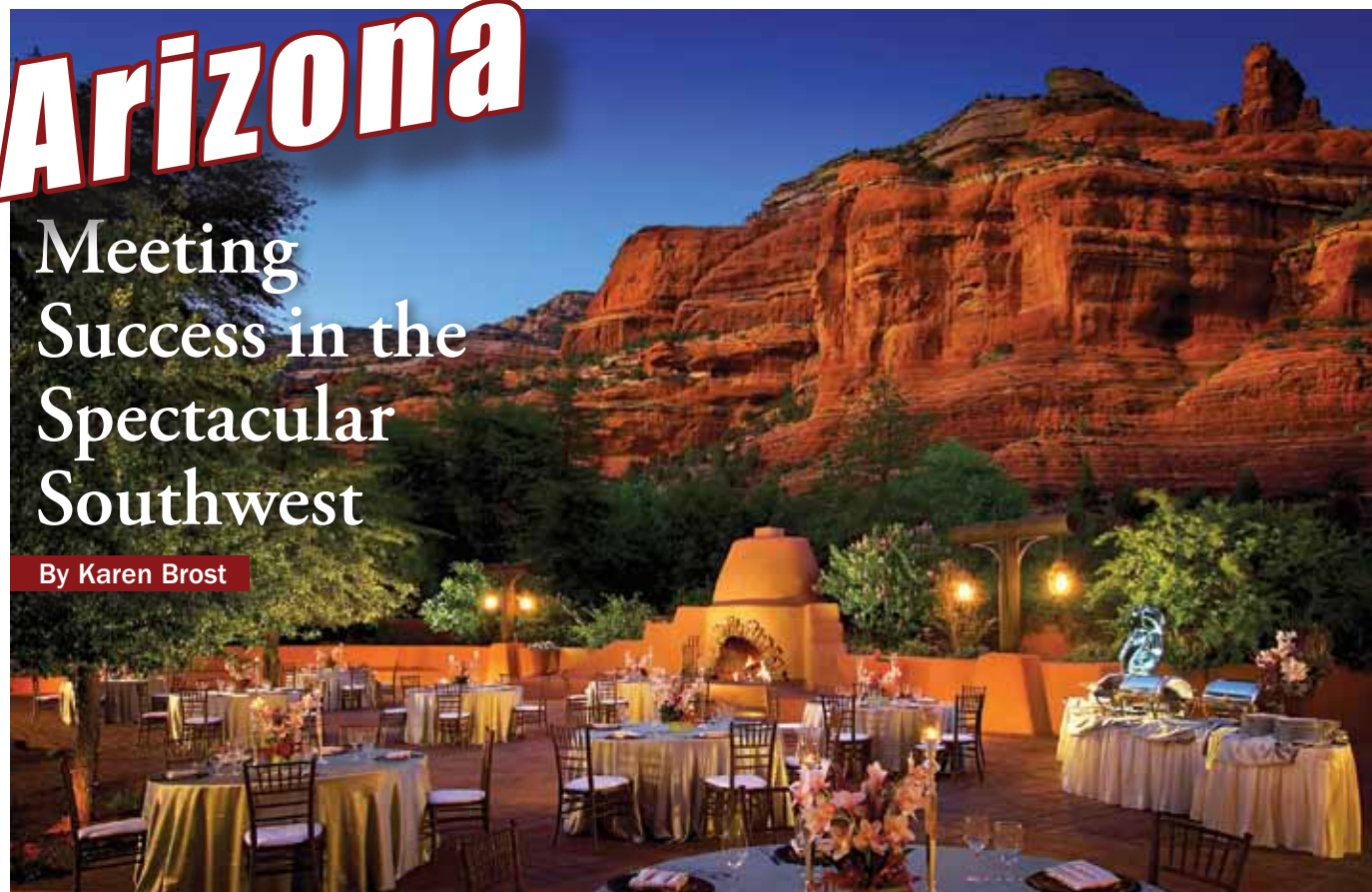
“Lobster has the perception of being very expensive,” Picciano says. “So these days we’re more likely to see high-end foods like tuna tartare instead of lobster. But that’s still a fabulous option. And shrimp is also very popular. And although those things might cost as much as lobster, they’re just perceived as safer choices than lobster or filet mignon.”

In the long run, however, Picciano says she expects that lobster and champagne will return to high-end meetings once the meeting market is fully revitalized. Until then, tuna tartare or shrimp — paired with a good local wine or beer — will do quite nicely. **C&IT**

Arizona

Meeting Success in the Spectacular Southwest

By Karen Brost



In the Meeting Village at Enchantment Resort, the Village Terrace offers breathtaking views of Sedona's majestic red rock formations.

Arizona is the kind of meeting destination that if you haven't been there lately, it's time to schedule another site inspection trip. No matter how many times you may have brought a group to this sunny Southwestern state, there is always something new and exciting to discover.

Patrice Trusdell, CMP, vice president of the meeting planning firm Boggs Chung Incorporated in Norristown, PA, kicked off the new year by planning an internal business meeting in Arizona for one of her clients. The venue chosen for the 80-attendee event was The Wigwam, an iconic 400-acre resort west of Phoenix that was built in 1918 as a retreat for the Ohio-based executives of the Goodyear Tire & Rubber company. Times have changed a bit, though. Back then, guests were given a horse along with their room key when they checked in.

Trusdell hadn't been to **The Wigwam** (331 casitas and suites; more than 100,000 sf of meeting space) for about 10 years, and she was very pleased with what she found. Last year, the luxury resort, which is under new management, unveiled a \$7 million rejuvenation project. "All of it was well spent," she comments. "They have a new entrance approach. They completely reconstructed and reconfigured the lobby.

They've made it more like a living room would be when you walk in. It's much more approachable and sets the tone for what the property is.

"The meeting space is outstanding," she continues. "They have a lot of it. Their rooms-to-meeting-space ratio is phenomenal for a planner, and it's in very good shape. The guest rooms are so large comparative to the square footage in most guest rooms. For standard rooms, they're oversized, and they're in the process of renovating all of their bathrooms. The guest rooms are all in pods laid out around the property around landscaped gardens and paths and pools, and the beautiful Red Door spa, which is just amazing."

She also commented on the resort's beautiful landscaping and gardens. "As you come up the front drive, it's lined with huge, stately palms, but then they also have citrus trees. Off the front lobby, they have an enormous display of oranges that are there for guests to take that are grown on-property. It's just a nice touch."

Her client's all-business agenda didn't leave any time for the spa or the resort's 54 holes of golf, but she did plan a special evening. "We took over Litchfield's, their fine-dining restaurant on the last night of our program, and they did an excellent

job. People walked out of there saying "That was such a great meal!" It was a complete fine-dining experience."

Trusdell had high praise for the entire staff, from the efficiency of the sales team to the attentiveness of the bell staff to the high service standards of the food and beverage team. She gave the example of an attendee who requested a brand of soft drink that wasn't on the drink display. Not only was the requested drink delivered with a smile, but that particular brand was automatically made available at every meal thereafter. She also made a point of complimenting the resort's front desk and housekeeping staffs. "They are phenomenal. Truly everything went so smoothly for our guests at check-in and checkout, and the housekeeping staff was superb. Since these departments don't often get mentioned, I wanted to give them a shout out."

More Phoenix

The Sheraton Phoenix Downtown (more than 1,000 guest rooms; 47 suites; more than 80,000 sf of meeting space) located near the Phoenix Convention Center, is offering two special services for groups: A link to e-dmc, a Web-based destination management service and "Onsite Specialty Events," budget-friendly activities that eliminate the need to arrange (and pay for) transportation to offsite venues — ideal for planners looking to reduce their meeting's carbon footprint.

Also located near the Phoenix Convention Center, the **Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel** (428 guest rooms; 60,000 sf of meeting space) is offering special incentives for groups requiring 10 or more nights on peak nights for meetings that are booked by the end of the year. Qualifying groups can choose three incentives from a list that includes free Internet access in attendees' guest rooms, triple Marriott points, VIP amenities and 30 percent allowable attrition.

The Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs Resort (584 suites; more than 65,000 sf of meeting space) in Phoenix makes it easy to plan offsite tours and teambuilding activities, thanks to the resort's partnership with Southwest Conference Planners. The offsite activities offered are as diverse as desert hikes, shopping tours and visits to Wrigley Mansion, the 16,850-sf, 24-room estate once used as a winter home for the chewing gum magnate's family. Some of the choices for Southwest-style teambuilding



The Arizona Kitchen at The Wigwam is reserved for group meetings and events for hosted dining and special culinary experiences.

activities include a chili cook-off, Wild West olympics (such as cowboy hat frisbee) and covered-wagon building.

The **JW Marriott Phoenix Desert Ridge** (950 guest rooms; 240,000 sf of meeting space), which just celebrated its 10th anniversary, is an earth-friendly resort. Its long list of initiatives for green meetings includes extensive recycling (including in-room bins), the use of recycled paper products, electronic invoices for group events, water and energy conservation, and chemical reduction practices.

Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa's (500 guest rooms; 100,000 sf of meeting space) signature fine-dining restaurant, Kai, was recently honored with its seventh AAA Five Diamond designation. The restaurant is renowned for its innovative, Native American-inspired cuisine that incorporates locally grown ingredients from the Gila River Indian Community.

One of the newest and most unique special event locations in Phoenix is the **Musical Instrument Museum**, a 200,000-sf venue filled with nearly 350 interactive exhibits showcasing musical instruments from around the world. The museum offers multiple areas for private events, including courtyards, the MIM Café and a 299-seat music theater equipped with state-of-the-art acoustics and projection capabilities.

Scottsdale

As a meeting destination, Scottsdale never stagnates. New additions include the \$20 million, 52,330-sf conference center recently unveiled at **The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess** (649 guest rooms). The new venue, which includes the 23,000-sf Palomino Ballroom, brings the property's total meeting space to approximately 150,000 sf. In January, The Fairmont launched its new spa concept Well & Being at Willow Stream Spa, created by Trilogy Spa Holdings. As the first of its kind in the nation, the program draws from a wide range of health, wellness, nutrition, integrative medicine, fitness and spa offerings to create customized wellness programs.

Several Scottsdale properties are also sporting fresh new looks. Last summer, **The Scottsdale Plaza Resort** (404 guest rooms; 40,000 sf of meeting space) completed a \$3 million property-wide renovation project, which included updates to all guest rooms and suites.

The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa (732 guest rooms; 100,000 sf of meeting space) recently invested approximately \$5 million to enhance its meeting space. The resort's newest venue is the 11,300-sf Trailblazer Ballroom, which overlooks the golf course. The Westin also recently added the Flowrider, a new water-sport activity that looks like surfing but mimics the moves and ride of snowboarding. Group competitions can be arranged at the new water attraction.

Montelucia Resort & Spa (253 guest rooms and 40 suites, 100,000 sf of meeting space), a luxurious Mediterranean-style resort located in the shadow of Camelback Mountain, helps planners envision their next meeting setting with an "inspiration gallery" on its website, www.montelucia.com. The site also offers interactive floor plans to help planners visualize the flow of their meetings.



Photo courtesy of Talking Stick Resort

The Orange Sky Patio, adjacent to Talking Stick Resort's fine-dining restaurant Orange Sky, provides views of the valley's sunsets.

Scottsdale Resort & Conference Center (326 guest rooms, casitas and suites and 50,000 sf of meeting space) simplifies the budgeting process by offering the Benchmark Conference Plan. The all-inclusive package includes deluxe guest room accommodations, three meals per day, morning and afternoon breaks, standard audio-visual services, conference space and the services of a professional conference planner. The resort also has all of the elements needed to stage themed events such as a Polynesian evening complete with Tiki torches, a Tiki hut façade, carved wood artifacts and fishing nets. Another popular choice is the country-western theme, which features jail, hotel, livery stable, and saloon facades and props that include hay bales, saddles and split-rail fencing.

By day, Scottsdale's **Talking Stick Resort** (497 guest rooms, more than 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space) offers plenty of space for taking care of business, and when it's time for leisure, the resort offers so many options that attendees won't have to leave the property unless they really want to. There's a 240,000-sf casino, a 14th-floor spa offering panoramic views of the Valley of the Sun, 36 holes of Troon-managed golf, and multiple dining and entertainment venues including a 650-seat showroom; and the Orange Sky restaurant and lounge on the 15th floor featuring outdoor patios with panoramic views of the surrounding desert landscape.

Scottsdale has long been called the "West's Most Western Town," and the city offers plenty of Western-themed activities to boot. Planners who want to help their attendees channel their inner wranglers can head 'em up and move 'em out to the **Arizona Cowboy College** for lessons on roping and herding cattle. **Fort McDowell Adventures**, located in nearby Fountain Hills, is a versatile indoor and outdoor special event venue offering multiple scenic settings, including the mission-style La Puesta del Sol (Spanish for "the setting sun"). Fort McDowell Adventures, which is conveniently located just four miles from the Radisson Fort McDowell Resort & Casino, also offers a wide range of outdoor activities, including trail rides, jeep tours, campfires and kayaking.

The **Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau** has released its 2013 Discover Scottsdale meeting planners guide, which includes details on accommodations, activities and amenities as well as a list of offsite venues, sample itineraries and incentive ideas. The new guide is available at www.MeetinScottsdale.com.

Sedona

Karen Birch, administrative assistant for Cobham Aerospace Communications, toured several properties to find the ideal location for the 10-person executive leadership team meeting she was planning. But once she toured Enchantment Resort in Sedona, she knew she had a winner. "There's no other place like it up there," she says. "The scenery is just gorgeous. Sedona is beautiful no matter where you are, but this kind of took your breath away when you drove in there."

Birch was referring to the extraordinarily beautiful setting the resort occupies. **Enchantment Resort** (218 guest rooms; 13,000 sf of indoor meeting space plus 20,000 sf of outdoor event space) is set on 70 acres at the base of a secluded canyon and is surrounded by breathtaking red rock formations. Sedona is located just two hours north of Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, and while Birch's attendees simply rented cars, limousine service is available that will bring guests right to the resort's front door.

Of course, it takes a lot more than breathtaking scenery to pull off a successful meeting, and Birch was also impressed with the service her group received. "I've got to tell you, Enchantment was just terrific in working with us. Everyone was very professional there, very helpful."

"They have all different sizes of conference areas," she explains. "They could cordon them off for whatever size you needed. Our people had their own small building, actually. We had breakfasts there and had lunches brought in so they could work through their lunch."

"Everyone loved it," she continues. "They thought it was the best thing since sliced bread! Everything ran very smoothly. I can't say enough good things about the resort."

Just last year, Enchantment wrapped up a \$25 million renovation that included a \$4 million expansion of the resort's Meeting Village and an \$11 million refurbishment of all 218 guest rooms. Improvements were also made to the clubhouse, pool, restaurants, and indoor and outdoor public spaces. The resort also recently introduced a service where guests are checked-in curbside by attendants using electronic tablets.

Another option for groups that want to bask in Sedona's scenic beauty is the **Hilton Sedona Resort & Spa** (219 guest rooms and 20,000 sf of meeting space). The resort can host golf tournaments onsite at its championship golf course or attendees may prefer to indulge in the menu of re-energizing services offered at eforea spa at Hilton.

Tucson

"Oh, my gosh. They loved, loved, loved it!" says Karen Moody, event planner for the consumer foods sales division of General Mills. She was referring to Tucson as the site of a recent sales meeting she planned in this southern Arizona city. "We survey our people at the end of every meeting and the results were phenomenal in terms of the destination."

General Mills chose the **Omni Tucson National Resort** (129 guest rooms; 15,000 sf of meeting space) as the meeting venue. "We had about 120 attendees, and so we pretty much

took over the place," she explains. Omni was fabulous every step of the way. Their service is just bar none. I've been to a few meetings like this, and this, by far, was best service I've ever received.

"What was really fun was that the golf course was very popular among our team and also the spa," she adds. "The resort's Catalina and Sonoran golf courses, which offer beautiful views of the Santa Catalina Mountains, have hosted many PGA championships." The spa is huge, much bigger than some of the other resorts that were much larger as far as room size. There's quite a few treatment rooms. It was nice seeing 10 people waiting around to have a massage, fitting comfortably in there. They weren't crammed in by any stretch of the imagination. That was by far our most popular choice in recreation over the golf. I think we had 60 people that actually signed up for a spa treatment, so almost half of our people. There's an equal amount of men and women attending."

