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THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



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**No More One-Size-Fits-All for a
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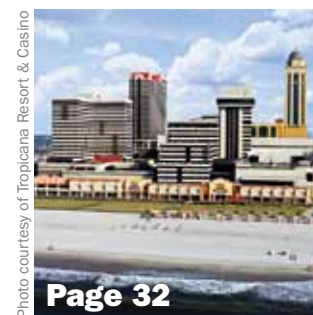
The New Face of Incentive Travel

No More One-Size-Fits-All for a Multi-Generational Work Force

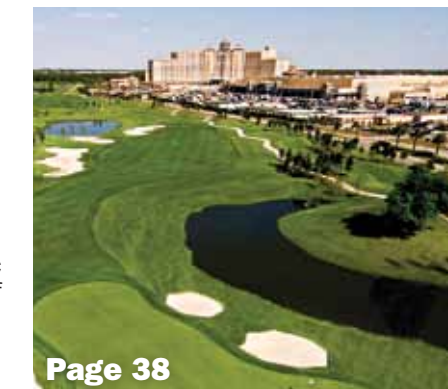
By Karen Brost

Arpoador Rock in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil — an emerging hot spot for incentive travel programs as Brazil will host the 2014 World Cup, and the city of Rio de Janeiro has been elected host city of the XXXI Olympic Summer Games in 2016.

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The Tropicana Resort & Casino in Atlantic City, NJ, located on the iconic Boardwalk of the popular seaside resort.



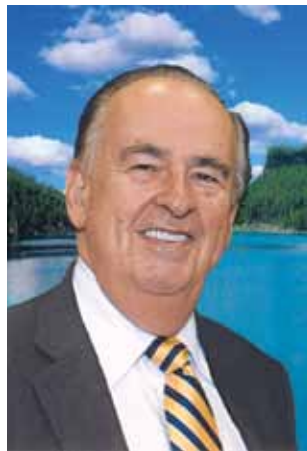
Rosen Shingle Creek's onsite championship golf course — one of the 176 golf courses in Orlando, FL.

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PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

It's the Experience That Counts

Incentive travel programs are back. No longer perceived merely as boondoggles, incentive travel and events as well as corporate meetings are enjoying a post-recession resurgence. This time around, in addition to seeking the most bang for their buck, professional meeting planners are going all out to find programs that deliver extraordinary experiences in exotic destinations that engage and involve the attendees, especially the younger generation of qualifiers who have different needs. In our cover story (page 22) "The New Face of Incentive Travel: No More One-Size-Fits-All for a Multi-Generational Work Force," Jeff Eells, president of TenDot Corporate Travel, says he sees a shift towards activities such as hiking, biking, canoeing and rafting because attendees in their late 20s, 30s and 40s "want to get that rush. They want to play a little weekend warrior."



Steve O'Malley, senior vice president for Maritz Travel, says companies are more receptive to international, remote and creative destinations. "What companies are saying is that in order to get the right behavior, the right performance and the right additional effort that they're asking people to invest

here, they do need to provide a destination and a complete package that is memorable, motivational and meaningful. It has to get people's attention. It has to drive their performance."

No doubt, all three of the destinations featured in this month's issue meet the "memorable, motivational and meaningful" experience test. For example, In "Boardwalk to Big Apple" (page 32), we learn that New York City and Atlantic City are perennial favorites for incentive travel especially for the limitless variety of experiences including incredible dining and exciting entertainment options. And, it's no secret that Orlando (page 38) has something for everyone, especially when it's time for a kid-friendly, family-friendly incentive program. In the report on Southern California (page 46), San Diego Tourism Authority's Margie Sitton says San Diego is appealing to groups because of the variety of experiences groups can get there. "I tell planners that there are several distinct regions in San Diego — all with the same backdrop of great weather — so that you can come to San Diego seven times and have seven completely different San Diego experiences."

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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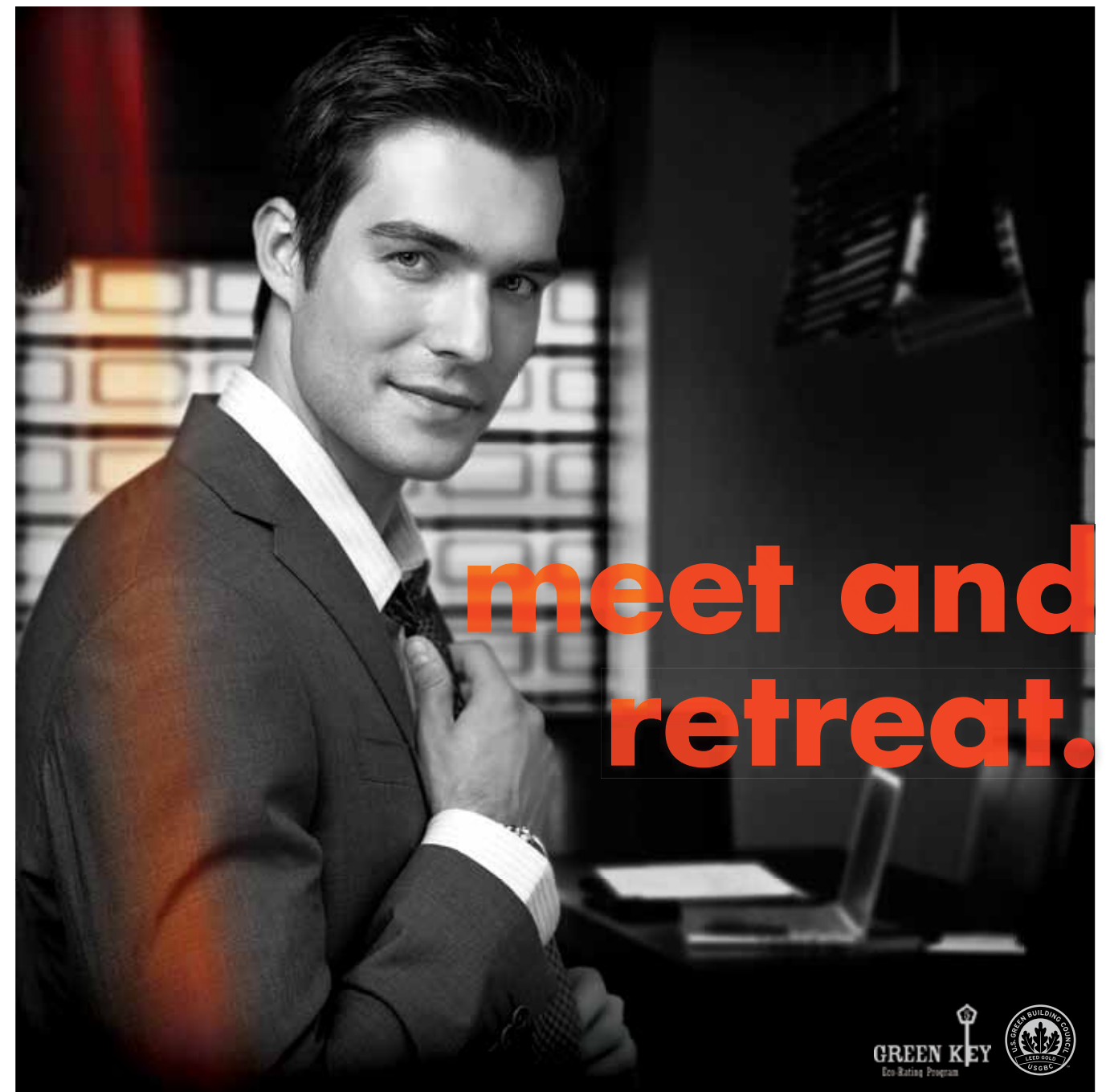
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U.S. Hosted Buyer Applications for AIBTM 2013 Surging Ahead of Last Year



LYONS

CHICAGO, IL — AIBTM 2013 reports a substantial increase in U.S. registrations received for the Hosted Buyer Program, a unique feature and business catalyst for the Americas Incentive, Business Travel & Meetings Exhibition June 11-13. The show, which is set to take place at Chicago's McCormick Place for the first time, has confirmed attendance from American Pharmacists Association, HelmsBriscoe, HPN Global, ConferenceDirect, ITA Group, Mandala Group,

Global Access Meetings, Ultimate Incentives & Travel, Grass Roots America, North South Travel and Premier Meetings Services among others. "We are delighted to confirm the increase in U.S. buyers attending AIBTM this year," said Michael Lyons, exhibition director of AIBTM. "We will be providing a platform where they can make the most of every business opportunity. We have also introduced features such as the 'Market Focus' sessions on Europe, Asia and Latin America to facilitate attendees reaching new suppliers in international markets." www.aibtm.com

Westin La Paloma Meeting Space and Guest Room Renovations Complete

TUCSON, AZ — The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa, located in Tucson, AZ, completed renovations to its 487 guest rooms and 60,000 sf of meeting space. Guest rooms now have RFID key card lock systems, headboards with LED technology and adjustable reading lights, executive desks with power outlets and Wi-Fi, 42-inch HD televisions, iHome docking stations, expanded walk-in showers, a mini-refrigerator, full-length mirrors and lighted makeup mirrors. The meeting space received new carpet; chandeliers with dimmable LED lighting; new banquet equipment such as tables, chairs and linens; a fresh color palette and modern AV equipment. The updates are part of a \$30 million renovation that began last spring. Still to come in 2013 are updates to the lobby, AZUL Restaurant and Lounge, Kids Club facilities, poolside cabanas and more. www.westinlapalomaresort.com



The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa.

Disney Unveils Vision for Disney Springs

ORLANDO, FL — Walt Disney World Resort recently announced the multiyear transformation of Downtown Disney into Disney Springs, a unique destination that will double the number of shops, restaurants and other venues for guests to explore, resulting in more than 150 establishments. Drawing inspiration from Florida's waterfront towns and natural beauty, Disney Springs will include four outdoor neighborhoods interconnected by a flowing spring and vibrant lakefront. Construction is slated to begin soon with new areas opening in phases. Disney Springs is expected to be complete in 2016. www.disneymeetings.com



Renderings courtesy of Walt Disney World Resort



Visit Orlando Creating Video Series for Meeting Planners

ORLANDO, FL — Visit Orlando is developing a series of videos designed to educate professional meeting planners on Orlando's key convention areas during the sales process. Each one- to two-minute video will provide practical information on



RUNZLER

a variety of topics relevant to today's meeting industry, from dining and entertainment options to convention hotels and what's new. The first completed video showcases the connectivity and walkability of the area surrounding the Orange County Convention Center. Four more videos are set to roll out by the end of the year. "Many planners simply don't have the time or budget to make multiple visits to familiarize themselves with the nuts and bolts of hosting an event in Orlando," stated Tammi Runzler, Visit Orlando vice president of convention sales and services. "These videos are for planners who have already been sold on the idea of meeting in Orlando and now need a next-level understanding of specific attributes of the area, including walkability, transportation logistics, the range and depth of available after-hours options — particularly dining and entertainment — and more." www.orlandomeeting.com

Omni Amelia Island Plantation Unveils \$85 Million Re-Imagination

AMELIA ISLAND, FL — The Omni Amelia Island Plantation completed an extensive \$85 million renovation including a new lobby, a new outdoor area with the largest pool deck in Northeast Florida; an adult, infinity-edge pool; the Splash Pool and Splash Park; and two hot tubs. The greens next to the splash area offer pop-up movies, spa breaks, golf and tennis clinics and culinary samplings. The new Oceanside wing features 155 new rooms, and the Sunrise wing features 249 rooms, totaling 404 oceanfront accommodations. Omni Amelia Island Plantation now features more than 80,000 sf of versatile function space in the onsite Conference Center. The new space includes the 16,800-sf Magnolia Ballroom, as well as the 11,165-sf Amelia Ballroom and the 5,465-sf Cumberland Ballroom. www.omniameliaislandplantation.com

Santiago Corrada Named President & CEO of Tampa Bay & Company

TAMPA BAY, FL — Following a three-month national search, Tampa Bay & Company named Santiago Corrada as president and CEO, effective May 2013. "We are confident that Santiago's abilities, experience and diverse background will benefit Tampa Bay & Company," said Jim Dean, chairman of Tampa Bay & Company's board of directors and president of Busch Gardens Tampa Bay. "He brings a sincere love for this community, a progressive leadership style and a collaborative approach that will serve this organization and our community well." With more than 20 years of public service and management experience, Corrada currently serves as chief of staff for the City of Tampa. Previously, Corrada served as convention center, tourism, recreation and cultural arts administrator directly overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Tampa Convention Center. www.visittampabay.com



CORRADA

EVENTS CALENDAR

MAY 21-23, 2013
IMEX '13 WORLDWIDE EXHIBITION FOR INCENTIVE TRAVEL, MEETINGS & EVENTS
Messe Frankfurt, Hall 8
Frankfurt, Germany
www.imex-frankfurt.com

MAY 29-30, 2013
HSMAI MEET WEST 2013
Anaheim Marriott
Anaheim, CA
914-421-3270
www.hsmaimeet.com

JUNE 11-13, 2013
AIBTM - THE AMERICAS MEETINGS & EVENTS EXHIBITION
McCormick Place
Chicago, IL
www.aibtm.com

JUNE 24-27, 2013
PCMA EDUCATION CONFERENCE
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Denver, CO
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www.pcma.org

JULY 15-17, 2013
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202-296-7888
www.destinationmarketing.org

JULY 20-23, 2013
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972-702-3051
www.mpiweb.org

SEPTEMBER 4-5, 2013
HSMAI MEET NATIONAL 2013
Walter E. Washington Convention Center
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Study on Purchasing Practices for Motivational Travel Programs Released

CHICAGO, IL — How have purchasing practices for incentive and motivational travel programs changed in recent years? This and related questions were the focus of a joint research study “Purchasing Motivational Travel,” conducted by the Site International Foundation and IMEX, the worldwide exhibition for incentive travel, meetings and events. Utilizing the combined databases of The Site Index Panel and the IMEX Group, the study asked industry professionals to comment on their experiences in purchasing motivational travel. According to Jane E. Schuldtt, CITE, CIS, Site International Foundation

2013 president, “The results of this joint study on purchasing practices for motivational travel programs were very informative, lending credence to what many practitioners have been experiencing anecdotally. Behaviors throughout the supply chain are heavily influenced by the economy, with actions and decisions continuing to be subjected to close scrutiny by the customer. Taking the findings into account, Site members and clients should immediately adapt their processes and strategies to mitigate the negative impact and enhance the opportunities inherent with change.” Of the 102 study participants, 58

percent represented 22 countries and 41 percent were from the United States, with more than 90 percent of the respondents identifying themselves as service providers. Due to the large preponderance of suppliers, the survey results strongly reflect their concerns and the indecision generated by uncertainty in the state of the worldwide economy.

The lead time for responding to an RFP continues a now-familiar trend. Sixty-three percent (63 percent) of study participants claim to have even less time to respond than in the past. The bane of all suppliers — requests for corporate-required competitive bids — are reported by 65 percent of respondents as the main cause for losing out on a bid. The second most common reason cited was price, at 53 percent.

To obtain a full copy of the study’s executive summary, go to www.siteglobal.com

MEETING VALUES



Hyatt Resorts and Spas in Hawaii.

The Hyatt More Meetings offer is valid for groups booking multiple meetings at Hyatt Resorts and Spas in Hawaii. Book two qualifying meetings and earn two rewards; three meetings, three rewards; and up to five meetings, five rewards including: 100,000 Hyatt Gold Passport bonus points per meeting and Hyatt Gold Passport Diamond status for two years; 3 percent rebate off master bill; complimentary Internet access in paid guest rooms; no attrition fees for up to 50 percent slippage; 1/40 comp room; complimentary coffee break; and more. Participating Hawaii resorts include Hyatt Regency Waikiki Beach Resort and Spa, Hyatt Regency Maui Resort and Spa (pictured) and Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort and Spa. 800-55-HYATT, www.hyatt.com/hyatt/resorts/hawaii

■ **Hilton Orlando, Orlando, FL.** The weekend and holiday group incentive offers a 5 percent room revenue rebate back to the master account for groups with 100 peak room nights or more and at least one catered meal booked now through designated weekends or holidays through 2015. Planners also receive from four to eight additional perks depending on number of nights, including: comp welcome reception; meeting breaks; airport transportation; comp Wi-Fi in meeting rooms. Contact Gino Marasco, director of sales, gino.marasco@hilton.com, 407-313-8428, www.thehiltonorlando.com.

■ **Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, FL.** The VIP Passport Package, valid for meetings booked by December 31, 2013 and actualized now through April 30, 2013 or August 1, 2013 through February 28, 2014, includes from one to three of the following depending upon number of nights: 3 percent rebate to master account; double HHonors Points; poolside cabana with beverages; and 10 VIP Passports including comp valet parking, daily beach chair, one comp signature beverage and comp daily access to the spa lounge areas; and more. Contact Matthew Price, director of sales and event planning, 850-267-9601, mprice@hiltonsandestinbeach.com, www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com



Photo credits: 1. Site EMEA Forum 2013, Antwerp, Belgium (streetevent.be); 2-3 DMAI; 4. HSMAL; 5. GBTA; 6. GIBTM; 7. IACC-Americas

1 Motivational events industry professionals gathered March 11–13 at Radisson Blu Astrid Hotel, Antwerp for the Site EMEA Forum 2013. The program included a celebration of Site’s 40 years leading the industry in connecting motivational experiences with business results. At the forum’s gala dinner, attendees dressed up in their best ‘70s style to celebrate the founding of Site in 1973. **2, 3** These attendees joined nearly 1,000 fellow industry professionals in the nation’s capital for the Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) Week in Washington including Destinations Showcase, DMAI’s largest face-to-face gathering connecting DMOs and meeting professionals. **4** The Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAL) and the HSMAL Foundation recently announced a \$1 million donation from the Mike and Andrea Leven Family Foundation. Leven, (left) the president and COO of Las Vegas Sands, is a longtime industry leader and former international president of HSMAL. **5** Participants at the Conferencia GBTA Mexico 2013, held in Mexico City. **6** GIBTM 2013, held March 25 at Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre, tripled corporate meetings buyer attendance, accounting for 35 percent of all hosted buyers attending the show, compared to 11 percent from the corporate sector in 2012. The total number of hosted buyers was evenly divided among the Middle East, Europe and Asia Pacific. **7** Neil Pompan, CMP, president of Pompan Hospitality Global, was recently awarded the Mel Hosansky Award for Distinguished Service, the highest honor bestowed by The International Association of Conference Centres-Americas.

By Walter Stugger

Does a 2,000-Year-Old Statue Belong at Your Meeting?

At a global meeting our company helped produce in Rome, one of the main attractions never moved a muscle. I did the booking but didn't complain. After all, the talent was nearly 2,000 years old.

The attraction was a statue, the well-preserved bust of Emperor Diocletian. The sculpture resided permanently within the ancient thermal baths that are among the surviving glories of ancient Rome. We had secured unusual private access to the renowned Baths of Diocletian, and I am sure the breathtaking setting and the emperor's compelling visage assured all arrivals this meeting would not be business as usual.

At our client, Infineon Technologies AG, expectations ran high. How could we harness the power of history and the arts to motivate the global network of Infineon distributors who constituted the meeting's invitees — executives from around the world coming to talk about technology trends and market demands, business channels and profit margins? They had so much on their minds besides antiquity and aesthetics. How would they react?

No One Slept!

Our creative team set to work, animating the emperor through adroit use of pin lights. A troop of modern dancers performed around the statue, using choreography created for the occasion. Chefs got busy cooking meals inspired by Cucina Romana. Puccini arias serenaded us and bestowed a name to the event: "Nessun Dorma." At this meeting, surely no one slept!

One of the Infineon distributors greeted me the next morning. "Walter," he began, "last night was remarkable! I could feel this 2,000-year-old legacy. The art, the music, the sense of continuity with the classical world were amazing. But at the same time it was so contemporary and with all the technology being used."

I appreciated his comments and was especially proud when our program earned the gold prize for corporate meetings at the Austrian Event Award competition last year.

We consider the arts to be our partners around the world. While fine artists thrive around the globe, we consistently look to showcase them in their own environment. In our experience, the environment is a major factor in both the creation of art and its reception.

Vital Qualities for Gatherings

Art is the ultimate flexing of the creative muscle. It pro-

vides inspiration and sustenance through the gifts of painters and poets, sculptors and choreographers.

This is by no means limited to organizations dedicated to cultural achievement. It was Albert Einstein who said, "Logic will take you from A to B. Creativity will take you everywhere." Einstein understood that cultural achievement produces creativity, inspires collaboration and spurs innovative thinking in all walks of life. These are vital qualities for every gathering.

Maybe it runs in my blood. I was born and raised in Salzburg, the famous hometown of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. I began my career as a licensed Salzburg tour guide, introducing visitors to the streets and cafés, the history and the abiding culture that nurtured the great composer. Walking through the town we both knew so well, I helped connect contemporary visitors with the composer's historical life. The composer was never Herr Mozart to me, he was mischievous Wolfgang! Without setting out to overthrow the standard tour, I was merely introducing visitors to an old friend. The connection and the passion I felt both made a difference, I think.

My experience introducing Wolfgang to visitors from around the world taught me lessons I will never forget. I learned the power of the arts to inspire is remarkable and enduring. The sweep of opera, the impact of theater, the excitement of dance — the arts embrace us, stimulate us, push



Two examples of how Stugger integrates the arts into programs are: an inspiring acrobatics performance at Baths of Diocletian before a living statue of the Emperor and (above) a projection of Leonardo da Vinci joining a montage of creative and artistic geniuses from throughout Italian history.

us to create and collaborate. The arts drive us to banish the predictable and incubate the exceptional. The arts move us to transcend the limitations of today, nurturing the potential of tomorrow.

I urge you to put my suggestion to the test. Prior to your next event, go out and discover the local poets, the regional

authors, the city's great painters. Find ways to integrate them into your program. Bring the culture of the community into the exposition center, make the most of the location, and watch the difference it makes.

In Salzburg you can still hear the laughter of young Mozart in the streets; you just have to know how to listen. **C&IT**

“Einstein understood that cultural achievement **produces creativity, inspires collaboration and spurs innovative thinking** in all walks of life.”



Walter Stugger

is co-founder of inspiria event service GmbH, helping companies and organizations meet successfully in Europe and beyond. People chose Inspiria for local connections across Europe, for access to cultural traditions and authentic expressions, and for events that are always unique and client-specific. Contact Stugger at w.stugger@inspiria.net and visit online at inspiria-global-events.com.

Unique Experiences

Await Attendees at Small Meetings and Executive Retreats

By Stella Johnson

The dark clouds are lifting. The outlook is brighter and meetings are back. For the first time in a number of years, the Meeting Professionals International (MPI) Business Barometer report reveals significant, uplifting shifts in the meeting and event industry. During the last few years of budget cuts and poor economic conditions, savvy meeting professionals not only learned how to adapt and persevere but emerged leaner, meaner and equipped with “new expectations, new tools at their disposal and new opportunities to address the strengthening meeting and event market,” according to the MPI February 2013 barometer.

During the worst of times, new solutions were sought for small meetings and executive retreats. Always a staple of the meetings industry, these events were transformed as meeting professionals created innovative and imaginative ways to get the most out of fewer and smaller meetings. Nowadays, staid and boring meetings are being replaced with innovative events accompanied by daylight and

fresh air, healthful snacks and beverages, intimate and relaxed meeting environments, casual attire, as well as flexible meeting agendas — resulting in greater attendee engagement.

Trends Tell the Story

“21st Century Meeting Space is Different” declares Benchmark Hospitality International as the No. 4 item in their 2012 Top 10 Meeting Trends.

“Meeting space isn’t what it used to be,” states the Houston, TX-based hospitality management company report, which is based on information derived from their 39 award-winning hotels, resorts and conference centers. “It’s more creative! Today’s planners are looking for properties with outsized meeting rooms out of doors, inspirational and non-traditional nooks and crannies for small gatherings and breakouts inside. ...Meetings today are just as apt to conclude around the campfire, fire pit or bonfire, as they are at the bar.”

Also, Benchmark’s newly released 2013 Top 10 Trends offers information

of particular interest to planners of small meetings. Trend No. 7, “What’s New in Meeting Room Demand,” notes that “Planners need extra breakouts in order to accommodate more “intimate attendee interface options.”

Hal Powell, Jr., vice president of sales and marketing, Benchmark Hospitality International, told *Corporate & Incentive Travel*, “We have noted an increase in demand for additional breakout meeting rooms and boardrooms for smaller sessions. While programs that are typically meeting space intensive, such as accounting or consulting firm executive training and larger sales meetings, are on the rise, we also are seeing an uptick in retreats and board meetings.”

Benchmark is addressing the issue and has already added new boardrooms at its resorts and hotels, starting with two new boardrooms at Costa d’Este Beach Resort in Vero Beach, FL.

Ahead of the Curve

The story doesn’t stop there. In

The Executive Board Room at Foxwoods Resort Casino is just one of many options for small meeting venues at the Connecticut meeting property.

Photo courtesy of Foxwoods Resort Casino

August, a small group of senior level conference executives met in a relaxed, intimate environment for a conference about the dynamics and the future of conferences. Conducted by host Robert B. Tucker, president and founder of Innovation Resource, a consulting and executive development firm located in Santa Barbara, CA, 14 professional conference producers met at the exclusive Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara for the first-ever Elite Retreat. Each executive was asked in advance to consider, “what is the future of the conference industry” and come prepared to discuss key challenges and best practices. The group discussed changing demographics, new business and delivery models, new technologies, budget pressures and heightened competition for attendee loyalty.

Graham H. Scott, vice president of business development, Innovation Resource Consulting Group, says innovation is necessary to reinvent conferences. “Even successful group organizers need to fundamentally rethink the entire conference experience in order to deliver greater perceived value and return on investment,” says Scott. “This requires revitalization and rethinking of education, as well as networking. It entails creating events that surprise and delight because they are immersive and multi-sensory, rather than merely informational and predictable.”

Furthermore, Scott emphasizes that the conference of the future, particularly small events, requires the meeting professional to think “ahead of the curve,” he says. “A tremendous amount of creativity, collaboration skills, innovation, experimentation and risk-taking are the ingredients to success here, as was demonstrated at the Elite Retreat where we provided opportunities for personal growth while sparking transformative ideas.”

Illustrating how outside-the-box this small, three-day summit was, Elite Retreat had no formal itinerary, but rather encouraged a free-flowing conversation and exchange of ideas among the participants, which manifested

itself at a dinner downtown, during a tour of Santa Barbara, at a wine tasting at Tucker’s home, or in an intimate conference room at the Four Seasons.

Participants deemed the retreat a success and all came away with great ideas to take back to their organizations. One attendee said the conference came together seamlessly both in its intimacy and exclusiveness, and was “something we would never have

the opportunity to do.” While another called the conference “a right-brain experience with music and storytelling to cement the cognitive learning that was going on.”

Incentive Retreats

Another form of small gatherings celebrates the accomplishments of top performers.

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“Small meetings provide a unique experience for attendees — one with many opportunities.”



Steve Spokane
Vice President of Marketing
and Customer Retention
McKesson Corporation, Alpharetta, GA

president of marketing and customer retention at McKesson Corporation in Alpharetta, GA, one of the largest and oldest health care services companies in the country, specializes in incentive programs. Last year, Spokane arranged an incentive program for the firm’s Summit Club of 13 top performers in Napa Valley. Spokane, who often books large brands such as The Westin and Marriott for sales meetings, needed an exclusive and very private retreat in an attractive, unique destination for this event. “Our sales kick-off meetings are somewhat larger — up to 250 attendees — so we needed a different type of property than a brand-name hotel due to the small size and nature of this event.”

Spokane and his team selected the Napa Valley region because of the unique, intimate experience it could provide for the small group of top achievers.

While in Napa, the incentive winners engaged in extraordinary experiences starting with a hot-air balloon ride over the valley. “It was probably the most memorable activity of the meeting and something the attendees may not ever get to experience again,” he says.

After a welcome reception the first evening, the attendees spent the next day touring wineries, enjoying a private dine-around in Yountville, and choosing from among a multitude of activities such as golf, spa services and biking.

The Napa Valley Wine Train, a three-hour, 36-mile journey on restored dining cars through the world’s most well-known wine valleys to the quaint village of St. Helena and back provid-

ed attendees with another memorable experience.

The three-day meeting culminated in a private awards banquet at Cakebread Cellars — a celebrated family-owned vineyard. The feast was not only delicious but high up on the healthful, good-for-you chart, too, as the vintages

were paired with local, fresh produce and food.

DMC Grapes on the Vine Events helped Spokane and his team meet their objectives by selecting the property and planning their activities in Napa, including their invitations, gifts, dinners and wine-tasting trips.

Another unique destination, Foxwoods Resort Casino, located in Mashantucket, CT, offers inspirational experiences for all types of meetings. In only her sixth week as executive assistant to the senior vice president of sales at Rapid7, a Boston, MA-based provider of IT security risk management software and cloud solutions, Julie Bertolino earned plaudits from her small group of sales representatives during their first incentive at Foxwoods. The sales team was rewarded with “praise that they deserved for 2012” as well as “the expectations for 2013.” Bertolino’s goal was to find a high-energy destination, something totally different from past incentive programs. A first-time user of Foxwood Resorts Casino in February, Bertolino says she can’t wait to get back there soon.

No wonder, the event was cut short by a severe snowstorm. However, in typical fashion, the staff at MGM Grand at Foxwoods helped manage the entire event and the weather-related crisis without a hitch, says Bertolino. She explained that the staff was completely supportive and got them in and out of the conveniently located resort quickly so they could return to Boston before public transportation was shut down.

Small groups receive personalized

attention, says Bertolino who had high praise for Kim Simone, sales manager, Foxwoods Resort Casino, from the beginning to the end of the event. “Usually when you meet with the salesperson they hand you off. This time they worked together,” says Bertolino. She adds that the food and beverage staff also were wonderful and responded immediately to an attendee who had both gluten and lactose allergies.

Foxwoods provided both Native American inspiration and built-in entertainment, which provided great opportunities for Rapid7’s sales representatives to have fun on their own and let loose after business meetings. The attendees were thoroughly impressed with the venue, the chips provided by the company for the casino, and the food and beverage at Foxwoods. An executive dinner also was held at chef Tom Colicchio’s Craftsteak, one of several fine-dining restaurants onsite. Bertolino says the group was very energized when they returned to the office in Boston, and the experience also



“Usually when you meet with the salesperson they hand you off. This time they worked together.”