"The meeting space was great," Moody continues. "The conference services manager was spot on, had everything arranged perfectly, just the way we wanted it, and on time. We didn't have any complaints."



Photo courtesy of The Westin La Paloma

Tucson's Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa.

Also located in Tucson, **The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa** (387 guest rooms) completes a top-to-bottom, resort-wide \$30 million renovation this month, adding modern upgrades and a contemporary flair to the iconic elegance the resort is known for. Enhancements to

the resort's 60,000 sf of meeting space include new floor coverings, chandeliers and state-of-the-art AV equipment. All 27 holes of La Paloma Country Club's Jack Nicklaus Signature design links have been rejuvenated as well.

Service With a Smile

Location, amenities and beautiful views all can play important roles in making a meeting a success, but it's great service that brings it all together. As Moody notes, "As an event planner, service is on top of our list. If you don't have good service, you're kind of sunk. Working with managers like Dan and Caroline (at Omni Tucson National Resort) was just a wonderful experience. They just made it so easy." She had a few words of advice for other planners considering the resort. "I would say, 'Book your group. Just do it!'"

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DESTINATION

The statue of Spanish explorer Pedro Menendez de Aviles, who founded St. Augustine in 1565, stands in front of Flagler College, formerly the Ponce de Leon Hotel. Ponce de Leon claimed "La Florida" for Spain in 1513.

Viva Florida!

Meet in the Sunshine State as It Celebrates Its 500th Birthday

By Karen Brost

Landing on what he thought was an island beach on April 3, 1513, Ponce de Leon claimed "La Florida – The Flowering Land" for Spain. Historians dispute just where Ponce landed, some believing it was somewhere between St. Augustine and Ponte Vedra Beach, and others finding evidence he first found terra firma on Melbourne beach south of Cape Canaveral. No matter the longitudinal landing spot, Florida celebrates its 500th birthday this spring with a year-long commemoration called Viva Florida 500.

St. Augustine, of course, lays its own claim to Ponce de Leon fame with historical favorites such as the 125-year-old Ponce de Leon Hotel, now home of Flagler College; Fountain of Youth Archeological Park; the Ponce de Leon Landing Re-

enactment; and more. Visit Florida offers more information about statewide events at www.VivaFlorida.org.

St. Augustine

Meeting planners have a long tradition claiming successful meetings from coast to coast across the state of Florida, and those who want to incorporate a little Viva Florida into their meetings might choose St. Augustine and the **Renaissance World Golf Village Resort, Convention Center and Beach Club** (301 guest rooms; 101,000 sf of meeting space). The AAA Four Diamond resort provides a complimentary shuttle to and from historic St. Augustine, America's oldest city founded in 1565 and named to *National Geographic Traveler's* "World's Top 20 Places to See" list last December. Attendees can visit America's only existing 17th century

fort Castillo de San Marcos; quaint St. George Street, Old Town Trolley Tour, Spanish Quarter, St. Augustine History Museum, The Oldest Wooden Schoolhouse and more.

Renaissance World is next to the World Golf Hall of Fame, which together with the resort offers 101,000 sf of function space. La Terrazza is a recent addition to the resort's outdoor event space, accommodating groups of up to 2,000 people and featuring advanced technology to rival an indoor ballroom. Groups now enjoy privileges at the exclusive Seranata Beach Club overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, an easy complimentary shuttle ride away.

Jacksonville Area

On Amelia Island, just outside of the city of Jacksonville, the **Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort** has embarked on an \$85 million makeover scheduled to be completed this spring. The conference center will gain 30,000 sf — inclusive of a 16,800-sf ballroom and new prefunction and exhibit area — for a total of 80,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space. The addition of 155 new guest rooms including 26 suites will bring its guest room total to 404 oceanfront rooms. Directly off the hotel lobby, the new outdoor area will offer the largest pool deck in Northeast Florida with tiered lounge seating. The resort also will feature floor-to-ceiling windows with Atlantic Ocean views and additional restaurants.

Just south of Jacksonville in Ponte Vedra Beach is the famed **Ponte Vedra Inn & Club** (250 guest rooms; 25,000 sf meeting space) built in 1928 and joined by the Lodge & Club in 1989. The AAA Five Diamond property's amenities include the largest spa in north Florida at 30,000 sf, 36 holes of golf, including links-style with ocean breezes, 15 tennis courts, an oceanfront gym, four restaurants, three lounges, eight shops and boutiques, and four heated pools in a beachfront setting.

Tampa

Michael Pelehach, president of Shuster Corporation in New Bedford,



The Terrace Room at Ponte Vedra Inn & Club overlooks the golf course and lagoon.

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MA, used two words to sum up one of the top reasons he likes to meet in Florida. “Easy access,” he says. “From almost anywhere in the country you can get into Tampa or Miami without having to do a lot of bouncing around.”

Pelehach's most recent Florida meeting experience was an April sales conference that he planned at **Saddlebrook Resort** (540 accommodations including hotel rooms and one- and two-bedroom suites; 95,000 sf of meeting space) while he was with his previous employer. His 65 attendees came from throughout the U.S. as well as from as far away as England. He came across Saddlebrook while doing a Web search and decided to give them a call. “The first person they put me in contact with was (senior sales manager) Mark Marker. His approach and tone were very welcoming, very warm, very open. There was no pressure at all on anything.”

Pelehach was initially concerned about how far the resort was from the airport (about a 30-minute drive, he says). “But Mark assured me that they could help us out with transportation. The more I thought about it, the more I liked the fact that it's in the middle of nowhere, because sales guys, of course, like to stay up late when they're at a sales meeting and head into town. I wanted to have a more controlled atmosphere. The resort had everything that we needed. It was remote so guys couldn't jump into a car and go to the bars or anything like that, and it worked out very well.”

Saddlebrook's room setup was also a major factor in Pelehach's decision. “What we try to do to save money is put guys in the same room,” he explains. “You can't really do that at a lot of these other resorts because you've just got a hotel room. In the case of Saddlebrook, we had two-bedroom units. They're almost like a condo where each person had their own bathroom and bedroom so they had their privacy, and then the living room and the balcony were the shared spaces. Nobody had a problem with it. We were able to do it as economically as possible.”

The resort also worked well for all of Pelehach's meeting needs. “We had some guest speakers come in. Saddlebrook had the flexibility to be able to set up for all of the different

“I wanted to have a more controlled atmosphere. The resort had everything that we needed. It was remote so guys couldn't jump into a car and go to the bars or anything like that, and it worked out very well.”

Michael Pelehach

President

Shuster Corporation

New Bedford, MA

events that we were having, whether it was dinner poolside or guests coming in and utilizing the conference room. The setups were done very well. They were done very quickly and efficiently. All of that made for a very, very good meeting.”

Pelehach also liked Saddlebrook's recreational amenities. The resort is home to two Arnold Palmer-designed golf courses and the Saddlebrook Golf Academy headed by Steve Bann and Dale Lynch. “We had a golf outing and the golf course was fantastic,” he says. “The staff at the golf course was terrific. They were very helpful, very accommodating. We had a couple of guys play tennis. The tennis facility is outstanding there.” The resort has a total of 45 tennis courts along with an extensive tennis program, which also makes it a tennis fanatic's dream.

His group also enjoyed the food. “When people leave a sales conference and they go back home, the family doesn't usually say, ‘How was the sales conference? How were the presentations?’ They say, ‘How was the food?’ Saddlebrook prides themselves in their food. They've got their own bakery. They've got their own butcher shop. They have the flexibility and ability to do pretty much whatever we wanted to do. Sometimes it was cooked right in front of you. We had a cookout where you went up and said, ‘I'll take that steak’ and they'd grill it for you. The food was fantastic. I really think that's one of the differentiators between Saddlebrook and a lot of the other places.”

Naples

On the Gulf along the Paradise Coast is the **Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club** (317 guest rooms; 34,000 sf of meeting space), the only beachfront resort in Southwest to claim an onsite golf course. Originally built in 1927, the 18-hole championship course was enhanced and refurbished in 2011. HB's on the Gulf is the city of Naples' only beachfront restaurant



Photo courtesy of Saddlebrook Resort

The Commons breakfast setup at Saddlebrook Resort in Tampa.

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*2009 HCEA State of the Industry Research Report. **According to *Business Review USA*.