Julie Bertolino
Executive Assistant
Rapid7
Boston, MA

gave them a positive, exciting outlook for the future.

Foxwoods Resort Casino, the largest casino resort in North America, has perfected small meetings within its vast spaces. In fact, the resort says nearly 70 percent of their meetings business is comprised of small meetings (75 people or fewer). The resort boasts 37 smaller meeting rooms, including the 20-seat MGM Grand at Foxwoods Boardroom, which features

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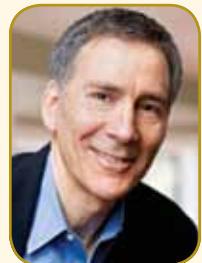
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Rules of the Road for Small Meetings

Andy Satter, president of New York City-based Satter & Associates, has successfully been designing and facilitating all types of meetings for two decades. Part of Satter's success is based on rules of the road that he has developed through the years. Satter says, "Small meetings are often exclusive meetings, and my clients hire us because they realize that there's a lot more to an effective and successful meeting than just chicken dinners, PowerPoint presentations and long-winded speeches."



SATTER

Satter's No. 1 principle is "use the physical space purposefully, and it becomes your ally. Ignore physical space, and it becomes your undoing," he cautions. "The space is that important and sets the tone for the meeting."

For small meetings, Satter typically recommends venues that are conducive for intimate conversation, as well as those that offer a sense of privacy.

"One size typically does not fit all. This is critical if there is a difficult or important agenda, like downsizing or mergers," he notes. "Some venues are more appropriate for smaller groups than others. If it's a one-day meeting, find a venue where everything is nearby. That way people aren't

wasting precious time walking from their guest rooms to the meeting room or the dining room, and so on. If it's a multiday meeting, be more relaxed and consider something like an exclusive rustic retreat." — SJ

10 LCD pop-up monitors, a smart board, and a 65-inch TV for displays and videoconferencing. Foxwoods has 137 suites, in both The Grand Pequot Tower and MGM Grand at Foxwoods, which are ideal for smaller meetings, private breakfasts or cocktail hours.

'To Event Differently'

Laurie Brewer, a junior event architect at TCG Events, a meeting and event planning company located in Charlotte, NC, says her company's mantra is "to event differently." TCG Events' website describes the company as "allergic to the typical, expected, conventional and banal." Instead, they "aspire to have each client engagement be an evidentiary experience of the integrity, expertise and necessity of the event planning industry."

Last May, Brewer orchestrated a 40-person event for a corporate client at the Grandover Hotel & Events Center in Greensboro, NC. The event's objective was to gather employees who work in offices across the state for teambuilding and bonding, and, at the same time, provide classroom opportunities for CEU credits.

Brewer says Grandover was selected because it is an easy drive from Charlotte, Raleigh and Greensboro. Also, the price point was right, and the resort offered a spa venue and golf course onsite, which was important to

the group. The 1,500-acre old-world estate was designed as a corporate conference center from the beginning and has solid block walls designed to block out distractions and ensure security and privacy.

"This is a great spot for a small, two-day meeting and was an easy drive for our attendees," says Brewer. "While we had our education sessions, there also were plenty of other activities including horseback riding. All meals were onsite, and guests had a choice of spa services or golf lessons."

Noteworthy

The 273-room Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino, located in the mountains just south of Ruidoso, in Mescalero, NM, has an abundance of flexible meeting space and accommodates small meetings and executive retreats well with 14 different meeting rooms ranging in size from 655 sf to 7,322 sf. The property boasts a state-of-the-art business center, smart boards, conference call capabilities, professional staging and an outdoor patio perfect for hosting pre- and post-events.

For true inspiration and an unforgettable small meeting, the inn provides meeting attendees with an abundance of recreation options such as an 18-hole golf course, an indoor pool and workout facility, horseback riding, as well as paddle boating, kayaking and

fishing on Lake Mescalero. Exciting Las Vegas-style gaming action and world-class entertainment are always on tap as are the resort's sumptuous selection of dining establishments.

Planners who need an exotic, luxury destination for their small meeting may consider the Preferred Hotel Group (PHG), which boasts more than 650 destinations in more than 85 countries around the globe. For example, an incentive or executive program would be right at home at Cambridge Beaches Resort & Spa, located on a 30-acre peninsula in Sandys, Bermuda. Inspiration and great ideas flow easily from attendees working out of the executive boardroom or one of three historic cottages. Four beaches, three tennis courts and a spa surround the 94 cottage-style accommodations, which face the Atlantic Ocean and pink-sand beaches. Activities include moonlight cruises, beach parties, offsite lunches at the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club and dinners at the Bermuda Aquarium.

Final Thoughts

In summary, perhaps Steve Spokane said it best: "Small meetings provide a unique experience for attendees — one with many opportunities for the group to not only get to know each other on a deeper level but also to share experiences that aren't often possible with larger meetings." C&IT



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The Best Defense

By Derek Reveron

Proactive Planners Provide Safe and Secure Meeting Environments

Some threats to the physical safety and security of attendees, including natural disasters such as Hurricane Sandy, provide at least some warning. But other types of threats such as accidents, medical issues, crime and terrorist attacks strike with no notice and can disrupt or completely ruin a meeting or event.



That's why planners must have a written strategy to assess and mitigate safety risks. "Having a security plan is part of the responsibility for putting on a successful meeting," says Susan Goldberg, CMP, president of Glen Cove, NY-based Segue Consulting Inc. A meeting planner and risk management consultant, Goldberg says, "Although planners wear 12 hats, they have to understand that safety is an integral part of planning. They have to start early in the planning process to identify risks and do it simultaneously with other duties. Planners must take a proactive role in security."

Corporate security experts such as William Besse agree. "Security planning should begin when you know what kind of trip it is and where you plan to go," says Besse, vice president, consulting and investigations of Los Angeles, CA-headquartered Andrews International LLC, a full-service provider of risk and mitigation services. "Starting early can dictate whether security can be done easily and inexpensively or whether it should be more robust, complex and costly. Security should not be tacked onto the end of the planning process after making reservations, itineraries and other commitments," says Besse, who is based in Irving, TX.

Ignoring safety and security could lead to legal problems, warn security experts. Indeed, legal precedent and case law have established that meeting planning is among the professions and industries that have an obligation to provide a reasonable standard of care while taking actions that could foreseeably harm others.

Planners can avoid legal issues and keep attendees safe by preparing in advance. Medical issues, accidents and incidents related to human frailty are the most common issues that occur. "In all the trips I have taken with large or small groups, there are far more cases of medical emergencies of varying degrees than any other kind of security incident. I spend a lot of time preparing for medical emergencies," says Besse, who pre-

viously served as the director of global security for Mary Kay Cosmetics.

Some planners can go many years or even their entire careers without ever facing medical emergencies or other significant security threats. But don't count on being one of those people, planners and security experts advise. It's best to heed the advice of planners, such as those interviewed for this article, who have experienced security and safety issues. Here are some of their examples:

- **Bomb threat and evacuation.**

Goldberg once experienced a bomb threat at a meeting at a resort in Florida. "We evacuated the hotel, and the FBI came. They searched the hotel and there was no bomb. It turned out there was a waiter who called in the threat offsite. They found him by looking at who called in sick that day," says Goldberg.

- **Audience member rushes stage.**

Goldberg cites another example: "We had a situation at a meeting where a person in the audience rushed the stage. We didn't know what she



"Having a security plan is part of the responsibility for putting on a successful meeting. ...Planners must take a proactive role in security."

Susan Goldberg, CMP, President
Segue Consulting Inc., Glen Cove, NY

was doing. It turned out that she was from Hawaii and wanted to put a lei around the speaker's neck. Security stopped the woman by gently diverting her in the opposite direction."

- **Information security breach.**

Another planner, a CMP, recalls the following incident: "I had a group of 70 staying at a five-star hotel in Mexico, and the fitness center required our last and first names and room number upon sign-in," says the planner. "The sign-in sheet was unattended and just sitting there for all to see. It was standard procedure and no one had ever questioned it. I spoke with the (fitness center) manager and general manager



about the risks it posed. It was changed the very same day."

- **Concealed weapon.**

Yet another planner faced this near-horrifying scenario. "A well-dressed person came to the registration desk with a briefcase, casually asking questions about the names of people who attended. A person at the registration desk became suspicious, contacted us, and we contacted security. We found out that person had a gun in the briefcase and had come specifically to target someone. She was arrested."

New Strategies

Due to potential physical threats, planners and corporations are taking several steps to increase security and safety for meeting groups and business travelers. According to a recent survey by

the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), travel managers have implemented several strategies.

Alternative transportation arrangements is the most common tactic, with 32 percent of respondents taking this route. Other actions include emergency contact information (70 percent); tracking support (66 percent); destination and crisis information (59 percent); crisis and evacuation plans (44 percent); and mass mobile communication tools (29 percent).

Experts say that most planners lack such strategies, including an overall safety and security plan. Meeting planners tend to avoid creating a plan because they fear it is too time consuming, dif-

“Planners should ask all venues that are considered for the meeting to provide a copy of safety and security plans and build ongoing communication for the organizers and attendees.”

Kevin Iwamoto, GLP, GTP, Vice President, Industry Strategy Active Network, San Jose, CA



ficult and overwhelming. However, once a plan is finished, it can serve as a blueprint for every meeting, large and small, with certain modifications for each event.

The Components of the Plan

The plan should include steps to take before meetings and after a safety or security incident. When creating the plan, it's best to imagine problems that could occur in four basic categories:

- Natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes and storms.
- Accidents — medical and human frailty issues.
- Crime.
- Technology and computers.

Kevin Iwamoto, GLP, GTP, vice president of industry strategy for Active Network, a San Jose, CA-based online registration and event management company, advises planners to always include a venue and location/destination safety and security review and advise clients if the meeting site or destination has a history of issues. “Planners should ask all venues that are considered for the meeting to provide a copy of safety and security plans and build ongoing communication for the organizers and attendees,” says Iwamoto, former president and CEO of the National Business Travel Association (former name of the GBTA).

“Planners can get information from various sources and should develop a checklist of standard operating procedures to demonstrate due diligence in safety and security vetting for every meeting they handle,” he adds.

Here are additional pointers for creating a security plan that covers all contingencies for small and large meetings.

- **Conduct a risk assessment.**

Identify possible threats. These include food poisoning, natural disasters, criminal activity, demonstrations, terrorism, evacuations, fires, construction, hazardous materials, power outages, transportation issues and work stoppages.

- **Determine unique threats.** For example, a corporation's product, service or executives may have received negative publicity and could be targets of protestors inside and outside of a meeting. Is there a VIP who travels with personal security or requires extra protection or a safe room? Perhaps an attendee has received a personal threat or has a disgruntled partner or spouse.
- **Determine medical issues.** Ask questions on the registration form such as, “Are there any medical issues that you care to voluntarily share?”
- **Assess other meetings.** Find out if there are meetings taking place simultaneously on the property. Does the other group have any unique security risks? For example, a company wouldn't want to hold a new product introduction meeting in the same hotel where a competitor is booked.



“We also hold an in-person meeting at the event venue to ensure that every tiny detail of the meeting is addressed and thoroughly understood.”

Mary Ann Willingham, Vice President, Meetings and Incentives Travel Leaders Group LLC, Plymouth, MN

- **Talk to hotel staff.** Determine if the hotel has safety and security procedures in place, preferably during a site visit. Mary Ann Willingham, vice president, meetings and incentives, for Plymouth, MN-based Travel Leaders Group LLC, a full-service

travel agency, includes hotel security staff in her pre-meeting planning sessions with properties. Willingham explains her approach: “These sessions take place in advance of the final preparation for the event via conference calls and webcasts. We

- also hold an in-person meeting at the event venue to ensure that every tiny detail of the meeting is addressed and thoroughly understood. During these sessions, we review hotel security procedures, sleeping room access practices, after-hours security staffing and any unique security officers hired for non-standard duties,” says Willingham.
- **Obtain a copy of the plan.** If the hotel doesn't provide a copy, ask questions about the facility's security procedures. Besse suggests talking to the head of security and general manager and asking questions from a security checklist that includes the following:
What kinds of incidents have taken place in and around the hotel?
How quickly do police respond?
How long does it take ambulances and emergency medical services to arrive?
What are the evacuation procedures?
What happens in the middle of the night if a fire alarm rings?

- **Talk to local law enforcement.** “You can always contact local police and tell them you are bringing a group, where they will be staying and for how long. Most police departments have a community liaison that will be glad to help you” by providing crime statistics for the hotel and surrounding area, says Goldberg.
- **Assess every meeting.** A key thing to remember about safety risk assess-

ments: Conduct them even when you return to a property where you have previously met, even if it was the prior year. “We do risk assessments every time regardless of whether we met there because things can change — staffs, the environment around the hotel and the venue,” says Besse. “It doesn't have to be a full-blown assessment if you are going back to the same place, but do some level of assessment,” he says.

- **Share the plan.** Go through what-if scenarios and response procedures with the staff and train them. Goldberg says she compares it to producing a movie. “I have a script (security plan) and a production team (meeting staff), and we choreograph our relationship with each other.”
- **911 procedures.** “At a large hotel or resort, sometimes it takes medical help several minutes after they arrive to find a person in a meeting room,” says Besse. “I like to know what the protocol is for helping the EMTs find the person in need after getting to the hotel. It's crucial that whomever calls 911 be able to direct EMTs to the property entrance that's nearest to the meeting room and the quickest way to get there once inside.”
- **Media relations.** Determine who will handle relations with media, relatives, attendees, vendors and the hotel should something serious happen. Designate responsible people who will handle inquiries onsite and at the planner's home office.
- **Create a contact list.** Include phone numbers and location of the nearest medical facilities, ambulance services, and fire and police stations. Also include numbers for the hotel security staff, manager, concierge, head of food and beverage, and maintenance and meeting vendors.

The Global Approach

Apply the basics of the security plan to meetings in foreign countries, but

take into account some key additional issues. In recent years, spontaneous political and economic protests have sporadically erupted in the Middle East, Europe, Asia and Latin America. Technology such as social media fuels causes so that a small protest can spread quickly and threaten a meeting.

In addition, groups from the U.S. stand out in other countries, making them obvious potential targets. “The global nature of the business travel industry can inevitably lead to travelers being in dangerous situations,” Mike McCormick, GBTA executive director and COO, says in a statement releasing the group's survey results. “Travel managers need to have a crisis plan ready to go at a moment's notice to ensure they can



“Starting early can dictate whether security can be done easily and inexpensively or whether it should be more robust, complex and costly.”

William Besse, Vice President, Consulting and Investigations Andrews International LLC, Irving, TX

help get employees out of frightening situations and return them to safety.”

Security experts offer this advice on keeping groups safe in other countries:

- **Follow major news about the foreign nation.** Track demonstrations and major political upheavals along with the impact they are having on a group's meeting destination.
- **Provide groups with information about a country's customs.** This will avoid unintentionally offending people and increasing the likelihood of a confrontation.
- **Review local laws and procedures.** Specifically, check out the laws for police and emergency medical staff responding to incidents.
- **Know the location and phone number of the local U.S. embassy.** When planning the meeting, get help from the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), a U.S. State Department website. The site allows users to get security-related information about a country and receive assistance from a U.S. em-



bassy or consulate. Register for the service at <https://step.state.gov/step>.