VisitOrlando



Photo courtesy of Jack A. Neal, Photographer

It was all fun, sun and sailing during Southern Pipe & Supply's Chairman's Club Weekend, held at Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa in the Panhandle city of Destin, where pristine beaches of white sugar sand and the Gulf's clear turquoise waters beckon.

and a popular draw for sunset-watchers. Another "only" claim to fame comes with the resort's most recent renovation, just completed last month, which included the opening of Naples' only Gulf-view, beachfront ballroom, the 5,000-sf Everglades Room, featuring a wall of windows. This latest project marks the completion of a three-year makeover of all guest rooms as well as the complete renovation of the resort's Gulf-side meeting rooms and prefunction space. Upgrades over the last five years included the expansion of the Sunset Beach Bar & Grill and beachfront pool complex. The resort, family owned and operated for three generations, is nearby the tony 5th Avenue shopping and dining district.

The Panhandle

For Ron Black, director of human resources for Southern Pipe & Supply headquartered in Meridian, MS, the theme for his Florida meetings might as well be "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." His company has been hosting three recognition events at the **Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa** (598 guest rooms; more than 32,000 sf of meeting space), located in Florida's Panhandle, an average of once every three years for the past 25 years.

"The primary events that we hold there are our recognition events for our top managers, top salespeople and top customers," Black explains. "It's a phenomenal location physically, and they do a good job. Needless to say, we would not return as much as we do regardless of how beautiful the beach and the grounds are if the people weren't high quality and didn't deliver a great experience for me as the planner, and, more importantly, for our guests attending."

"I think without question, the No. 1 thing about the resort is that it is directly on the beach," he continues. "There's a large section of beach. There is a resort area called Sandestin, so the Hilton is a resort within a resort. It is the only property of its type, literally from Pensacola to Panama City, that is directly on the beach, right on the Gulf."

Black's three recognition events, which are typically attended by anywhere from 60-85 couples, include the Chairman's Weekend for customer appreciation, the Champion's Club for store managers and the President's Club for the company's sales team.

"Our events are strictly all fun," he notes. "We believe in giving people a lot of free time. Typically, for our events down there we offer deep sea fishing trips, we offer golf. Within the Sandestin resort they have 72 holes of golf. You can walk out of the Hilton and practically be on the golf course, and they are great golf courses. We also offer visits to the spa, and sailing has really become popular over the last several visits."

Black also puts a unique twist on the traditional hospital-ity suite. "They give us a part of the pool area that we rope off and call it Club Southern Pipe. Every afternoon that we're there, from noon to five, they give us this area. We'll put live entertainment out there, a guitar player doing Jimmy Buffett, James Taylor, that type of music, and our people just kind of come and go. We have dedicated servers. At all of these events, everything is carte blanche. They can charge anything to eat, drink — anything they do at the resort — to their room and we take care of it."

He explained that the Hilton's main bar and restaurant, Barefoot's Beachside Bar & Grill, has been totally rebuilt after being destroyed by a fire about two years ago. "The fire at Barefoot's offered them the opportunity to literally come back and redesign it. It's 100 times better than it used to be. It's now this massive open-air bar and restaurant with seating inside and tons of seating outside. It's a great place."

Black continues to tweak his programs. "We try to change things up, but at the same time we keep the constant things that we know people enjoy doing. We do take events to the beach at times. The resort does a great job of doing dinners on the beach. We've also taken folks down to the beach for a bonfire and to roast marshmallows and do s'mores. Instead

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of doing Club Southern Pipe up at the pool, we've done it on the beach and made it a sports theme with volleyball and races in the sand and sandcastle building competitions. They have a great recreation staff that's got more ideas than you can possibly use."

When guests want to enjoy some nightlife, Black explained that they can head to an entertainment district within the Sandestin resort area called Baytown Wharf. "If you're staying at the Hilton, there's a Sandestin shuttle that picks you up at the door of the Hilton and takes you to Baytown Wharf and brings you back. They'll also take you to the golf courses." He added that the hotel provides shuttle service to another popular attraction, the nearby Silver Sands Outlet Mall.

"We're trying to give them the highest quality trip that we can give them. Once you set foot on the property, we pay for everything. You could eat and drink yourself into oblivion," he laughs.

The Hilton Sandestin is completing a \$5 million winter renovation project, which includes a redesign of its 32,000 sf of meeting space, a facelift of its signature AAA Four Diamond restaurant, Seagar's Prime Steak and Seafood; and a completely redesigned Kids Krew children's program area.

Ron Black summed up another advantage of holding his recognition events at the beachfront Hilton Sandestin. "You can get the best of both worlds. You can go there and have a very laidback weekend or you can leave there more tired

"Needless to say, we would not return as much as we do regardless of how beautiful the beach and the grounds are if the people weren't high quality and didn't deliver a great experience for me as the planner, and, more importantly, for our guests."

Ron Black
Director of Human Resources
Southern Pipe & Supply Co.
Meridian, MS



than when you got there. It depends on what you're trying to do."

Orlando

Every five years, Southern Pipe takes its three recognition programs to **Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa** (867 guest rooms; 40,000 sf of meeting space), the flagship resort at **Walt Disney World Resort** in Orlando, and children are included. "The only exception (compared to the company's other programs) is that when we go to Disney World, we cannot afford to give everyone carte blanche charging privileges. We look at average costs per person that we spend at these other places, and we give people a Disney gift card that potentially has a value from \$1,000 to \$1,500," he states, explaining that guests can then use the gift card to cover the cost of parking tickets, dining and other activities.

Walt Disney World Resort recently introduced several new entertainment options for private group events. The new Test Track Presented by Chevrolet combines the themes of innovation, performance and creativity into an activity

where attendees create their own virtual car concepts then board "SimCar" ride vehicles to race through a series of performance tests. Another new option is the Splitsville Luxury Lanes located in Downtown Disney that opened in December. The upscale, retro-style boutique bowling venue offers more than 50,000 sf of entertainment space on two floors and includes 30 bowling lanes, billiards, live entertainment and upscale dining.

December marked the opening of the Storybook Forest and Enchanted Forest — the first phase of Disney's new Fantasyland expansion project. The expansion — the largest in the 41-year history of the Magic Kingdom — will open in phases through 2014. Its new attractions, dining and shopping venues are set among waterfalls, grottoes, bridges, forests and circus big tops.

Universal Orlando Resort posted a banner year in 2012 with the debut of several new adventures and attractions. For example, last June, Universal Studios debuted Universal's Superstar Parade, a daily affair with extravagant floats and hundreds of street performers; and Universal's Cinematic Spectacular: 100 Years of Movie Memories, which brings to life some of Universal's most iconic films on huge waterfall screens, with visual and audio special effects and pyrotechnics.

Other new additions: "Despicable Me Minion Mayhem" is a 3-D experience at Universal Studios that incorporates characters from the hit film of the same name. "The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man" at Islands of Adventure now features a state-of-the-art 3-D projection system, new music score and Spider-Vision glasses.

Universal CityWalk recently rolled out Hollywood Drive-In Golf, two 18-hole miniature golf courses based on classic drive-in era horror and sci-fi movies; and a revamped show from Blue Man Group, which now features a new show environment, musical score and interactive technology.

What really generates enthusiasm, however, is Universal's wildly popular Wizarding World of Harry Potter in the Islands of Adventure. Groups can book specialized, catered experiences and entertainment at locations such as Hogsmeade, Hogwarts castle and Three Broomsticks tavern.

The three onsite Loews hotels are updating their offerings: Renovations to the meeting space and ballrooms at **Loews Royal Pacific** (1,000 guest rooms; 85,000 sf of meeting space) and **Hard Rock Hotel** (650 guest rooms; 6,000 sf of meeting space) were completed last September; and guest room renovations at Loews Royal Pacific will be completed in stages, with the first half scheduled for a 2014 completion and the rest in 2015. Hard Rock also will update its guest rooms at a future date. **Loews Portofino Bay Hotel** (750 guest rooms; 42,000 sf of meeting space) finished renovations to all guest rooms last month, with some Kids Suites to be updated by this spring. Construction of



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Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando, FL, features the Shingle Creek Golf Club, home of the Brad Brewer Golf Academy.

the new, more moderately priced, family-friendly 1,800-room Cabana Bay Beach Resort will be completed in 2014.