- **Maintain records.** Security problems that occur overseas and in the U.S. require effective record-keeping and follow-up. Iwamoto cautions planners to maintain detailed records “of their efforts in research and execution of safety and security planning,” Iwamoto says, “Keep dates, times, names, conversations and detailed written records of planning activi-

ties as information will most likely be requested by legal representatives from all sides to determine culpability. This is where working with corporate risk management whenever possible really works in favor of a planner because it demonstrates a good faith effort to plan for the safety and security of attendees in advance.”

Final Thoughts

Experts advise independent meeting planners to view security planning as part of their standard services. Even planners who lack the time or expertise to do complete safety planning should bring up the issue with clients to ask how they prefer to approach it.

More planners should take an approach similar to that described by Willingham: “It is our policy to use our knowledge and expertise and the resources available to us and the meeting venue to do everything we can to ensure the meetings we coordinate are a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone involved.”

C&IT

The New Face of Incentive Travel

By Karen Brost

No More One-Size-Fits-All for a Multi-Generational Work Force

After a few lean years during the recession, incentive travel is coming back in a big way. But that doesn't mean it's business as usual. As in any segment of the meetings industry, incentive programs are continuing to evolve to meet the changing needs of their attendees.

"It's no longer that one-size-fits-all mentality, it just can't be," explains Jeff Eells, president of TenDot Corporate

Travel in Lincoln, NE. "Our father's incentive program is not the same thing that my kids' program is going to be in another 20 years or what it is right now.

"I think the biggest thing that we've seen so far over the last year or two is the change of generation," he continues. "You're seeing a lot younger qualifiers instead of the people who are in their 60s and 70s who are qualifying. Now it's people in their late 20s, 30s and 40s

that are qualifying for the trip. Because of the age difference, there's just a new need for what we do on incentive trips.

"People want to be more engaged when they're on these programs," he

continues. "It's just not enough to dump people off on a warm-weather beach and say, 'OK, great, have a good time. We'll see you on Sunday when it's time for departure.' People are looking

for a lot more engagement, a lot more activities, a lot more involvement. It's not about sitting down for a formal dinner with suit and tie anymore. It's about being out on the beach or being in a local

downturn. What companies are saying is that in order to get the right behavior, the right performance and the right additional effort that they're asking people to invest here, they do need to provide a

Younger incentive qualifiers would rather engage in "weekend warrior" activities — like this mountain-biking group at Keystone Resort in Colorado — than attend a stuffy, formal dinner.

community or having one of the local chefs come and do a farm-to-table dinner or helping the chef get something ready. They want to be more hands on. I think we're seeing a shift where people are willing to go take a hike or go take a bike ride or a canoe trip or a rafting trip or things like that because they want to get that rush. They want to play a little weekend warrior. They see it as a great opportunity to do that."

Deciding on a Destination

Experts say that the choice of destination plays a key role in an incentive program's success. After all, people will work that much harder to earn a trip to a place they've always dreamed of visiting.

"We are seeing that participants and companies are more open to international and remote and creative destinations," explains Steve O'Malley, senior vice president for Fenton, MO-based Maritz Travel. "They are getting more adventurous relative to places that were in favor maybe 10 years ago and during the



Photo courtesy of Keystone Resort



Photo courtesy of Ritz-Carlton

A feel-good component of many incentive programs includes a corporate social responsibility activity, such as this Ritz-Carlton Volunteering sand dune protection project.



Photo courtesy of the K Club

Ireland is an incentive hot spot, as exemplified Dublin City Centre. The K Club was anointed

by the K Club (Smurfit Clubhouse shown) near one of the world's top 10 golf resorts by CNN.



Photo courtesy of Mexico Tourism Board

Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, (above) and the Caribbean are home to all-inclusive beachfront resorts, which have improved their offerings for groups in recent years.

Jeff Eells

President
TenDot Corporate
Travel Inc.
Lincoln, NE



“Now it’s people in their late 20s, 30s and 40s that are qualifying for the trip. Because of the age difference, there’s just a new need for what we do on incentive trips. ...People are looking for a lot more engagement, a lot more activities, a lot more involvement.”

destination and a complete package that is memorable, motivational and meaningful. It has to get people’s attention. It has to drive their performance, and I think that is why you’re looking at a little bit more of an exotic destination.”

“People are still pretty committed to North America,” Eells notes. “Now they’re also taking more of a look at the Caribbean, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Aruba. Nevis is one of our favorite places. They’re also looking for Costa Rica. We’re seeing some movement down in Colombia. It now is one of the places, in my opinion, to watch. It has fabulous hotels, great activities...a really over-the-top experience for not a lot of money. I’m always a huge fan of that.

“The Colombian government as a whole has done a fantastic job of getting planners down there,” he continues.

“It’s not the Colombia of the ’80s and ’90s where you’re thinking ‘Scarface.’ It’s not that drug-riddled culture they’ve been known for in the past. It has the most hospitable people that you’ll ever meet. Brazil’s going to be another huge location. We’re doing a huge program for the World Cup there for 2014.”

Rodger Stotz, chief research officer for the Incentive Research Foundation, recently gave a presentation at the Philippine M.I.C.E. Conference on “What’s In, What’s Hot” in incentive travel. In his presentation, he identified the following countries as being emerging incentive destinations: China, Bali, Vietnam, Cambodia, South Africa, Argentina and Peru.

Some warm-weather destinations have been known for their all-inclusive packages, which have often received a bad rap in the past. “The all-inclusives have come a long way in the last five or six years,” Eells explains. “It’s not (any longer) that schlocky ‘feed them, water them and get them home.’ They’ve put a lot of thought and effort into making the food good and the service good. They have to, out of necessity.”

O’Malley agrees. “Some of the all-inclusive properties that we use quite often, primarily in the Caribbean and Mexico, are some of the nicest properties that I’ve ever seen.”

No More One-Size-Fits-All

With so many generations in the work force, it’s no longer easy to pick a one-size-fits-all destination. “Not everyone will say that a beach destination is what is going to really appeal to them,” O’Malley notes. “Thirty years ago it could have been a grand European capital, and that would have been fine because you had a much more homogeneous work force. I really think that (now) you need to offer multiple choices of destinations because destination does tend to be one of the biggest drivers of attractiveness of an incentive travel program. Where possible, you need to build choice around destination, then once you get to the destination, build in choices to the destination itself.

“Probably a quarter of our clients of-

fer that,” he continues. “They find it unbelievably motivating. It only makes sense that if people can shape their own experience, choose their own destination, that they’ll strive that much harder for it.” He gave the example that an employee with young children might be far more motivated by the prospect of a family trip to Orlando than they would by a seven-day program in Europe at this stage of their lives.

“Outside of that warm-weather destination, we’re seeing a lot of Ireland,” Eells describes. “It’s hard to go to Ireland and not come back without a big smile on your face. It’s a great place. It’s one of the only places in the world where people will stop you on the street, and say ‘Let’s go have a beer.’ The people are what make Ireland so absolutely incredible. We’ll take incentives over there as much as we can just because of the hospitality of the people. It also has fantastic hotels, easy lift and great transportation while you’re there. I think Ireland is another hot spot right now.”

Panama Case History

Ted Funk, president of Funk Travel,



Cruises are ideal for incentive groups because of their all-inclusive service and value. The atrium on the Carnival Breeze (above) is a great space for networking.

plans an annual sales incentive trip for a client in the agricultural industry. This year, the group traveled to Panama for a week-long program that included a bucket-list-worthy activity — a cruise down the Panama Canal.

For accommodations, Funk’s client chose the luxurious Trump Ocean Club International Hotel & Tower in Panama City. Set on the coastline in the exclusive residential neighborhood of Punta Pacifica, the hotel soars 70 stories above Panama Bay and delivers spectacular city and ocean views. The building’s stunning architectural design is in the shape of a butterfly, the national symbol of Panama. Guests have a choice of multiple restaurants and bars offering indoor and outdoor dining, and plans are underway to add the Spa at Trump and a 75,000-sf casino. The 369-room resort has 46,000 sf of meeting space.

“The rooms were amazing,” Funk describes. The hotel’s sleek, contemporary rooms and suites are spacious, measuring from 525 sf to more than 1,500 sf, and they each offer floor-to-ceiling windows and a private balcony “The hotel has great restaurants, great bars and a lot of public spaces. The pool area was amazing. We had a cocktail party (there), so people could come have a drink or two. We had entertainment — some local Panamanian musicians, which were good.” The hotel’s pool deck is located on the 13th floor and includes five pools, private cabanas and an open-air restaurant and lounge. “Everybody was very happy.”

Panama City provided an excellent home base for exploring much of what the country has to offer, and the group saw and did a lot within a three-hour drive. “We went to the San Blas Islands archipelago to do snorkeling,” Funk explains. “San Blas is amazing. We also went to the jungle twice — to a bird sanctuary and a preserve. They were always on the go, whether it was to San Blas or the rain forest.”

The group also toured the engineering wonder of the Panama Canal on two different days. “We did the visitor’s center on Sunday, and we had a half-transit on Thursday,” he explains. For



The Trump Ocean Club International Hotel & Tower in Panama boasts a stunning butterfly architectural design and offers equally impressive amenities and experiences.

the half-transit tour, the group traveled by ship through two of the canal’s three locks. “It was amazing,” he says, “just to see all those ships going through.” Funk arranged the tour through a local ground operator.

“It was an eye-opener,” Funk says of his Panama experience. “We learned a lot.”

Designing the Program for ROI

“There’s definitely a belief that when designed appropriately, incentive travel is a critical tool for businesses to use to increase the performance of their people,” O’Malley explains. “One of the biggest changes that we’ve seen in the past couple of years is that people are looking for demonstrative return for the dollars that they’re putting against these activities.”

O’Malley says that program design is one of the critical issues that the industry is facing right now. “It’s really gaining a deep understanding of what the client’s goals and objective are in order to design the program correctly, in the rules and campaign phase, as well as ultimately designing the right experience for the guests. That requires a deep understanding of what is appealing to that individual, not necessarily what is appealing to the executives who are forming the programming.”

He adds that a well-designed program should easily pay for itself. “I think you should have anywhere between a three

and five times return on the investment if done correctly, absolutely. When you look at incentive travel, it should be viewed as core to the attraction of new employees, retention and engagement of your current employees, and even viewed as part of their compensation plan. I think the best companies out there do just that. It’s part and parcel of the value proposition that a company is providing to an associate to say, ‘Hey, we value you and want you to be part of this mission that we have.’”

How Long Should it Be?

The typical length of a program has also changed over the years. Brad Williams, senior director, operations for CWT Meetings & Events, remembers the time when there were a lot of five- and six-night programs as well as dual destination programs that spanned eight to 10 nights. “For the most part, those programs are history,” he says. “I would say the average incentive program that we’re seeing now is three to four nights unless it takes a day to get there. So if you’re going to Australia or South Africa, obviously it’s going to be a longer incentive program because of travel time. The other programs that tend to be longer are cruises. We do a lot of six- and seven-night cruises because that’s what the itineraries are, typically.”

He listed some advantages of cruise incentives. “They’re just a tremendous

value because everything is all-inclusive. You don't have to plan a lot of tours because the cruise lines offer a lot of tours. You can simply give people a shipboard credit to use to purchase their own tours, then do a couple of exclusive ones to keep the group together and supplement what the ship already offers."

Williams also discussed regional incentive programs, which can be as short as two nights. "Say the Northeast region was doing a spiff incentive program to drive this particular product in the fourth quarter of the year. They might offer a New York City/Big Apple reward for the people that achieve the results and do something that they couldn't do on their own like a private dinner at the top of Rockefeller Center. The regionals are really great for those spiff-type spur-of-the-moment incentives."

More Trends

If there's one thing incentive attendees love to get, it can be summed up in two words: Free time. O'Malley says, "One of the things our research shows at Maritz Travel Company is when we went out and tested, I'll say, 17 activities that are normally included in incentive travel, the one activity that came back as the most popular was free time. It only makes sense. Everyone is so busy now that having an opportunity to relax and enjoy and take time to do whatever you might want to do with your guests is probably a pretty attractive thing. Free time doesn't really cost the sponsoring company anything, so you can use those dollars to invest in something else, whether it's upgraded menus, an additional night, you name it. It really becomes a choice that the sponsoring company can make."

Williams says, "It used to be that incentive programs were jam-packed full of activity. Now it seems like companies want to have group time, but they also want people to have free time."

"CSR (corporate social responsibility) is still big," he adds, "depending on the corporate culture of the company. If, on an incentive program to Mexico, you take a group out into a village and build bikes and the kids come and they

Steve O'Malley
Senior Vice President
Maritz Travel
Fenton, MO



"One of the things our research shows at Maritz Travel Company is when we went out and tested, I'll say, 17 activities that are normally included in incentive travel, the one activity that came back as the most popular was free time."

ride their bikes off, you feel really good about that whole experience. We have customers that try it once and then it becomes part of the culture. People want to do it every time they go on an incentive program.

"It doesn't have to be a half day out of your incentive program," he elaborates. "It could be a half hour where you go into a ballroom and you pack boxes with chewing gum and magazines and things to send to the service people overseas."

Taking Care of Business

Incentive programs are mainly designed for rest, relaxation and rewards, but they also offer a rare opportunity for company executives to communicate and interact with their top performers. As O'Malley explains, "You have your top performing associates gathered together, so you may as well

take that time to share with them insights as to where you're going to take the company, have them feel even more engaged and help steer the process to take the company to new heights. It's always going to be a matter of trying to balance out the amount of time you spend in a meeting room versus the amount of time you spend at leisure or doing other activities."

Williams described one creative approach to soliciting this kind of input while everyone is gathered together. "It's creating these kinds of lab environments where you're showcasing your new product or new technology. They can touch it and feel it, maybe in small groups rotating throughout the lab. You're not only showing them what's new, but soliciting their input. They feel really good about giving that input, and it's just a great way to share information with your most important stakeholders," he explains. "We've even set them up so that you walk into this space and there are these big beakers with colored water and dry ice. The smoke is coming out and the presenters are in lab coats. You get the sense that 'Wow, we're really experimenting here.'"

Getting Them Hooked

"The best thing about any kind of incentive program," Eells notes, "is if you can get someone out of their comfort zone. Maybe they haven't left the country before, maybe they haven't seen a sugary sand beach before, but as soon as they have that experience, you can watch their eyes open up. Once you know they've been transformed through one of these incentive programs, you know they're hooked from here on out."

"Travel is such a transformative thing," he concludes. "If these men and women bust their butts to qualify, it's up to us to make sure they have a great time and come back for more year after year."

One CEO succinctly summed up the power of incentive travel. At the close of his presentation in the Philippines, Stotz quoted the executive who said, "Our incentive travel program would be the last thing we would eliminate before we turn the lights off." **C&IT**

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Something's New Under the Sunshine Act

But Planners Worry It Won't Be Alright for Pharma Meetings

By Patrick Simms

'Here Comes the Sun" for the pharmaceutical meeting industry this year, as companies will have to report their payments and transfers of value made to physicians (of \$10 or more) to the government under the Physician Payment Sunshine Act. According to the "final rule" issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in February, the recording of spend is to begin August 1, 2013 with reports of data collected from August 1 through the end of 2013 due by March 31, 2014. The CMS will then begin publishing the data on a public website on September 30, 2014, following a legally required 45-day period in which physicians can review the data.

Physician Concerns

But while the well-known Beatles song is hopeful and uplifting, some pharmaceutical meeting planners feel the opposite way about the Sunshine Act. Many physicians, it is feared, will not want to participate in clinical trials and other key meetings held by pharma companies once they learn that all the spend data related to them will be publicized, since they will see it as negative press suggesting they are being "bought" by pharma companies. Granted, many physicians are still unaware of the new policy. According to global technology company MMIS' third-annual survey of doctors and their knowledge of the Sunshine Act, released in February, over half of the 1,000 physicians questioned admitted they didn't know about the annual public reporting requirement. However, 63 percent said they were "deeply concerned" that such data would be available in a publicly searchable database, according to MMIS.

By receiving meetings-related transfers of value, the physicians would "be perceived as doing something unethical when they are not," says Judith Benaroche Johnson, CMP, president and CEO of Rx Meetings Worldwide. "A person can look up his doctor and say, 'Oh, so that's why my medicine costs so much; my doctor is gallivanting all over the country, and they spent \$200,000 on her this year.' But I'm not corrupting that money as a physician; it's just what it cost me to go participate in the trial to bring new drugs to the market."

Johnson also worries that ultimately many physicians will decide they do not have the time to review and dispute any inaccurate payments or transfers of value reported: "Let's say that a

physician attends a 2½-day meeting and the reported value transferred is \$1,000. She says, 'Wait a minute, I did not stay that last half day, I didn't eat breakfast, I didn't eat lunch,' etc., and needs that corrected. But she doesn't have the time to do that. These physicians who do clinical trial meetings are the cream of the crop and they are very busy," Johnson explains. In any case, pharmaceutical meetings are not lavish affairs, she adds. "I wish that the senators that came up with this act could go to a meeting and see the lack of perks. Pharma meal costs have not even increased in the last four years, and you are asking the hotels to produce, four years later, the same meals at no increase in revenue. So nothing fancy is going on here."

Nonetheless, the perception issue, which planners are all too familiar with after the AIG incident, will "have a huge impact on our industry," asserts Kathy Truelove, president of Universal Meeting Management. Effectively, the government will be "promoting that pharmaceutical companies are spending too much money buying physicians to write their products, when that's not the case: They are educating physicians on new drug studies and products. Personally, I don't want to go to a physician who is not educated."

Impact on Meetings

It is likely too soon to determine whether and to what extent the Sunshine Act will adversely affect physician-attended meetings, in terms of a possible reduction in number of events held or in attendance. "I have not seen any major changes at this stage, but since it's just going into effect, if we see any changes it would probably be next year," says Bonnie Weiss, director, Global Pharmaceutical Sales, Americas, Hyatt Hotels.

However, Universal Meeting Management has seen "about a 20 percent drop in pharmaceutical meetings on the mar-



keting and clinical side and about a 10 percent drop on the sales meeting side," notes Truelove. "That's how our numbers have trended. I think certainly the economy plays a role in every industry these days, but specifically for pharmaceuticals, I really think the biggest impact has been because of the Sunshine Act that goes into effect this year. I think leading up to this year people knew that it was coming and everyone started holding back a little bit more."

And while the Sunshine Act would primarily affect physician-attended meetings, there may be a side effect on internal meetings, Truelove supposes. "There is now so much visibility in the pharmaceutical meetings industry, even for their incentive programs. So consumers are questioning, 'Why are you taking 3,000 sales reps to Las Vegas?' It's identical (to the AIG scenario)."

CME Exemption

One type of industry event that in many cases will not be subject to the new reporting requirement is the Continuing Medical Education (CME) meeting. Exempt are CME providers whose programs are accredited or certified by the Accreditation Council for CME, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Dental Association's Continuing Education

Recognition Program, the American Medical Association or the American Osteopathic Association. In addition, the pharma company must not pay the CME speaker directly, choose the speaker nor provide a group of speakers for the CME provider to select from as it pertains to program.

As for non-accredited and non-certified CME providers, as well as those who run various other types of physician-attended programs, it is key to raise awareness of the due diligence that will come into play. Indeed, the most fundamental response to the impending policy change under the Sunshine Act is education in the industry. While large pharma companies who already have corporate integrity agreements in place with the

that had to be met before there was a government reporting requirement." In many cases, those compliance procedures are part of companies' strategic meeting management programs; after all, SMMPs began with large pharma firms. But procedures relating to spend tracking and reporting tend not to be the most developed aspect of SMMPs, some planners feel.

"Most companies have some semblance of an SMMP, but very few have a full-fledged SMMP," says Johnson. "And the first component that is usually in place is the travel policies to dictate exactly when people can travel and what types of transportation they can use. The second thing that goes into place is the expense policies," she says.

Expense Tracking and Opt-Out Programs

In anticipation of August 1, Universal Meeting Management added a new feature last fall to its proprietary meeting management tech platform, MeetingSmart, in view of the Sunshine Act. "We developed an opt-out program at registration," says Truelove. "When physicians go into the system to register, all the transfer-of-value items are listed there, including the estimated costs for meals and other functions. And then they can opt out of all those different functions." The response to the feature has been quite favorable, according to Truelove, and it has another advantage. "We started the program because we wanted to give physicians an option of not having that transfer of value if they didn't want to, but it turned into something much better in that now we have such great cost optimization for our meetings. We found that attendees were opting out of functions that, in most cases, they were not going to attend anyway, so we no longer have to guarantee those."

Also last fall, Hyatt Hotels & Resorts introduced a new Group Bill tool that should help with the more detailed tracking of physician-related spend. The traditional event bill is typically a large paper folio containing several bills in different formats, but under the new system, the planner receives an interactive PDF bill with a table of contents, summaries and hyperlinks. What's more, planners can track all charges in real time under different expense categories, down to individual room bills and line-item coffee-break charges. The data also can be exported into an Excel spreadsheet. "The timing of this is perfect. We were not putting together the group bill because of what's going on with the Sunshine Act; it was a coincidence," Weiss says. "It's going to help planners access the specific information they need and to break down that information the way they need it to be broken down."

Among the expense categories are familiar ones such as air travel, ground transportation, lodging, and food and

"We are trying to educate our hotels so that when they get a lead for a meeting that includes health care professionals, they know how to respond to it."

BONNIE WEISS, Director
Global Pharmaceutical Sales, Americas
Hyatt Hotels, White Plains, NY



beverage, but the monetary figures will be much more granular. "What is different under the Sunshine Act is that we will have to break down the bill per physician, and then per hotel, F&B and other spend categories for each physician," Johnson explains. "It's really detailed information that will be submitted to the government." And that report will reference government-assigned physician numbers. "Let's say that Dr. Smith goes to 10 meetings a year produced by four or five different companies like ours. The doctor's number would have to be the same for each company's report to the government, because the government doesn't care who produced the meeting," she adds.

Sunshine Act Strategies

Given the worry that physician attendance will significantly diminish once more of them become aware of what the Sunshine Act entails, a couple of strategies appear to be sensible for pharma companies. First, meetings might be held more cost-effectively, so as to reduce transfer of value to physicians and assuage concerns about public perception. However, pharma companies have already been paring down their meeting budgets, Truelove notes. "They started doing that probably eight years ago when there was a lot of visibility for pharmaceutical meetings. The standards of how the programs are run are already in place, and I don't think there is any change there that really needs to occur." For example, clinical

meetings tend to have extensive break-out needs, and going to an airport hotel, despite savings in room rates and ground transportation, would not be an option if the property has limited or inflexible meeting space.

A second possible strategy might be to ramp up virtual meeting offerings, since these evade much transfer of value to physicians. Yet Johnson is skeptical as to the viability of that medium in the case of physician-attended meetings. Virtual meetings would be missing "the face-to-face collaboration that comes when you have your top physician going over something so critical as a drug trial," she says. "You take those same attendees and try to sit them down in front of a computer screen to watch a protocol being done; I just don't see that happening."

Penalties

Not reporting physician payments and transfers of value simply isn't an option, and the deterrent is a civil penalty of up to \$150,000 per year or a fine of up to \$1 million for those who are determined to have knowingly failed to report, according to the CMS. Furthermore, the CMS retains the right to "audit, evaluate or inspect" an organization for compliance with the Sunshine Act. As to the coauthors of the act, Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and former Sen. Herb Kohl (D-Wisc.), they have

promised to "stay vigilant about how this law is implemented," according to a recent statement. The senators clearly see the act as a positive one that "brings about accountability, and accountability will strengthen the credibility of medical research, the marketing of ideas and, ultimately, the practice of medicine."

Repercussions

Of course, an important pillar of that practice is the education and research that happens at pharma meetings. As the spokesperson for GlaxoSmithKline notes, "Health care professionals lead programs that deliver important information, which can translate to improved patient care. We assess the needs for such programs annually and focus our programs in particular on new medicines and new label information." And if the payments reported under the Sunshine Act end up compromising physician participation in such programs through negative public perception, that may well undercut the goal cited by Grassley and Kohl. It remains to be seen whether the reporting will have that repercussion, but pharma companies and meeting planners do have a legitimate concern. **C&IT**



"I wish that the senators that came up with this act could go to a meeting and see the lack of perks."

JUDITH BENAROCHE JOHNSON, CMP
Rx Meetings Worldwide, Plano, TX



government tend to be quite aware of the act, Johnson finds that smaller companies and biotech firms "have very little knowledge of what's going on, so we're trying to educate our smaller clients" on the reporting requirements.

Since hoteliers will be instrumental in the reporting initiative, "we are trying to educate our hotels so that when they get a lead for a meeting that includes health care professionals, they know how to respond to it and understand that in many cases we have to perhaps put together a special menu of pricing issues that we are going to have to work through," Weiss notes.

SMMP

Weiss does not expect that the reporting will be too much of an operational stretch for many pharma clients, who had "internal compliance procedures

Truelove adds, "The big factor that no one has really mastered is consolidating a lot of the expenses. A lot of meeting management software tools have a good registration program but none of them have a good budgeting program or a good spend tracking and reporting program."

Thus, achieving the kind of transparency required by the Sunshine Act will entail a significant additional investment of time and resources for many companies. An advantage does go to those large firms that are already publicly reporting their physician-related payments and transfers of value. "We voluntarily have been disclosing information about our work with physicians since 2009, and we believe this has helped us to prepare for the new Sunshine Act," notes a spokesperson for GlaxoSmithKline.



Photo courtesy of Andrew Shafer Visuals

Meeting planners network with suppliers at Revel in Atlantic City.

In 2014, the Super Bowl will be played at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, just five miles from New York City; and the Miss America Pageant will return to its long-time home in Atlantic City. These events and thousands of others demonstrate that the New Jersey-New York market is a natural for significant events — including meetings. Both destinations are making significant investments to improve their meeting products as the economy recovers.

Why Planners Choose NJ-NY

And meeting planners are responding, seeing the destination as a networking natural. Elite Meetings International selected Revel (1,898 guest rooms; 160,000 sf of indoor-outdoor meeting and event space), the new multibillion-dollar resort in Atlantic City, to host the Elite Meetings Alliance last August. Among the attendees were more than 100 meeting planners there to network with suppliers.

“The key thing about where we hold these events,” says Kelly Foy, Elite Meetings International CEO, “is that they need to be hot properties because of the high planner attendance. Revel is

the first of its kind in Atlantic City and really helped with our attendance. There was nothing they wouldn’t do for attendees, and they really understood our needs.”

Margaret Holsinger, events manager, noted, “We worked on this meeting for more than a year — even before the resort opened, which is sometimes a little risky. But they delivered on everything they said they would. They went along with our desire to make creative use of spaces — for instance, a Rock ‘n’ Roll Fantasy Camp event incorporating the floor and stage of their big Ovation Hall. Even though there were only about 200 of us, they made the space feel just right for the event. Our guests had a ball going up on stage and performing with the rock ‘n’ roll legends.

“We also did a circus-themed reception in a prefunction area,” Holsinger continues, “which the staff encouraged us to use in a very creative way. They have a great way of blocking out unused space with air walls. We did all of our F&B through their catering, and it was phenomenal.

“It’s a beautiful property,” she says, “and so well placed on the Boardwalk. I was very impressed that it was a nonsmoking

What’s New for AC-NYC Meetings

By Harvey Chipkin

facility, and that you don’t have to walk through the casino to get to the meeting space.”

A Go-To Guy

Marilyn Kleinberg, executive director, eWomenNetwork of Southern New Jersey, says her organization is built around relationships. And so is her choice of meeting venue: Bally’s Atlantic City (1,760 guest rooms; 80,000 sf of meeting space). Says Kleinberg, “We have had our last four annual events at Bally’s. I worked with them for many years when I was vice president of special events and marketing for the Chamber of Commerce of Southern New Jersey. I truly believe that the staff is as important as anybody else at an event, and the banquet manager Dennis Vrba has been my go-to guy for the meetings. I believe that he will take care of me, and that’s why I go there. They have been so supportive in many ways.”

Most of her attendees, says Kleinberg, are business owners intent on networking. The meetings feature speakers who can educate and inspire women. There is also something called “accelerated networking” — a trademarked event that, says Kleinberg, “is like speed dating, an accelerated opportunity to connect and learn about somebody and whether you can do business with them.”

At their upcoming Bally’s event, says Kleinberg, “we expect a couple of hundred women. Day one will be an authors’ workshop. That night we will have a networking event at Harry’s Oyster Bar, where the manager is a woman. Day two is the summit itself where the theme is “succeeding in spite of everything.”

Like other planners who conduct meetings in the New York-New Jersey region, Kleinberg says the nearby population and its impact on attendance is an important factor. “We will be drawing from Atlantic City, Philadelphia, Maryland and Delaware.”

Perception Issues Easing

Despite the periodic pressure of rate and availability, says Monique Pujol, an events manager for By Invitation Only, which specializes in corporate events, “hotels that you have worked with for a long time will aim to accommodate you. That’s why I’m thrilled the New York Palace is undergoing its big renovation (see details on page 36). I went with a law-firm client a few days ago; they were very impressed.”

The perception issues of meeting in a five-star New York hotel, says Pujol, have eased “and a lot more clients are doing events for their own clients.”

Booking windows continue to shorten, says Pujol, who adds, “Our groups range from 30 to about 500, and you don’t have the lead time that you used to. They are always waiting for the last minute to commit.”

Pharma Favorite

Denise Newman, president of New York Hotel Reservations, a meeting planning firm that specializes in New York and New Jersey, says, “Business is really picking up including, to my sur-

prise, some groups that have not been in years. We are getting a lot of medical and pharmaceutical events because with all the top hospitals in New York they are there to do training.”

Newman is a fan of The Roosevelt Hotel (1,015 guest rooms; 30,000 sf of meeting space), a 90-year-old hotel on Madison Avenue, because of its “Old World feel combined with modern technology. Also they have an extensive selection of suites, which is really important when you have a group that wants a VIP room.

“The location is terrific,” she says. “It’s two blocks to the theater district so you don’t need a bus or taxi.”