For an overall meetings perspective of Orlando, **Visit Orlando** recently relaunched its meetings website (www.orlandomeeting.com) with the latest news on venues and attractions, plus accommodation listings, planning tools, online RFP submission forms and more. There's also a link to Visit Orlando's Twitter feed for industry updates and announcements.

More Orlando resort news of interest to groups:

Rosen Hotels and Resorts has renovation news to report for all three of their convention hotels, including the

introduction of free wired and wireless Internet in all guest rooms and public areas. **Rosen Centre Hotel** (1,334 guest rooms; 124,000 sf of meeting space) recently completed a multimillion-dollar renovation of all guest rooms as well as the presidential and hospitality suites. **Rosen Plaza Hotel** (800 guest rooms; 60,000 sf of meeting space) recently completed a floor-to-ceiling renovation of all guest rooms as well as hallways and hospitality suites. **Rosen Shingle Creek** (1,500 guest rooms; 445,000 sf of meeting space) recently enhanced its

Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando recently renovated all guest rooms.

50,000 sf of outdoor meeting space with an additional 16,000 sf. There's also a 40,000-sf outdoor event lot to take advantage of Florida's great weather. Rosen Shingle Creek last year opened Banrai Sushi and Tobias' Flats & Watering Hole. Later this year Mi Casa Tequila Taqueria will open, the resort's 15th dining/lounging option.

The Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate just last month debuted the new 55,000-sf Osceola County Conference Center, which includes a 28,000-sf ballroom, open prefunction area and event lawn. With this new addition, the 720-room resort now offers more than 128,000 sf of indoor meeting space, including two ballrooms and 46 meeting rooms, and an additional 52,000 sf of outdoor event space.

Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek (400

guest rooms; more than 25,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting/event space), which opened in 2011, is offering several creative group activities to enhance teamwork and communications. For the "Krush!" activity, attendees are divided into teams that compete to create the perfect wine blend along with a name and logo for their new vintage. Wyndham Grand also can arrange an Iron Chef-style competition called the "Texas BBQ Brisket Challenge" as well as "Mixology 101" where groups of 40 or fewer compete to create a signature cocktail for their event.

Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center (1,406 guest rooms; 400,000 sf of meeting space) unveiled a \$50 million renovation last spring that included upgraded guest rooms, networking venues and executive meeting spaces. New are the 10,000-sf Coquina Lawn for hosting outdoor events, the Cypress Springs Family Fun Water Park, Wreckers Sports Bar and adults-only South Beach Pool.

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel (2,265 guest rooms; 329,000 sf of meeting space) rivals the Gaylord Palms for its ability to host supersized meetings. Meeting space includes 110,500 sf of contiguous convention/exhibit space and four ballrooms. Groups also have the option to use the expert services of Disney Event Productions.

The Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek (1,000 guest rooms; 122,000 sf of meeting space) borders Walt Disney World Resort and shares the adjacent Waldorf Astoria Orlando's golf club and Guerlain spa.

Daytona Beach

A gem in Daytona Beach Shores is the luxury oceanfront **Shores Resort & Spa** (212 guest rooms; 20,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting/event space) the only AAA Four Diamond oceanfront resort in Central Florida. Meeting space encompasses oceanside executive boardrooms, a private beachfront terrace, grand ballroom and sky-level meeting space with panoramic views of the Atlantic Ocean and Intracoastal Waterway. Highlights for groups can include oceanside fire pits, the boutique Indulge Spa, surfing lessons, fitness-led beach walks and more. The Shores is now offering free round-trip transfers to



A dinner event setup at the AAA Four Diamond Shores Resort & Spa in Daytona Beach Shores. Oceanfront rooms and meeting spaces bring Florida's tropical ambience inside.

Photo courtesy of The Shores Resort & Spa

"We've seen the use of a lot of our Miami Beach nightclubs, particularly Mansion, Opium and Bamboo here on the beach. They are great facilities if you need to take advantage of some audio-visual production because it's built in."

Jeff Nelke
Vice President and GM
Access Destination Services
Hollywood, FL



the Daytona Beach Ocean Center convention facility just a short drive away.

South Florida

Jeff Nelke, vice president and general manager of Access Destination Services in Hollywood, FL, shared one idea that some of his clients have embraced during the past year. "We've seen some of our corporate clients taking advantage of doing evening activities to replace what were traditionally dine-arounds," he explains. "They're able to share in the bonding experience and collaboration, since spending time together is a goal of a lot of these meetings, particularly with mergers and acquisitions and things of that nature."

He shared an example. "We do a Cuban heritage tour where we turn it into 'Havana Nights' where we've done dinner as a chance to get a little bit of the history, then salsa dancing at a fun club that I don't think a lot of people would have visited on their own. We're trying to create some unique experiences that way. We're still dining at a restaurant, mainly just for budget purposes, and this creates the idea of doing an offsite event

on a dine-around budget. It's certainly something that was different and well-received."

He also noted a change in booking windows that he has seen recently. "We have definitely seen a pickup in activity, and planning is becoming more paramount. Over the last two years, it's been easier to get the things that you want in terms of availability, and we're starting to see things book up much quicker. We're starting to (say), "You're coming in January, February or March? Great! Is that 2014 or '15?" Whereas in the past, you were able to go two to three months out and find availability for the venues and things that you would like. We definitely see that as a trend. Before, it was easier for meeting planners to pull that rabbit out of their hat at the last minute because of availability. It's going to require a little more planning as we go into the 2013-'14 season. You just can't wait as long if you know what you want."

When asked which offsite venues are the most popular in South Florida, Nelke replies, "We've seen the use of a lot of our Miami Beach nightclubs, particularly Mansion, Opium and Bamboo here on the beach. They are great facilities if you need to take advantage of some audio-visual production because it's built in and the nightclub scene doesn't really get going until 11 o'clock or midnight, so we're able to use the facility. Our corporate dinners would usually be from 7 to 10 or 7 to 11. It's a great way to take advantage of high-end audio-visual production for entertainment, let's say for an evening gala. To bring that into

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Photo courtesy of Doral

Miami's Doral Golf Resort & Spa, home to the legendary Blue Monster golf course, is undergoing a property-wide renovation.

your hotel can be expensive, where this would be incorporated into your rental fee because it already exists, and many of those clubs are old theaters that are converted into nightclubs.

"They run the trend," he continues. "Some are popular one year and out of business the next, so you have to make sure you're working with good planners. As far as the facilities, you get a little bit of the vibe of the Miami Beach nightlife. When people come to South Florida, they think about the water, and the cosmopolitan culture, at least in South Beach. As you move up to Palm Beach, you have the rich history of the Flaglers, the Rockefellers, and the Kennedys, what they brought to the area. There are also the indigenous things like our Everglades, things of that nature. So (booking a nightclub) touches on one of those major experiences."

Nelke discussed why it's important to strike a balance between planning events at the host hotel and going offsite. "We always feel that part of signing a good hotel contract is keeping them involved in the hotel for a couple of nights to help maximize room rates. But the last thing you want to do is spend every waking moment in the hotel. This is a great way to see the destination, as well, for the evening events."

One of the most significant developments in Miami's meetings scene is Trump Hotel Collection's purchase of the iconic **Doral Golf Resort & Spa** (700 guest rooms; 86,000 sf of meeting space) last summer. Through the fall of 2013, Trump will be investing more than \$200 million in a property-wide renovation that covers the resort's guest rooms, and all four golf courses including the legendary Blue Monster course. The resort will remain open during the renovation.

PGA National Resort & Spa (379 guest rooms; 40,000 sf of meeting space) in Palm Beach Gardens just north of West Palm Beach recently completed a comprehensive \$100 million revitalization project. All guest rooms have received a complete makeover, and guest room corridors have also been refreshed with new carpeting, lighting, wall coverings and artwork. The Lakeside Lawn, which overlooks a lake and the resort's golf courses, has been established as a permanent special event venue, and the Palm Terrace restaurant is now available as a poolside venue for evening events. In addition, Tom Fazio II has remodeled The Haig — PGA National's original 18-hole course that was designed by his uncles. The resort's 19th hole bar and grill, Bar 91, has also been completely renovated.