Newman says The Roosevelt is very flexible when it comes to rates, and as for availability, “In New York, it’s always best to book well in advance for spring and fall; in January and July you can really get a great deal. I’m a connoisseur of New York hotels,” she says, “and my main job is to fit the meeting with the venue. I have a large group coming into The Roosevelt, a pharmaceutical group. They really wanted all their space on one floor, which The Roosevelt can offer.”

Do AC, a Shore Thing for Meetings

Before Hurricane Sandy, Atlantic City, according to Gary Musich, vice president of sales for the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority, was on track to enjoy its fourth consecutive year of growth in meetings. Even with losses due to the storm, the year turned out flat with the prospects for 2013 and beyond very positive. “We are projecting 12 percent growth in meetings for 2013.”

Behind that growth, says Musich, “is that we are evolving from a gaming destination to a balanced, mature destination appealing to all business segments. Our room inventory grew by over 20 percent in 2008 as the recession hit, but we have been able to absorb that. We have seen an evolution of the city as a tourism district that has been carved out in collaboration with the Atlantic City Alliance. We are aiming to lengthen the stay with attractions that are also important to planners. There has been a massive investment in retail like The Walk, a 10-square-block dining and retail center that connects the convention center and Boardwalk. And we recently got a commitment from Bass Pro Shops to build a 90,000-sf facility.”

Also big news, says Musich, “is that Margaritaville has partnered with Resorts (Casino Hotel) to develop a huge Margaritaville facility within Resorts with construction underway later this year. We’re getting our message out to planners with a massive ‘Do AC’ campaign,” says Musich. “And it has paid off. Attendance at meetings and conventions were up 65 percent and spend was up 43 percent in January so the rebound from the storm has been quick.”

To maintain that momentum, Atlantic City has launched a \$1 million incentive program for groups that book at least 1,000 nights during the 2013 calendar year. The incentive, says Musich, can be used for transportation, marketing or anything else.

And the pitch for Atlantic City, according to Musich, remains:

- Convenience to major cities such as New York and Philadelphia;
- One-stop shopping because the CVB owns and operates the convention center; and
- Cost effectiveness.

Hotel Happenings in AC

Atlantic City's resorts are investing along with the destination itself. Of course the biggest investment has been Revel, which cost more than \$2.4 billion and opened almost a year ago. While the hotel did announce a prepackaged bankruptcy earlier this year, Jim Zierys, vice president of resort sales, says, "We are moving full-speed ahead. The bankruptcy means that our creditors have taken an equity in the property. We are opening a

new restaurant and a day spa so we continue to add amenities to the 14 restaurants and many other features that we offer."

Revel's 160,000 sf of meeting space includes an eye-opening 90,000 sf of outdoor space, which can be used year-round. The resort's accommodations include oceanview rooms and residential-style meeting rooms with couches. These rooms can accommodate three groups of up to 500 each.

About 70 percent of Revel's meetings come from corporate sources, says Zierys. He adds, "We sometimes have to deal with a perception problem because people who haven't been to Atlantic City in a while would not recognize the place today. We find that if we can get them onsite our close rate is fantastic. The way we have captured the sunlight and views stops them in their tracks, and you can enjoy all that as you walk from your general session to your breakout room. We are truly a full resort, and that's why we see a lot of meeting attendees stay a day or two before or after their events."

Caesars offers several resorts in Atlantic City under different brand names, each appealing to a specific market (Bally's, Harrah's, Caesars and Showboat). While it has not been officially announced, news reports have detailed a plan by Caesars to build a \$134 million conference center at its Harrah's Resort Atlantic City. The project would involve a two-floor, 200,000-sf addition, half of which would constitute meeting space. The center would focus on corporate meetings and special events.

In a news release, the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority said the new center "will spur additional development throughout the city and bring with it increases in revenue and ratables at a time when casino gaming revenues have been steadily declining and new non-gaming attractions and businesses are sought to energize the market."

A spokesperson for Caesars in Atlantic City, says, "The Do AC campaign is spending \$30 million over five years and that has been very helpful. They help to offset some costs in bringing planners to our properties. For Atlantic City, show



Atlantic City's Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa recently renovated its guest rooms, which also now offer in-room gaming.

is better than tell. Planners are always surprised at what Atlantic City has to offer as far as shopping restaurants, etc."

At The Tropicana Casino & Resort (2,078 guest rooms; 122,000 sf of meeting space), "The market is very promising," says Eric Fiocco, corporate vice president of marketing for Tropicana Entertainment. "We are redoing the ballroom and adding six new food and beverage venues that will have mass appeal for the convention-goers. We have a new nightclub, Boogie Nights, which appeals to an older demographic. We are extremely happy

with the outlook, which is why we are investing so much in the property. ...Do AC has been really helpful. It concentrates almost 100 percent on non-gaming activity, as well as rates and deals." The Tropicana, which boasts the largest showroom in Atlantic City with 2,000 seats, will renovate the 18,000-sf Royal Swan Ballroom this summer.

The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa (2,000 guest rooms; 70,000 sf of meeting space) has completed a \$50 million room redesign project, and recently introduced in-room gaming, a first for the hotel industry. "The outlook for meetings at The Borgata and The Water Club (a separate luxury product) looks fantastic," says Bernard Sefcik, director of hotel sales. The Water Club offers an additional 18,000 sf with state-of-the-art technology. The Borgata features innovative and world-class dining experiences with a wide array of restaurants and world-renowned chefs under one roof, including legendary chefs such as Wolfgang Puck (Wolfgang Puck American Grille) Bobby Flay (Bobby Flay Steak) Michael Geoffrey Zakarian (the Water Club) and others.

Atlantic City is not the only meeting destination in New Jersey. The Hilton Short Hills, not far from New York City, has committed to the meetings market by converting a former dining room into two meeting rooms and a private dining room. According to David Keys, regional vice president-sales and marketing Eastern North America for Hilton, "Short Hills is one of the properties where Hilton is testing a new Small Meeting Package where planners can book function space only on short advance notice. It's aimed at planners whose hardest task is frequently booking space without guest rooms. It will be a simple, one-price package with some options."

And Jersey City is emerging as a meetings hub as well. The 10-year-old Hyatt Regency Jersey City on the Hudson (351 guest rooms; 20,000 sf of meeting space) has just completed a full renovation of its meeting space. A big selling point for the hotel, which has a 35 percent group mix, is its unmatched views

of Manhattan. The hotel is connected to the PATH rail station, for a five-minute ride into Manhattan.

Big Apple Appeal

Keys, a member of the NYC & Company board, said that the city has enjoyed a 3 percent jump in bookings for the first quarter of 2013, usually the quietest time of year and another sign of recovery.

At The New York Hilton, says Keys, "We are upgrading our restaurant experience with the Herb n' Kitchen, which is targeted at meeting attendees who want to eat healthily but want to eat in their rooms without calling room service. We also have new directional meeting signage in the hotels that is interactive, and we can now do meeting messaging in the elevators. Those are small things but all add to the experience."

New York has enjoyed an unprecedented hotel boom and what that means, according to Chris Heywood, a spokesman for NYC & Company, the city's visitor and marketing agency, are "more short-term bookings, and interest in (outer) borough hotel properties for smaller meetings. New hotels all around the city offer a wide variety of styles and budgets."

But the perennial selling points prevail. Says Heywood, "New York is a capital of business and commerce, a place where business gets done. You do more in a few days here than you can in a week anywhere else. And meetings that convene in New York usually generate record attendance."

Heywood tells planners that NYC & Company is a great resource for meetings of all kinds. They will help with venue selection and navigating the city on the planner's behalf through their destination services departments. Planners should go to www.nycandcompany.org/meetingplanners.

And Heywood's advice: "Plan ahead for better value. Consider planning meetings in January and February; and consider a Sunday stay for lower rates. And don't forget that New York is a great incentive destination; that should not be overlooked."

Hotel Happenings in NYC

Meanwhile, New York's convention hotels have spent many millions to enhance their product. The Sheraton New York Hotel & Towers near Times Square (1,781 guest rooms; 60,000 sf of meeting space) has just completed a \$20 million renovation of its meeting space, the final phase of the hotel's overall \$180 million renovation. The project includes a complete renovation of the ballroom, meeting rooms and prefunction areas. This renovation will offer a clean, fresh design

scheme with an emphasis on light, warm tones and geometric patterns. Kai Fischer, director of sales and marketing, noted that the renovation will allow the hotel to "appeal to higher end events for executives and customers of large Fortune 500 companies," adding, "The overall New York market continues to strengthen, because of greater confidence in the economy and the need to put people on the road to connect with their customers. New York remains the No. 1 attendance driver and the No. 1 destination people want to come to. However, there is still a considerable amount of affordability by New York standards as we continue to recover."

Also in Times Square, the InterContinental New York Times Square (607 guest rooms; 10,000 sf of meeting space) has introduced Insider Collections as an additional offering for meetings. The programs aims to create truly memorable meetings and events that are infused with authentic local flavor, according to Ryan O' Byrne, director of sales. "This insider local knowledge," he says, "is achieved through one of the following options: insider locations, insider breaks, insider interactions, insider speakers and insider community." The property, says O'Byrne, "focuses on more intimate corporate meetings along with high-end incentive trips. With our largest ballroom being 4,000 sf and adjacent smaller breakout rooms, it allows the client to be creative in their setup while not feeling the impact of other groups impeding in their space."

He says the hotel continues to see an increase in short-

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Photo courtesy of The Roosevelt Hotel

The historic 1,015-room Roosevelt Hotel in New York City offers 30,000 sf of elegant meeting space.

term meeting requests — 30–60 days out. “Although there are steady requests, we are noting companies scaling back on their initial contractual commitment — contracting fewer room nights and lower food and beverage minimums.”

The area near Grand Central station has emerged as a meeting center with several major properties undergoing significant improvements. The Westin New York Grand Central (774 guest rooms; 12,000 sf of meeting space), formerly the New York Helmsley Hotel, boasts a renamed and renovated Madison Ballroom, a 2,500-sf space for up to 350 guests. It features an 18-foot ceiling, access to a private terrace and a number of unique design elements such as color-changing LED lighting.

There has been an \$80 million overall renovation that changed the entire look of the hotel. “Everything was gutted including the infrastructure; there is new bandwidth using fiber optics,” says Kristin Hankins, director of sales and marketing. “The meeting space was gutted as well. This hotel as the Helmsley did nowhere its potential meeting business, especially corporate,” she says. “We still love our association business but have repositioned to appeal to corporate clients who like our location and the fact that our space offers natural light and is above ground. We’re looking to triple our group room business.

“We have already tripled our banquet and catering revenue and added corporate business,” says Hankins. “We have the easiest hotels to get to if you land at JFK or LaGuardia, and we have the 7 subway line at our doorstep, which will be expanded to Javits Center in 2014.”

The nearby Grand Hyatt New York (1,306 guest rooms; 60,000 sf of meeting space), right above Grand Central Station, redid its meeting space in 2011, including the addition of the Gallery, an innovative meeting space ideal for brainstorming.

Also in the Grand Central area is the historic Roosevelt Hotel, which offers grand vintage spaces but a modern approach in its 30,000 sf of meeting space. “We are seeing large programs approach us on a short-term basis, says Susan Richardson, director of sales. “Last June, a pharmaceutical company came to us and asked for all of our meeting space in September. We were able to move stuff around and accommodate them. We sell the intimacy of small spaces in a large hotel.

I used to call The Roosevelt the largest boutique hotel in New York. Planners like us because we offer the perception of value. And we find that even the younger planners like the vintage feel of our ballrooms and other vintage spaces.”

And Newman agrees that younger planners like the property “especially since they added a rooftop bar, which is very popular with younger attendees.”

Another classic property in the heart of midtown, The New York Palace (813 guest rooms; 22,000 sf of meeting space), has transformed its fourth- and fifth-floor meeting space, creating an atmosphere that matches the style and grandeur of the function rooms on the upper floors of the hotel’s Villard Mansion. As part of the redesign, The Palace introduced a corridor art program on the fourth- and fifth-floor meeting spaces. All of the paintings are original pieces that have been curated from antique and vintage sources.

And The Palace just launched the first phase of a \$120 million overhaul including a \$25 million makeover of its Towers Rooms and Suites, scheduled for completion in June. The Towers is a separate and distinct part of The Palace, occupying the hotel’s top 14 floors. It offers a private reception area and a dedicated concierge team. “We’re embracing meetings more than in the past,” says General Manager David Chase. We have the most significant suite inventory in the city with eight suites that are probably bigger than most presidential suites. We have 40 other very large suites that are available for small meetings. They have dining tables and either wet bars or full kitchens.”

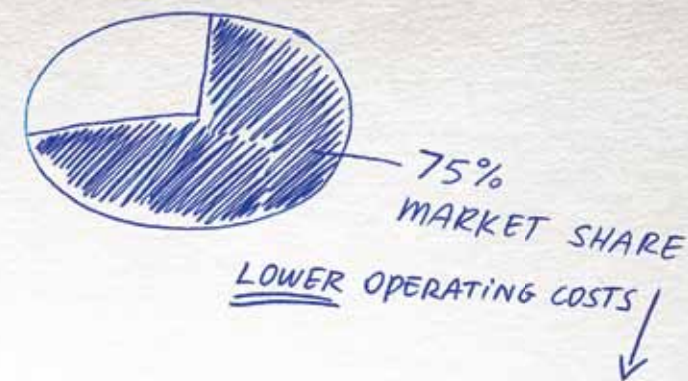
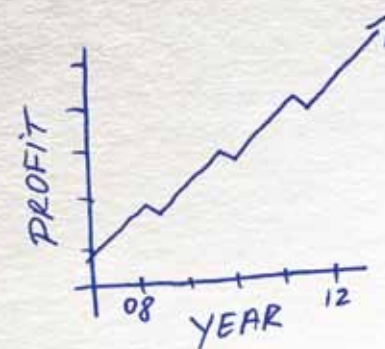
In an entirely different neighborhood, but one which is also coming into its own as extensive meeting inventory has been added in the last few years is The Ritz-Carlton New York, Battery Park (298 guest rooms; 13,000 sf of meeting space). According to Jessica Solomon, director of meetings and special events, “We recently updated our meeting space with refinished banquet chairs, new carpets, wall coverings and curtains in our foyer space to keep the property in new condition. This is important especially for our repeat groups so our clients see that we are staying relevant. Groups are once again moving toward more offsite meetings,” says Solomon. “Companies seem to be bringing back strategic and board of director meetings, which decreased in the past few years due to many companies keeping these meetings onsite at their home offices.”

Unlimited Diversions

While they differ in a lot of ways, what both Atlantic City and New York have in common are unlimited diversions. As Kleinberg says, “We don’t have a lot of down time, so it’s great having all those shopping outlets right there. In warm weather it’s great to walk around and shop, and there is a lot of female-friendly activity going on in Atlantic City. Nobody wants to stay in the hotel the whole time,” says Kleinberg, “if you can give them something within walking or jitney distance, that works out really well.”

And Pujol agrees that attendees “like to use all that New York has to offer and all that is around them.”

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ORLANDO



Downtown Disney at Walt Disney World Resort is being transformed into Disney Springs, a one-of-a-kind destination filled with things attendees can enjoy such as shopping, dining and entertainment as well as new venues for private events.

Second to None in Service & Support, Variety & Value

By John Buchanan

Over the past decade, Orlando has sustained a dedicated, well coordinated effort to extend its brand image beyond the theme park capital of the U.S. and become the country's top-dog meeting destination, too. The official recognition of that achievement came not long ago when Cvent named Orlando the No. 1 destination in America for meetings and conventions.

That lofty distinction does not come as much of a surprise to any planner familiar with Orlando's unique combination of airlift, hotel product, offsite venues and activities — all powerfully accentuated by service that is good as a planner can find anywhere.

"One of the things that really sets Orlando apart is the amount of options you have as a planner," says Jason Johnson, managing director of the local office of leading site selection company HelmsBriscoe. "For example, there is the availability of so many different kinds of hotels and venues. Orlando has

really evolved over the last five years or so. Before that, a lot of planners thought that it was just a family destination and associated it with Disney and the other theme parks. Now those same planners understand that it's a great meeting destination that has something to offer for any kind of meeting or incentive program."

Today, Johnson says, Orlando is universally perceived as a very sophisticated meeting destination that can rival any on Earth. "The city," he says, "has really done a great job of getting that message out and educating planners about all the things that Orlando has to offer."

Amy Tynan, national sales manager at destination management company AlliedPRA Orlando, notes that in addition to its stellar reputation for infrastructure, Orlando also is now widely known for the bottom-line value it delivers. "Orlando is affordable," she says. "Meeting planners know now that they can get a lot of bang for their buck in Orlando."

Another key factor in the ever-growing popularity of Orlando is its status as the No. 1 family vacation destination in the world. "Because of that, it's also a destination where a lot of attendees want to bring their spouses and children," Tynan says. "Over the last few years, we have seen a definite trend to more meetings being opened up to families, so that also has been an important factor in the success of Orlando, because more and more organizations are finding out that when you include families, you get better attendance."

Meagan Alexander, member education and special events manager at Fort Wayne, IN-based hardware and lumberyard co-op Do it Best Corp., discovered that benefit in January 2012 when she hosted her first meeting in Orlando — a four-day, three-night conference at the Swan and Dolphin Hotel for 400 owners of hardware stores and lumberyards.

"Orlando was a great venue for that particular event, because many attendees choose to also make a vacation out of it and bring their families," Alexander says. "And Orlando is obviously a very family- and kid-friendly place. And with the meeting last year, we saw more of that than we have in other destinations, so that helped increase our attendance."

Service and Sophistication

A foundational pillar of Orlando's drive toward meeting destination supremacy has been a ferocious commitment to service.

"The hospitality and guest care you get in Orlando as a planner, and the extent to which everyone is very willing to work with you on every detail of your meeting to make it successful, are second to none when it comes to destinations," says Sherri Davis, senior events manager at New York-based business software and support services provider Wolters Kluwer, which hosted a 2011 meeting for 800 attendees at the 584-room JW Marriott Orlando Grande Lakes. "No matter who you're working with, whether it's Disney or Universal or the convention center or any one of the major meeting hotels, they all have a super-strong customer focus. And that helps make my job as a planner a lot easier."

Johnson notes that the level of service commitment in Orlando clearly distinguishes it from many other major meeting destinations. "The people in Orlando who are in the hospitality industry are in it by choice," he says. "They're in it by design, because it's what they really want to be doing. In a lot of other destinations, it's just a job. Or it's considered a stepping stone to what a person really wants to do, like being an actor. And that difference really shows when it comes to the service you get."

The result, Johnson says, is that

Orlando consistently delivers the best service and support infrastructure of any destination in the U.S.

One thing in particular that sets Orlando apart is the services of The Disney Institute, which Do it Best Corp. used to deliver all of the content for their last two meetings. "They were great to work with," Alexander says. "And one of the things they helped us do was to develop and execute a theme that was consistent throughout the entire program. And they created excellent sessions that got very high marks from our attendees. They did an excellent job, including providing the two facilitators that led our sessions. And that was another thing that gave us consistency throughout the meeting."

The service and support from Visit Orlando consistently receives kudos from professional meeting planners. The CVB is developing a series of videos designed to educate professional meeting planners on Orlando's key convention areas. The goal of the program is to give planners a virtual walk-through of the destination, in place of, or in addition to, a personal site visit. The first video showcases the connectivity and walkability of the area surrounding the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC). "Many planners simply don't have the time or budget to make multiple visits to familiarize themselves with the nuts and bolts of hosting an event in Orlando," said Tammi Runzler, Visit Orlando vice president of convention sales and services, in a statement. "These videos are for planners who have already been sold on the idea of meeting in Orlando and



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now need a next-level understanding of specific attributes of the area, including walkability, transportation logistics, the range and depth of available after-hours options — particularly dining and entertainment — and more.” In addition, Visit Orlando 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.

Airlift and Hotel Product

Two other factors in Orlando’s popularity are its formidable airlift — another result of its status as the world’s top family vacation destination — and Orlando International Airport.

“Airlift is one of the main things that we look at when we select a destination, because we have attendees coming in from all over the country,” Alexander says. “And we don’t want our attendees getting frustrated by how hard it is to get to the meeting.”

Davis agrees that airlift and the ease of navigating Orlando airport rank high on the list of things she likes best about the destination. “And it’s also a very convenient destination from

“They all have a super-strong customer focus. And that helps make my job as a planner a lot easier.”

Sherri Davis, Senior Events Manager,
Wolters Kluwer, New York, NY



a logistical point of view,” she says, “because all of the hotels are within 30 minutes of the airport. That saves me a lot of transfer time, and it also makes things easy for attendees.”

Add to that the value most planners find with fares from all over the U.S. and around the world, Johnson says, and airlift and the airport are often on the list of deciding factors when Orlando is selected for a meeting or convention.

Closely related to airlift is Orlando’s range of hotel product. There is literally something for every type and size of meeting, from low-budget to super high-end and everything in between, Johnson says.

Tynan corroborates that view. “And there are also resort properties, as well as business hotels,” she says. “And there are two distinct corridors. One is the International Drive corridor, where you have the major business hotels, like The Peabody Orlando and the new Hilton Orlando, both of which are just across the street from the convention center. Then you have the Downtown Disney district, where there are more resort hotels. And between those two choices, a planner can find a very good option at a good price.”

Once experienced, Orlando’s hotels generate high praise.

“My experience in working with the Swan and Dolphin was a great one,” Alexander says. “The accommodations

and food and beverage were really top notch. And the service was excellent.”

Davis says that the JW Marriott Orlando Grande Lakes was the best hotel she has ever used. “If I could use it for every event that I do, I would, because my life would be a piece of cake,” she says. “Physically, the hotel is fabulous. They have great meeting space. They have great sleeping rooms. It’s also a stand-alone resort that is self-contained and provides everything you need for a meeting. It’s luxurious, comfortable and well-priced. And their food and beverage and banquet teams are fantastic. And they are willing to work within various budgets, but still very original and creative, so you get a lot of value for your dollar.”

Davis singled out the property for creativity that matched its other benefits. “They come up with a lot of creative ideas that help keep your meetings interesting,” she says. “They don’t just say, ‘Let’s do another casino night or food stations and a bar.’ They really put in the effort to give you a lot of ideas, and then they execute those ideas very creatively. They really want to make your meeting special. They really appreciate your business, and that shows in everything they do, from their executive team down to the housekeepers.”

Although Orlando now offers almost 116,000 hotel rooms at 447 hotels — including 18 AAA Four Diamond and Forbes Travel Guide Four Star properties — the bar is constantly being raised by new entries.

The **Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek** (400 guest rooms; 25,000 sf of meeting space) made its highly-anticipated debut in February, overlooking its 10-acre lake and adjacent to the sprawling Walt Disney World complex.

In early 2014, Universal will open its newest property, the more moderately priced **Cabana Bay Beach Resort** (1,800 guest rooms) to be operated by Loews Hotels and Resorts, which will mimic classic beach resorts of the 1950s and 1960s and bring another unique offering to Universal’s local hotel inventory, which features a combined 250,000 sf of meeting and event space.

Walt Disney World will add two new hotels, the **B Resort Lake Buena Vista** (394 guest rooms; 20,000 sf of meeting space), opening later this year, and construction is set to begin in December on the **Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort** (434 guest rooms; 37,000 sf of meeting space), which will be the largest Four Seasons resort in the world when it opens in 2014.

Downtown Disney will undergo a multiyear transformation and morph into **Disney Springs** by 2016. The destination will feature more than 150 establishments for shopping, dining and entertainment as well as new private-event options for groups. “Disney Springs will be a timeless, vibrant place where Walt Disney World guests and local residents can relax, shop, dine and be entertained in an imaginative setting where they’ll instantly feel at home,” said Tom Staggs, chairman of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts, in a statement.

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Photo courtesy of Universal Orlando Resort

Groups can book specialized, catered experiences and entertainment at the very popular attraction — The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort.

from the hottest attractions at its theme parks, restaurants and unique attractions such as nearby Kennedy Space Center.

“About half of our clients do something offsite during the meeting,” Johnson says. “And one obvious reason for that is the number of options that a planner has in Orlando. Just like it’s true of hotels, it’s true that the city offers an offsite venue that is perfect for every taste, group size or budget.”

For her meetings in 2010 and 2011, Davis used Universal Orlando Resort, using buyouts after public hours to stage a New York block party that incorporated the Blues Brothers show and Mummy attraction, as well as the park’s famous arcade.

“We were able to bring our attendees in through a back entrance, we had a red carpet with our logo, and we were able to put up signage and make it look as if it was Universal Orlando at Wolters Kluwer,” says Davis, who is now planning a 2014 meeting for 1,400 attendees and is again planning to use Universal. “It was ‘ours,’ and it was spectacular. Our attendees felt like they were at home. And they made them feel very special, because this was something they could never do on their own.”

Alexander hosted a dinner at Atlantic Dance Hall, located within easy walking distance of the Swan and Dolphin Hotel, then shuttled her attendees off to see the Cirque du Soleil show at Downtown Disney.

She also used Disney’s Epcot for a dessert reception after the closing-night reception at the Swan and Dolphin. “Then we gave our attendees badges that allowed them to stay until the park closed at midnight,” she says. “So that was another very nice evening that our attendees and their families really enjoyed.”

More venue and attraction news includes these updates:

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 per-

formance 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.

The highly anticipated Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin will open at **SeaWorld Orlando** on May 24, 2013. This first-of-its-kind adventure ride takes attendees on an exploration of a penguin colony, both above and below their cool world. Each car on the ride is a mobile simulator, with movements that allow guests to become one with the story line as they follow a young penguin’s adventures. For the first time in any theme park, this motion-based simulator ride will be completely trackless and guests will choose one of two levels of adventure with various levels of intensity, according to SeaWorld.

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.

More Orlando resort news of interest to groups:

Universal’s 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.

The DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld (1,094 guest rooms; 60,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space) recently debuted a \$35 million makeover. Located adjacent to SeaWorld, the hotel is minutes away from Orlando’s most popular attractions and only 10 minutes from Orlando International Airport. The hotel, which offers a complimentary shuttle service to popular theme parks, boasts three swimming pools, putting green, spa and more. As an official hotel of SeaWorld, registered guests of the DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld receive many exclusive benefits.

The Villas of Grand Cypress Resort (146 villas; 10,480 sf of meeting space) has spent the past four months transforming its 146 villas, the first phase of a multifaceted resort-wide renovation. The renovation showcases spacious new guest rooms that offer modern interiors featuring streamlined decor and natural materials. Outdoors, guests can enjoy expansive private patios or decks overlooking the fairways or waterways of the North Course. The Fitness Center offers state-of-the-art Life-Fitness Equipment featuring built-in home theaters, in-



“Orlando is obviously a very family- and kid-friendly place...that helped increase our attendance.”

Meagan Alexander
Member Education & Special Events Manager
Do it Best Corp., Fort Wayne, IN

cluding treadmills, stationary bikes, elliptical and multi-purpose strength machines.

Rosen Hotels and Resorts has renovation news to report for 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 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.



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The Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate (720 guest rooms; 128,000 sf of meeting space) recently debuted the new 55,000-sf Osceola County Conference Center, which includes a 28,000-sf ballroom, open prefunction area and event lawn.

Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek (400 guest rooms; more than 25,000 sf of indoor-outdoor meeting and 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.

“The city has really done a great job of educating planners about all the things that Orlando has to offer.”

Jason Johnson, Managing Director
HelmsBriscoe, Orlando, FL



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.

Magnet for Golf

Near the top of the activities list for many planners and enthusiastic attendees is golf. Orlando features 176 courses and 23 world-renowned golf academies.

Tynan points out that Orlando offers a number of meeting hotels that offer truly spectacular golf courses. Among them: Shingle Creek Golf Club at Rosen Shingle Creek; The Grand Cypress Golf Club at the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress, which features four uniquely challenging Jack Nicklaus Signature Design courses; Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, which features two championship 18-hole golf courses designed by Greg Norman and the David Leadbetter Golf Academy; and the legendary, intimate Arnold Palmer’s Bay Hill Resort, which hosts one of the most prestigious events on the PGA Tour each March.

Local Dining

Of all the practical benefits Orlando has to offer, perhaps the most surprising is its sophisticated, world-class dining scene.

In terms of local geography, there are three basic options, Tynan explains — The Pointe Orlando, on International Drive

near The Peabody Orlando and Hilton Orlando, Restaurant Row along Sand Lake Road and Downtown Disney.

“Each of those locations offers a variety of different restaurants that makes it possible to create a dine-around program that is convenient to your hotel,” Tynan says. “There are themed restaurants like B.B. King’s at The Pointe, which is casual and fun, and has great music. Every group I have taken there has had a fantastic time. But there are a number of other good options in The Pointe, too.”

Tynan also likes Bongo’s, located in Downtown Disney and co-owned by Gloria Estefan. “It provides Latin flair, which is a popular choice right now,” Tynan says. “And Bongo’s has a great band, which is personally produced by Gloria Estefan.”

Johnson agrees that Orlando’s dining scene is a major draw. “The city has really stepped up its game when it comes to the culinary scene,” he says. “And it’s not just about good restaurants in the hotels. It’s also about the many dining options in the different corridors of the city. Now planners also know that Orlando is a destination they can count on, not just for the quality of the food and beverage, but also the service and the value that you get.”

A Singular Man

Taken together, all of the things that make Orlando special as a meeting destination can be largely linked back to a single and powerful influence: the local convention and visitors bureau known as Visit Orlando. Much of the credit for the organization’s phenomenal success can be attributed to its late president and CEO, Gary Sain, who died suddenly in May of last year.

Harris Rosen, president and COO of Rosen Hotels & Resorts, recently announced that he will honor Sain’s singular contribution to Orlando by naming a new skybridge the Gary Sain Memorial Bridge, which will connect the Rosen Plaza Hotel to the Orange County Convention Center.

According to a statement, construction of the \$1.5 million bridge will be entirely funded by Rosen Hotels & Resorts, completing the final link in connecting OCCC with adjacent International Drive hotels.

“I am honored to dedicate this project to my friend and colleague Gary Sain,” said Rosen. “It is entirely fitting that this pedestrian skybridge named in his honor will be used to benefit thousands of visitors to Orlando, a destination he worked tirelessly to build and strengthen during his time with us. Rest assured, Gary’s legacy continues here today.”