In Hollywood, FL, near Fort Lauderdale is **The Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino** (481 guest rooms; 40,000 sf of meeting space), a rare gaming opportunity for groups visiting the Sunshine State. The property completed a \$7.8 million renovation of its guest rooms last year. Despite the laidback

Florida environs, there is a certain Las Vegas-like energy at this resort, generated by 18 restaurants and lounges, the Body Rock Spa, 23 boutique shops, 13 nightclubs, the 400-seat Paradise Live theater and the 5,500-seat Hard Rock Live concert arena. The AAA Four Diamond resort is Green Lodging Certified by the state of Florida.

Key Largo

One of Florida's most prized enclaves is the private, exclusive **Ocean Reef Club** (guest accommodations include 175 inn rooms, 100 spacious one-, two- and three-bedroom villas, and private homes; 30,000 sf of meeting space), located in Key Largo, in the Upper Keys about an hour south of Miami International Airport.

For 60 years, Ocean Reef Club has been a personal hideaway for titans of industry and other wealthy Americans who largely kept it a well-protected secret. Because of its VIP membership, privacy is paramount and security is suited to the world leaders who have vacationed or attended conferences there.

The complex, situated on 2,500 tropical acres, is a self-contained, member-owned property that features more than



Photo courtesy of Ocean Reef Club

Watersports activities abound at Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo and include kayaking, snorkeling, deep-sea fishing and more.

a dozen restaurants, a 175-slip marina, a private airport, 54 holes of golf, a shopping village, tennis courts, salt water lagoon, beach, pools, Jacuzzi and more. Charters for flats and deep-sea fishing as well as snorkeling and scuba diving at John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park are popular one-of-a-kind adventures. Group activities also can include chartered yacht dinners, beachside events, eco-tours, and teambuilding programs such as cooking school, golf cart scavenger hunts, cardboard boat regattas and beach olympics to name a few. There also are plenty of options for events with a tropical backdrop, including the waterfront outdoor event venue Buccaneer Island.

The 8,000-sf Spa at Ocean Reef just completed its own multimillion-dollar makeover in December. The renovation has added 10 individual massage and treatment rooms, plus a VIP couples suite. The new suite includes two treatment tables and an outdoor terrace with whirlpool and dining area. **C&IT**



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DESTINATION

Louisiana

By Derek Reveron



Houmas House Plantation and Gardens, located between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, is an ideal site for corporate receptions and outings.



“We did a beautiful seated dinner on the front lawn at Houmas. Ladies were decked out in antebellum dresses and men wore civil war uniforms of the North and South.”

David Rome, Director of Sales
BBC Destination Management, New Orleans, LA

New Orleans

Mardi Gras World figured prominently in another group's experiences in New Orleans, which remains Louisiana's superstar destination. Automotive Events Inc. selected New Orleans for a recent three-day business conference for 1,200 Subaru dealers nationwide. During one evening the group held a themed party at Mardi Gras World, complete with floats, costumed figures, a jazz band and food stations featuring local cuisine.

On another evening, according to Iain Dobson, senior vice president of automotive events and manager of the Subaru account, the dealers witnessed the exciting debut of the Subaru BRZ at the recently opened NOLA Motorsports Park. Just 20 minutes from New Orleans, the race track, which offers road racing, go karts and drag racing, also sports impressive meeting and event facilities. “Usually when we do these introductions, we have a vehicle in a large room with drapes over it that we lift to reveal the vehicle. This time, we chose to use a race track,” Dobson says. “The track, coupled with a great meeting venue at the nearby Hyatt Regency New Orleans, and an entertaining and iconic city, all added up to a unique package that doesn't occur anywhere else.”

The Big Easy is the heartbeat of Louisiana's effervescent culture. New Orleans is known worldwide for its mélange of French, Spanish, English, African, Creole and Cajun cultures; jazz; Mardi Gras; and the French Quarter with its hundreds of restaurants, music venues and bars.

Seven years after Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, New Orleans is attracting a growing number of visitors. The city received 4.9 million visitors in the first half of 2012, a 2 percent rise over the same period in 2011, according to the University of New Orleans Hospitality Research Center's 2012 New Orleans Area Visitor Profile. Visitors spent \$3.4 billion, up 11 percent over the first six months of 2011.

Nikki Moon, vice president of sales, New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau, says New Orleans' popularity is growing as a meeting designation. “Out of all our meetings, going into the future, anywhere from 50 to 80 percent, are smaller meetings,” says Moon, vice president of sales, New Orleans CVB. “We have a great package of hotel offerings, from big hotels and chain properties to wonderful independent hotels, and a citywide renovation program has been in effect in anticipation of the Super Bowl. Every single hotel has been refreshed, even after they were rebuilt following Katrina.”

A Magical Mix of Culture, Cuisine, Music and More Keeps Groups Coming Back Year After Year

Louisiana is arguably one of the most unique destinations in the United States because of its matchless mix of cultural influences, music, cuisine, hotels and venues. The state is home to several increasingly popular destinations, including Baton Rouge and Shreveport-Bossier City.

Last April, the 100 attendees at a telecommunication company's incentive visited Houmas House Plantation and Gardens, a 38-acre antebellum jewel located about 60 miles

outside of New Orleans. “We did a beautiful seated dinner on the front lawn at Houmas,” says David Rome, director of Sales, BBC Destination Management, a New Orleans DMC. “Ladies were decked out in antebellum dresses and men wore civil war uniforms of the North and South. We had one long table for everyone with one long tablecloth. There were several toasts of thanks to attendees. We had a full orchestra playing a mix of big band music during dinner and dance

music afterwards. Everyone took a picture together in front of the plantation.”

The incentive group also enjoyed a dinner in New Orleans at Mardi Gras World, the leading maker of Mardi Gras floats, sculptures and props. “We picked them up from The Ritz-Carlton in a float, welcoming them with a band and had a parade in their honor,” says Rome. “They sat on floats with deejays playing and throwing beads to people on the roadside. When they arrived at the venue, they had a cocktail reception. We had extra lighting in the warehouse and glitter on the tables that picked up the lights from the floats and the tables. A band played zydeco music, and we had a seated catered dinner.”



Twenty minutes from New Orleans, NOLA Motorsports Park offers road racing, go karts and drag racing, as well as considerable meeting and event facilities.



New Orleans' singular culture makes it a big hit with corporate meetings. "We are very much a popular corporate meeting city because we are so culturally endowed," says Carling Dinkler, president, Custom Conventions, a New Orleans-based DMC that handles corporate meetings, incentives and conventions. "We are the most European city in the U.S. Corporate groups can come and have an exotic time without leaving the country."

The plethora of cultural offerings in New Orleans allows planners to choose just the right activities to reach their meeting and incentive goals. "We weave New Orleans culture into the goals of corporate meetings and incentives, which is to get attendees excited about coming, and we have so many must-see and must-do things to get them excited," says Dinkler.

An online encyclopedia company enjoyed a big helping of New Orleans culture during its three-day meeting at The Roosevelt New Orleans, a Waldorf Astoria Hotel, in January 2012.

The 250 attendees enjoyed a French Quarter-themed dinner party in a warehouse that serves as a meeting venue. "We tricked out the warehouse with street lamps, street signs, tarot card readers, sketch artists and a mime to make it look like

the French Quarter's Jackson Square," says Dinkler. "We had creole food and a jazz band. At the end of the night, we did a second-line parade in which the band comes down from the bandstand and a grand marshal leads everybody in a parade around the meeting space waving their handkerchiefs. It went over big," he says. The group also held a dinner in a private dining room at world famous Antoine's restaurant.

New Orleans entertains attendees while bringing out the best in them. That's the view of Seth Adler, general manager of Catfish Entertainment, a New York-based meeting and event planning company. "Everything about the culture of New Orleans

lends itself to creativity and entertainment because it's unlike any other city. It's our job to make sure that the meetings and events are not only thought-provoking but extremely entertaining. If you are looking for that combination and you have the ability to choose the city you want, then New Orleans should be at the top of your list," says Adler.

The Big Easy was at the top of the list for a media and entertainment company that held a strategy, networking and thought leadership meeting in the city in October around Halloween. The two-day meeting, which was the group's first in New Orleans, included about 150 top executives. Attendees met at the 285-room Loews New Orleans Hotel, which offers 17,000 sf of meeting space. Adler and his staff brought in the famous Rebirth Brass Band for entertainment during sessions held in the hotel ballroom.

Outside of the hotel, the group gathered for dinner in Jackson Square at ever-popular Muriel's restaurant, which serves some of the finest Creole cuisine in New Orleans. Attendees also visited Frenchman Street, home of a joyful enclave of jazz clubs, restaurants and bars. The group was wowed by the many revelers who took to Frenchman Street in wildly exotic costumes to celebrate Halloween, says Adler.

New Orleans offers so many alternatives that groups can have difficulty deciding what to do. That's one reason why Dinkler sends sample activity programs to potential incentive and meeting clients. The sample programs include a wide range of popular activities. "We have the World War II Museum, the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas and Mississippi River cruises on the beautiful Steamboat Natchez," says Dinkler.

The sample programs also include walking tours of New Orleans. Such tours are popular among corporate groups, Dinkler says, "The cool thing about New Orleans is that we do a lot of walking because everything is so close. Corporate groups love that. They also love it when we move them from the hotel to a venue with a second line parade or with carriages."

Many distinctively Louisianan activities are available outside New Orleans. "They can go fishing in the morning and then have a cocktail party where we serve what they caught," says Dinkler. "We also have scavenger hunts using seaplanes. Some groups go to venues in bayou country for a Cajun pig roast called a cochon du lait; or they can visit a Creole plantation."

No matter what activities groups choose, there is one that is always at the top of the list — dining. Planners can choose from several world-famous New Orleans restaurants such as Antoine's, Brennan's, Muriel's and Arnaud's, all of which feature spacious private dining rooms for groups.

Mix New Orleans' food, activities and culture with the Super Bowl and corporate groups have all the ingredients for successful incentives and meetings. New Orleans, along with Miami, is the nation's most popular home for the Super Bowl. The 2013 game on Feb. 3 was the 10th played in New Orleans, tying the city with Miami for the city hosting the most Super Bowls.



The future site of many a command performance, the Crescent City's long revered convention center will now feature a 60,300 square foot divisible Great Hall, 25,400 sq ft multi-use pre-function space, and include hotel-like appointments throughout. This impressive 1.1 million sq ft center, which so perfectly complements the city's walkable hotel packages, will now be more attractive than ever to groups large AND small. Additional features of note include the 4,660 sq ft Rivergate Room, complete with a 3,420 sq ft rooftop terrace, a 980 sq ft indoor balcony and a 5,700 sq ft executive club lounge.

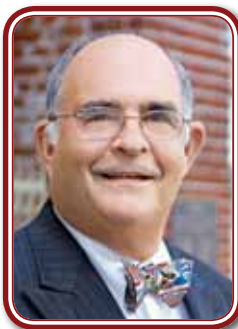


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“We are coming off one of our banner years. ...As the brand of Baton Rouge becomes more familiar and recognized, we will do considerably better in meetings.”



Paul Arrigo, CDME, President and CEO
Visit Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge, LA

Once again, this year's game attracted scores of corporations looking to entertain and reward employees, clients and business partners. During the game, corporations entertained in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome's several renovated Club Lounge areas, each of which accommodates up to 500 people.

New and Noteworthy

The 1.1-million-sf **New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center** — the sixth largest convention center in the nation — opened The Great Hall in late January 2013. The \$50 million project encompasses 86,000 sf of flexible function space, including: the 60,300-sf, column-free Great Hall, the largest ballroom in New Orleans; 25,400 sf of multi-use prefunction space; a 4,660-sf junior ballroom with a 3,420-sf rooftop terrace called The Rivergate Room; a multipurpose lounge; and an open-landscaped pedestrian plaza. The Great Hall, named for the 1984 World's Fair exhibit space of the same name, can be divided into multiple configurations, allowing for several concurrent but independent session rooms. The Great Hall debut follows \$140 million of other post-Katrina upgrades to the 27-year-old facility.

New Orleans offers more than 35,000 hotel rooms and most of them have undergone renovations. For example, the **Hyatt French Quarter** opened in May 2012 following an \$18 million makeover. Renovations included all 254 guest rooms, lobby and hotel exterior as well as the pool and deck area. A Hard Rock Café is scheduled to open in the Hyatt French Quarter in early 2013.

In 2012, the French Quarter's **Royal Sonesta Hotel New Orleans** spent nearly \$18 million in upgrades and improvements. Renovations included new furnishings and carpeting in all of the third-floor guest rooms; a brand new second-floor Acadia event space; new furnishings and carpeting in Irvin Mayfield's Jazz Playhouse; and an updated Fleur de Lis Suite. High-speed wireless Internet access was expanded and is now available throughout the hotel. Last May, chefs John Folse and Rick Tramonto opened the highly anticipated Restaurant R'volution, a fine-dining establishment. The Royal Sonesta offers 483 guest rooms, 35 suites and 20,000 sf of meeting space. Also last May, the 570-room **Hotel Monteleone**, with

24,000 sf of meeting space, completed a \$10 million renovation that included updated guest rooms and meeting space, and the Criollo Restaurant and Lounge. In March, the hotel celebrated the grand reopening of its famous rotating Carousel Bar, which added a second, new stationary bar.

Following a \$275 million redesign and revitalization, the **Hyatt Regency New Orleans**, featuring 1,193 all-new sophisticated guest rooms and suites and 200,000 sf of state-of-the-art, flexible event space, and expansive food and beverage offerings, reopened in 2011. The 32-story hotel — in the city's downtown district and adjacent to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome — offers two 25,000-sf ballrooms, 64 versatile meeting and banquet rooms, 19 executive-level meeting rooms, seven permanent boardrooms, and more than 80,000 sf of exhibition space, highlighted by a new 50,000-sf exhibit hall. In addition to revitalizing its 1,193 guest rooms, including 95 suites, five meeting planner suites and four presidential suites, other highlights include 8 Block Kitchen & Bar, a 360-seat, full-service restaurant and bar; Vitascope Hall, a media/action bar outfitted with 42 flat-screen TVs; and Borgne, the latest restaurant by chef John Besh. Additional culinary options include a 65-seat Starbucks; Lagniappe Exchange, a 24-hour fresh market and



The Hyatt Regency New Orleans boasts 200,000 sf of event space including the Regency Club conference room with spectacular city views.



convenience store; Whole Hog Café, featuring award-winning barbecue; and Pizza Consegna. “The re-opening of Hyatt Regency New Orleans is symbolic as it represents the end of a journey and the beginning of a new chapter for Hyatt and the city of New Orleans,” says Michael Smith, general manager. “We spared no detail in positioning ourselves to be the quintessential hotel for conventions, leisure and business travelers alike.”

New Orleans also is upgrading its transportation infrastructure. **Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport** is undergoing a \$300 million modernization, including expansion of Concourse D and the addition of six new gates.

Unique venues are a New Orleans specialty. Examples include legendary **Preservation Hall**, which offers top jazz bands five nights a week and accommodates groups of up to 125 people. **The Cabildo**, built in 1799 to house the Spanish municipal government, features reception space on three floors and a courtyard overlooking the Mississippi River. Smaller groups may



“There is one thing we agree on — New Orleans is a great place to hold an event!”

2013 New Orleans Super Bowl Host Committee Co-Chairs
(and New Orleans locals), Mary Matalin and James Carville



For more information call 877-393-5828 or visit neworleansmeetings.com.

enjoy **The Musée Conti Wax Museum** in the French Quarter, which accommodates groups of up to 200.

The National World War II Museum (formerly known as the National D-Day Museum), located in the Central Business District on Magazine Street, was designated by the U.S. Congress as “America’s National World War II Museum” in 2003. The museum is undergoing a \$300 million expansion project — “The Road to Victory: A Vision for Future Generations” — which will eventually quadruple the size of the original museum.

The new 1,500-acre **BioDistrict** in downtown and mid-city New Orleans is home to a collection of biomedical research and development facilities, teaching facilities, clinics and hospitals. Completed projects include the BioInnovation Center and Louisiana Cancer Research Consortium. The U.S. Veterans Affairs Hospital, currently under construction, is scheduled to open in 2015; and the University Medical Center, also under construction, will open in 2014.

Baton Rouge

Located 80 miles from New Orleans, the popular city of Baton Rouge, Louisiana’s capital and most populous city, combines Creole culture, the charm of the Old South and urban style.

Baton Rouge is a popular destination. “We are coming off one of our banner years. We had an increase in leisure travel,” says Paul Arrigo, CDME, president and CEO of Visit Baton Rouge, the city’s CVB. “Our hotel tax receipts from leisure travelers are up over 25 percent over the last year. As the brand of Baton Rouge becomes more familiar and recognized, we will do considerably better in meetings, a lot of which center around Louisiana State University (LSU) sports, particularly football, which attracts corporate groups,” he says.