Although Davis never met Sain, she acknowledges how the leadership from him and others in recent years has made Orlando a treasured option for her.

“As a planner,” she says, “when I think of using Orlando and the JW Marriott and Universal, I sleep better at night, because I know they are always checking and double-checking everything they can do to make my attendees feel comfortable and achieve their goals. And in my opinion, in Orlando, they do that better than anywhere else.” **C&IT**

All eyes are on Orlando’s inspiration.



To see how Orlando can provide inspiration for your next meeting or convention, check out our Inspiration Spotlight video series. Each video features candid interviews with key Orlando figures who have been instrumental in providing creative meetings for our visitors. Be inspired by real ideas that led to outstanding events in Orlando.

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DESTINATION



Balboa Bay Resort, the only AAA Four Diamond waterfront resort in Newport Beach, CA, features scenic beaches and unique outdoor spaces for special events.

Photo courtesy of Balboa Bay Resort

Southern California Pretty and Close to Perfect

By Mike Bassett

Southern California may combine a bit of a beachside vibe with the urban glitz of Hollywood and Beverly Hills. But it offers so much more than that. The stretch of the West Coast from Los Angeles down to San Diego is filled with world-famous theme parks and museums, great restaurants, iconic hotels, fantastic beaches, and world-class golf courses and resorts. And, of course, there's the fabulous weather.

In fact, native Southern Californians and thousands of transplants say living in SoCal is pretty close to perfect.

All of which gets even the most jaded meeting attendee excited about a corporate meeting or an incentive program in Southern California.

Los Angeles

As Roberta Rinker-Ludloff, senior vice president, sales and client services, of the Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board puts it, "every city has great hotels and great restaurants, but from the perspective of an incentive program, no city gives you the buzz that you get in L.A."

From the great movie studios such as Universal and Paramount to glamor spots like Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, the city is filled with locations that resonate with anyone who goes to the movies, watches television, listens to music or is keyed into popular culture.

The numbers speak for themselves. The city welcomed a record 41.4 million visitors in 2012, up 2.5 percent from 2011. And the city hosted 24 citywide conventions last year, the most held in the city since 2011. People want to go to L.A.

But, Los Angeles is more than good weather, Hollywood and celebrity watching. According to Rinker-Ludloff, it's also a city of different regions that offer varying experiences to meeting planners and their groups.

For example, L.A.'s coastal communities, from Malibu down to San Pedro offer miles of beaches, hotels, shopping and much more. Santa Monica has been named one of the top-10 beach cities by *National Geographic* and is home to the Santa Monica Pier and Third Street Promenade with its shopping, restaurants and cultural attractions.

Head for Pasadena and "you'll get a sense of what old Los Angeles used to be like," says Rinker-Ludloff, "It's such a unique and historic area." It's also home to the world-famous Rose Bowl, as well as great hotels, restaurants, museums and gardens.

And despite the size of greater Los Angeles, it's fairly easy to move groups from place to place. The city is used to holding large events ranging from awards ceremonies like the Oscars to the New Year's Day Rose Bowl Parade. "So we're pretty used to moving people around," Rinker-Ludloff says. "We pretty much have it down."

LeAnne Giambrone, senior event manager for ACN Inc., a direct seller of telecommunications and home services headquartered in Concord, NC, is a planner who brings one of those large events to Los Angeles. She plans four three-day training and recognition events a year, each of which draws close to 20,000 attendees. One of the events is usually held in Southern California.

A large number of ACN's affiliated independent business owners come from the West Coast, so Los Angeles, with its history of handling large groups, is an obvious choice for one of the four events, Giambrone says, particularly since it has a convention center and the hotel room inventory to handle large events like hers. She's brought the event to L.A. a half-dozen times over the years and has another event planned there this June.

Los Angeles also appeals to her, Giambrone says, "Because it's affordable for our attendees. Our attendees pay their own way, and they can fly into LAX, which is affordable from anywhere in the country." And with such a large variety of hotel product, her attendees have a choice ranging from upscale properties to budget hotels, depending on what they want and can afford.

"And the convention center is wonderful," she adds. "It's beautiful, and it's easy to get to."

As far as new hotel projects go, the biggest news involves the new Wilshire Grand Hotel. The new hotel is part of a \$1 billion project and will be located on the footprint of the old Wilshire Grand, which closed its doors in 2011 after 60 years in business.

In the place of the old Wilshire Grand will stand the 1,100-foot Wilshire Grand Tower, which, when completed, will be the tallest building west of the Mississippi River. The tower will contain a new 900-room Wilshire Grand, as well as retail and office space and will be completed by 2017.

One of the largest hotels in Los Angeles — and one of the most convenient for travelers — is the Los Angeles Marriott Airport Hotel. With more than a thousand rooms, four restaurants and 55,000 sf of meeting space, there's a lot about the LAX Marriott to like including the fact that planners say the hotel is not at all like a typical airport hotel. The hotel also has 6,000 sf of outdoor space, as well as a swimming pool that's three times bigger than an Olympic-size pool and has an adjoining 5,000-sf deck.

The LAX Marriott's "sweet spot" for group meetings is about 250 rooms, with a two- to three-night duration. The hotel is also a hot spot for day meetings. "We probably have more interviews in our building than any other place in the world," says a spokesperson. "I'll meet you in the lobby of the Marriott LAX" is almost a tagline. There are probably six to eight meetings going on in our lobby or one of our restaurants at any one time."

San Diego

The travel and tourism market is typically divided into three segments—business travel, leisure travel and meeting and conventions. But, according to Margie Sitton, senior vice president of sales and services of the San Diego Tourism Authority, that pattern doesn't necessarily hold in San Diego.

San Diego, unlike cities like Los Angeles, isn't home to many major corporate headquarters. Consequently, says Sitton, there isn't much business travel demand in San Diego. "Since that segment doesn't count for very much, we have to



LeAnne Giambrone, Senior Event Manager
ACN Inc., Concord, NC

"(Los Angeles) is affordable for our attendees. Our attendees pay their own way, and they can fly into LAX, which is affordable from anywhere in the country."

make up for it somewhere," she says. "And that void has to be filled in by group business. Everyone here understands that group business is the driver for San Diego."

Ask most meeting attendees what appeals to them about San Diego, and the first thing they'll probably mention is the area's fantastic weather. But, beyond the weather, research tells the city's tourism officials that San Diego is simply a "must-see" destination for meeting attendees, no matter whether they're first-time visitors, or they've been to the city before and want to return.

"So when a meeting is announced it really gets people excited," Sitton says. "They develop this mindset that gets them excited to get to San Diego, and whether they're here for an incentive program, or to learn about their company's latest sales program, their psyches are in the right place when they arrive."

Part of the reason that happens, she points out, is the fact that the airport is so conveniently located that when travelers walk out of the airport they're already in the destination. San Diego International Airport — also known as Lindbergh Field — is located just three miles northwest of the city's central business district, with immediate access to the San Diego Freeway.

"One of the most beautiful things about San Diego is every-

thing is so close,” says Stacy Weber, CMP, meeting and procurement manager for Moss Adams LLP, in Seattle, who plans meetings in multiple locations in Southern California and elsewhere on the West Coast. “You’re about five minutes from the Gaslamp Quarter (in downtown San Diego) and about 15 minutes from La Jolla. That’s really hard to find anywhere.”

“The minute (meeting attendees) get off the plane, they see the palm trees and smell the fresh sea breeze,” Sitton says.

“One of the most beautiful things about San Diego is everything is so close. You’re about five minutes from the Gaslamp Quarter and about 15 minutes from La Jolla. That’s really hard to find anywhere.”



Stacy Weber CMP, Meeting and Procurement Manager
Moss Adams LLP, Seattle, WA

“They’re already enjoying the atmosphere of the destination. And even if they have to drive all of 40 minutes to North County, they’re getting a look at the ocean on one side, and sprawling hills on the other, so it’s a destination where you kind of go, ‘Wow!’”

Another thing that makes San Diego appealing to groups is the variety of experiences groups can get there, says Sitton. “I tell planners that there are several distinct regions in San Diego — all with the same backdrop of great weather — so that you can come to San Diego seven times and have seven completely different San Diego experiences.” Those experiences range from heading north where you’ll find golf resorts, wineries and the beach vibe of Encinitas and Carlsbad, to taking the bridge across the bay to Coronado, home of the iconic red turrets of the Hotel Del Coronado.

Not only is the airport conveniently located, it’s about to complete a \$1 billion upgrade. Terminal 2, which handles most of the airport’s international and cross-country flights, is adding new gates, an expanded security checkpoint, a new ticket lobby and a new dual-level roadway to accommodate departing and arriving passengers.

In addition, the airport is building a new dining and retail area called Sunset Cove, which will be the central meeting area in Terminal 2. According to Sitton, some of the restaurants going into Sunset Cove are so high end that there have been suggestions that the airport could become a dining destination.

Elsewhere in San Diego, the Embarcadero, which sits along San Diego harbor on the east side of the bay, is undergoing a massive facelift. “We’ve always referred to the Embarcadero as kind of San Diego’s front porch — but it hasn’t been pretty,” says Sitton. The North Embarcadero Visionary Plan calls for the addition of about 12 acres of park and open space, seven acres of gardens, and more than 1,700 trees, and should make the area attractive and appealing, she says.

The old San Diego police headquarters building, located adjacent to Seaport Village, was built in 1939, but has been empty since 1987 and is finally being developed. The project calls for the conversion of three existing buildings into a collection of 30 shops and restaurants called the Headquarters, and will include a plaza, walkways and entertainment space. Construction is expected to be completed in October 2013 and the Headquarters is expected to serve as a new venue for meetings, Sitton says.

In the downtown, a multimillion-dollar expansion of Horton Plaza Park has begun, which will add 1.3 acres, as well as an outdoor amphitheater and three pavilions, making it a venue for offsite meeting events. That project should be completed by next year.

In La Jolla, The Estancia La Jolla Hotel & Spa has become part of the recently launched Meritage Collection, which includes three other four diamond resorts, Balboa Bay Resort in Newport Beach, Meritage Resort and Spa in Napa and the Bacara Resort & Spa in Santa Barbara.

The 210-room Estancia La Jolla just completed a \$4.8 million renovation, which includes guest room upgrades complete with new carpets, drapes, linens, pillows, robes, custom headboards, custom lounge chairs and artwork. The 8,000-sf spa has been renovated as well. The hotel has 26,000 sf of meeting space, as well as gardens, courtyards and outdoor space spread out across the 10-acre property.

The Estancia, like the other hotels in the Meritage Collection, is specifically geared towards groups, says Dave Gerdes, vice president of sales and marketing of the Pacific Hospitality Group, which manages the collection. “It’s our main emphasis.”

The idea behind the collection is that the four properties are destinations that “emphasize a combination of lifestyle and experience,” Gerdes says. “And they’re not downtown locations — they’re considered to be desirable resort locations, and they’re not huge properties. So the meeting planner and the group is never going to have that little-fish-in-a-big-pond feeling.”

Orange County

Lying between Los Angeles to the north, and San Diego to the South, Orange County is also a prime corporate meeting and incentive destination

In Anaheim, the Honda Center, home of the National Hockey League’s Mighty Ducks, continues to add improvements to the facility. The Grand Terrace project, which includes 15,000 sf of indoor-outdoor entertainment space and a new public restaurant, opens this year. The center also recently added free public Wi-Fi.

Elsewhere in Anaheim, the Anaheim Convention Center just opened the Grand Plaza, a Southern California outdoor environment suitable for a wide variety of outdoor events, such as al fresco dining, concerts, receptions and exhibitions. And just two miles from the Anaheim Convention Center

and the Disneyland Resort, a renovated 1919 citrus packing house is scheduled to open this summer. The Anaheim Packing House will be a 40,000-sf artisan food hall that will feature boutique food and beverage shops, live music and communal seating.

Groups heading for destinations such as Irvine and Newport Beach can fly into a newly improved John Wayne Airport. The recently completed \$543 million improvement plan included the addition of a third terminal, additional parking, free wireless Internet, and enhanced concession and retail offerings.

Weber has a particular affinity for Newport Beach. It’s close to the John Wayne Airport (about a 10-minute drive) and it has some great meeting hotels, she says, adding that it has plenty of shopping, dining and sightseeing, and is close enough to the rest of Orange County to take groups out on day trips.

“I love Newport Beach, and we do a lot of events there,” she says. “And one of the things I find interesting about Newport Beach is that it has ‘beach’ in its name, and it’s referred to as somewhat of a surf town, yet none of the major hotels are near the beach, except the Balboa Bay Club. The hotel is right there on the boardwalk, and when you’re there you really feel like you are in Southern California and all that that means, but in an amazingly luxurious setting.”

The Balboa Bay Club was recently added to the Meritage

Collection and changed its name to the Balboa Bay Resort. The 160-room hotel has more than 17,000 sf of indoor event space, including the 7,000-sf Grand Ballroom, a private bay-side lawn, outdoor terrace, and many well-appointed meeting rooms. “The hotel feels to me like a really rich person’s comfortable home,” says Weber. “That may sound weird, but you walk in and feel a little in awe about how beautiful it is, and you expect it to be a little snooty, but it isn’t. It’s just comfortable, welcoming and inviting.”

A little farther south, between Newport Beach and Laguna Beach, the resort at Pelican Hill offers groups 204 bungalow guest rooms and 128 villas, along with a 22-room, 23,000-sf spa, two Tom Fazio-designed championship golf courses, and five restaurants with ocean and golf course views.

The resort has about 20,000 sf of indoor and outdoor space, much of which comes with panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean, and has been consistently ranked by *Condé Nast Traveler* Readers’ Choice Awards as one of the top 100 hotels and resorts in the world.

The best reasons to meet in SoCal? The weather always tops the list as bright blue skies and sunny days (with little rain) are the norm in this part of the world. Beautiful coastlines, amazing mountains and parks, abundant outdoor activities and historic places to explore all make the list. When planners want to build attendance and make attendees and incentive winners happy, they think Southern California. **C&IT**

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The Peabody Memphis, Memphis, TN, has named **Donna Pope** and **Marshall Thompson** as national sales managers. Pope, who is responsible for the Washington, DC, market, previously served as general manager at the Fairfield Inn & Suites hotel and the Comfort Suites hotel, both in Olive Branch, MS. Thompson, who is responsible for the Greater Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia markets, most recently served as director of sales and marketing at the International Palms Resort & Conference Center in Orlando, FL.

Joe Bocherer was named vice president of sales for Experience Columbus. He most recently served as corporate director of sales and marketing for White Lodging Services out of Atlanta where he oversaw sales strategy for 13 full-service properties.

Westin Grand Cayman Seven Mile Beach Resort & Spa has appointed **Marti Trieschmann** as director of sales and marketing. She was area director of sales and marketing for the Wyndham Lake Buena Vista, an Official Walt Disney World Resort, Orlando, FL.

Coeur d'Alene Resort, Coeur d'Alene, ID, has promoted **Steve Carey** to national sales manager responsible for the Southwest region. He most recently served as the hotel's golf, ski and tour group sales.

The San Diego Tourism Authority has rehired **Lynn Whitehead** as national sales director in its citywide sales division based in the Washington, DC, office. She most recently served as director of national accounts for the Greater Phoenix Convention & Visitors Bureau, Phoenix, AZ. **C&IT**

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