Baton Rouge’s growing meetings infrastructure is a plus for potential meetings. In late 2011, the 256-room **Renaissance Baton Rouge Hotel** opened near the LSU campus. It was the first newly constructed full-service hotel to be built in Baton Rouge in about 40 years. The Renaissance provides 13,000 sf of meeting space, including a 7,500-sf ballroom.

The city’s main convention facility, the **Baton Rouge River Center** (BRRC), is located a short walk from downtown. The BRRC offers more than 200,000 sf of new and renovated meeting and exhibit space, including the new 70,000-sf Exhibition Hall and 17 breakout rooms. There also is a state-of-the-art, 1,900-seat Theatre of Performing Arts. “The River Center was expanded to include a certain amount of public space about year ago. There is more versatility in the meeting space and we now have about 100,000 of exhibit space on one level,” says Arrigo.

Last year, Visit Baton Rouge premiered a new website, *VisitBatonRouge.com*. The site was launched in conjunction with the state changing the name of the Baton Rouge Area Convention & Visitors Bureau to Visit Baton Rouge. The site features special offers, hotel rate listings and deals from local restaurants and attractions. Planners also can download the free Go BR mobile app and access customized itineraries.

Baton Rouge’s offsite venues reflects its Old South, Creole



Groups can enjoy the local sights and taste delicious Southern specialties at any number of restaurants in Baton Rouge.

and modern influences. For example, the **Magnolia Mound Plantation’s Hart House** accommodates up to 50 guests and its French Creole barn can host up to 250 people. **The Old Governor’s Mansion** offers a classic ballroom that provides an elegant setting for meetings. **The LSU Museum of Art** offers 14 galleries, including two that can accommodate 200 and 400 people, respectively.

Kerri Morgan, CMP, global account manager for Hotels for Hope, an Austin, TX, for-profit hotel booking company for planners and businesses that also matches clients’ contributions to selected charities, recently scheduled a three-day meeting in Baton Rouge for about 100 attendees of Professional Marketing International, a Lehi, UT-based real estate investment and online business consulting firm. The meeting, which involved intensive training courses, included about 24 room nights at various Baton Rouge hotels since most of the attendees live in the Baton Rouge area.

Morgan’s meetings are typically booked on a short turnaround of about four weeks prior to the meeting, and she often deals with groups that have people staying in several different hotels. That’s why Morgan finds CVBs such as Visit Baton Rouge to be very helpful. “We use them every time. They make sure that my RFPs get into the hands of the hotels on time. And they have all the connections to make sure we get sufficient bids from all the hotels we are considering. That’s very important for my clients. Plus they are experts on the city and a great resource for any additional information about the town,” says Morgan.

Shreveport-Bossier City

Shreveport and Bossier City, two municipalities located on opposite banks of the Red River, draw cultural influences from their locations in the northwest corner of Louisiana near the Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas borders. The slogan of the Shreveport-Bossier Convention & Tourist Bureau (SBCTB) is “Louisiana’s Other Side.” The SBCTB’s website describes the people of the area as “East Texas Cowboy with a Cajun Twist,” and suggests that “It’s that unique combination of two great American heritages that sets Shreveport-Bossier apart.”

Groups (of 10 or more) visiting Shreveport-Bossier may arrange a private Mardi Gras party on the parade route. The party includes food, band, specialty bead and T-shirts all under a covered, climate-controlled tent.

Aside from its singular culture, Shreveport-Bossier City offers approximately 10,000 hotel rooms and the second largest convention center in Louisiana — **Shreveport Convention Center** (SCC). The facility features more than 350,000 sf of meeting space including a 95,000-sf, column-free main exhibit hall, 15,000 sf of meeting rooms and the 18,000-sf Capt. Shreve Ballroom. The SCC is connected to the 313-room **Hilton Shreveport Hotel**. In addition, the **Bossier Civic Center** (BCC) provides 24,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space with an additional 7,500-sf banquet hall that can be divided into three breakout rooms.

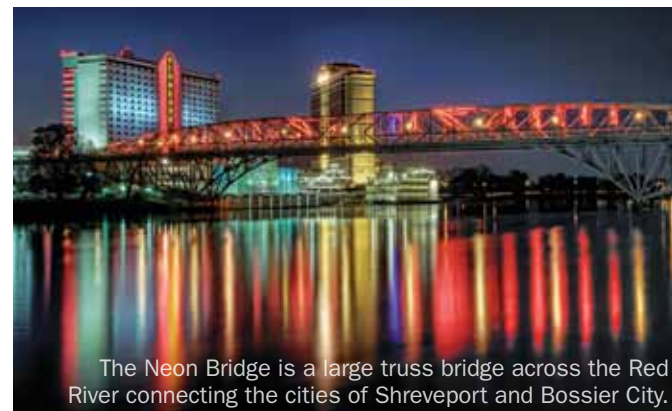
Shreveport-Bossier’s offsite venues include five riverboat casino hotels open 24 hours a day on both sides of the Red River. The casinos are **Horseshoe Hotel & Casino, DiamondJacks Casino & Resort, Sam’s Town Hotel & Casino, Boomtown Casino & Hotel and Eldorado Casino Resort & Hotel**. Additionally, **Harrah’s Louisiana Downs** offers a horse-racing track and casino. Most of the properties are located just a few miles from the BCC, and they all have meeting space. The sixth casino hotel, the new **Margaritaville Resort Casino**, is expected to

debut in the summer of 2013 on the banks of the Red River near the Louisiana Boardwalk. Developers say the project will feature a 396-room, 18 story hotel, a 900-seat entertainment venue, spa and fitness center, outdoor pool deck and dining area, and four food and beverage outlets, including the trademark Margaritaville Restaurant. Jimmy Buffett is expected to appear at the grand opening.

Offsite venues include the **Sci-Port: Louisiana Science Center** where groups can dine, enjoy an IMAX show and an open-access space planetarium. Attendees can enjoy plays and musicals at the renovated **Strand Theater** and hold receptions in the venue’s elegant foyer. Plentiful shopping is available on Line Avenue, a five-mile stretch of specialty shops, boutiques, antique stores and restaurants.

Louisiana’s destination trifecta — New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Shreveport-Bossier City — offers everything that planners need for a small or large meeting or incentive. Good times, sublime cuisine, elegant hotels and a one-of-a-kind culture bring joy and lasting memories to attendees.

C&IT



The Neon Bridge is a large truss bridge across the Red River connecting the cities of Shreveport and Bossier City.

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ON THE MOVE



NORTHROP-JOST

The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs, CO, has appointed **Nicole Northrop-Jost** as director of national sales. She formerly served as senior sales manager of the Four Seasons Resort & Club Dallas at Las Colinas in Irving, TX.

Sean Sachs has been appointed vice president of sales and marketing for all of The Dawson Companies, which includes The Scottsdale Plaza Resort, Scottsdale, AZ. He previously was associate director of sales at The Scottsdale Plaza Resort.



SACHS

Dolce Hotels and Resorts has appointed **James Bennett** to vice president of sales, North America. He was with Starwood Hotels & Resorts in New York where he served as the leader in the New York City metro market.

James M. Gelfand was named director of sales and marketing for The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa, Tucson, AZ. He was director of sales and marketing at Turnberry Isle Miami, Miami, FL, and The Westin Copley Place in Boston, MA.



BENNETT



GELFAND

Cranwell Resort, Spa and Golf Club, Lenox, MA, has named **Tim Paulus** as director of sales. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing at The Westin Poinsett Hotel in Greenville, SC.

Loews Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Stephanie Hinckley** to vice president of sales and marketing for the company's Western division. She formerly served as director of sales and marketing at the Arizona Biltmore in Phoenix, AZ. **C&IT**



HINCKLEY

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29	Talking Stick Resort	877-724-4687	www.talkingstickresort.com	Steven Horowitz	steven.horowitz@talkingstickresort.com
35	Universal Orlando Resort	888-322-5531	www.uomeetingsandevents.com	Group Sales	meetings@universalorlando.com
49	Visit Baton Rouge	225-382-3587	www.visitbatonrouge.com	Geraldine Bordelon	geraldine@visitbatonrouge.com
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