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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



## Cruising Has Arrived

PAGE 10

## Presenting for Maximum Impact

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## The Conference Center Difference

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## Destination Marketing

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Norwegian  
Cruise Line's first  
Aqua Park on the Epic  
features three multi-story water  
slides including the 200-foot Epic  
Plunge — the only bowl slide at sea.

Florida  
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Nashville  
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New Orleans  
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ISSN 0739-1587

USPS 716-450

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FEBRUARY 2014

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Credit: Loews Portofino Bay Hotel



Universal Orlando Resort's Loews Portofino Bay Hotel recently completed an exterior and interior renovation. **PAGE 28**

Credit: Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.



Planners sing the praises of Nashville's music, food, culture and expanding meetings infrastructure. **PAGE 38**

Credit: Bordway Photography



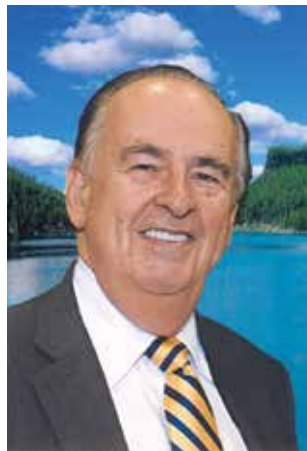
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Corporate & Incentive Travel (USPS 716-450) is published monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$12.00 U.S.A. only. Yearly subscription price is \$125.00 in the U.S.A.; Canada and foreign is \$165.00. Back copies \$14.00 U.S.A. only. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Corporate & Incentive Travel), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of or reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is in no way to be construed as a recommendation by C&IT of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted, by or to be binding upon, any corporate/incentive travel planner or agent. Reproduction of any portion of this publication by any means is strictly forbidden. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited photographs or manuscripts. Subscribers: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Department, Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Provide old and new addresses including zip codes. Enclose address label from most recent issue and please allow five weeks for the change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2014

# Publisher's Message

## The Easy Button

When we see a large, red push-button marked “easy,” the office superstore Staples comes to mind. Even though Staples has moved on to new advertising campaigns, the idea of pushing a button to make a job easier lives on. We push a button to google from our smartphones when no one can remember an actor’s name or the year of a historic event. We push a button to start a car or open a door. We all are looking for an easier or more convenient way to get things done.



Especially professional meeting planners who rarely have an easy time of it. Tasked with doing more with less every minute of every day, planners are finding meeting onboard a cruise ship very attractive nowadays. It sure is easier, they say.

For example, a survey conducted by Site, in cooperation with the Cruise Line Industry Association, reported that 72.6 percent of respondents said they expected to book a cruise for an IT program over the next three years, while 52.8 percent said they planned to book a business meeting on a cruise ship.

Jo Kling, president of Miami-based Landry & Kling Events at Sea, says, “Meetings are coming on strong now. And that has been especially true since the recession.

Cost is a very important factor for planners now. ...Being able to host a meeting in a way that costs less...is something that is becoming more and more attractive.”

Tom Koenigsberg, chief brand officer of Irving, TX-based Cheddar’s restaurant chain, favors cruises because they are very economical. “We realize that with a land-based program, you have F&B minimums, and you are also paying out of pocket for things like coffee and doughnuts. Those things tend to add up very, very quickly. Then, you also have the cost of the hotel rooms. A cruise is all-inclusive, and it is an incredible value,” he says.

Mark Bosworth, CEO of SwissJust in Doral, FL, agrees. “When we ran the numbers, the cost of a cruise was about the same or even cheaper than a land-based program.”

And Helen Wylie, corporate administrator for Bridgeville, PA-based Development Dimensions International, who the last time out chartered the entire ship — Silversea’s Silver Cloud — sums it up best: “You only have to write one check to pay in full for everything. A cruise is easy.”

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

## www.TheMeetingMagazines.com CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

### WEBSITE

www.themeetingmagazines.com

### PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Harvey Grotsky  
harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

### CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Mitch D. Miller  
mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

### MANAGING EDITORS

Susan Wyckoff Fell  
susan.fell@themeetingmagazines.com

Susan S. Gregg  
sue.gregg@themeetingmagazines.com

### CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Karen Brost

John Buchanan

Gabi Logan

Christine Loomis

Derek Reveron

Patrick Simms

### PRESIDENT & CEO

Harvey Grotsky

### VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS

David A. Middlebrook  
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

### ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES

2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120  
Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394  
561-989-0600 • Fax: 561-989-9509  
advertising@themeetingmagazines.com

### NORTHEAST/MID-ATLANTIC

Ric Rosenbaum  
914-643-1193 • Fax: 914-864-0673  
ric.rosenbaum1@gmail.com

### FLORIDA/CARIBBEAN

Mark Gold  
561-989-0600, ext. 109 • Fax: 561-989-9509  
mark.gold@themeetingmagazines.com

### SOUTHWEST

561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509  
advertising@themeetingmagazines.com

### SOUTHEAST

Hutson Lambert  
228-452-9683 • Fax: 866-419-9580  
hlambert@airmail.net

### MIDWEST/COLORADO

Michael D. Stack  
847-367-7120 • Fax: 847-276-3421  
michaeldstack@aol.com

### WEST

Marshall Rubin  
818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907  
mrubin@westworld.com

### HAWAII

Marshall Rubin  
818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907  
mrubin@westworld.com

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# News & Notes

## Dine Around the World with Discovery Dining at Sandals Resorts and Beaches Resorts



Sandals Emerald Bay, Grand Exuma, Bahamas

MIAMI, FL — Sandals Resorts and Beaches Resorts believes life is meant to be savored. Accordingly, chef Walter Staib, a four-time Emmy Award Winner and Culinary Ambassador to Sandals Resorts and Beaches Resorts, says the resorts launched Discovery Dining at all of their restaurants — a gastronomic expedition without leaving the resort.

More than 140 restaurants bring several unique culinary concepts to life, representing countries from around the globe at every meal. Guests will discover cuisine ranging from regional Italian, Neapolitan Woodstone Pizza, Japanese Teppanyaki, Sushi, Chinese, Thai, Pan-Asian, Classic French, French Brasserie, French Pâtisserie, Crêperie, Southwestern, Seafood, Mediterranean Rim, English Pub Fare, Caribbean and more.

Allergies and special dietary needs are addressed in private consultations with the culinary concierge or face-to-face meetings with each resort's executive chef. And, separate prep areas and separate kitchens keep guests safe from cross-contamination and food allergies and ensure a worry-free visit.

The Discovery Dining iPad App provides 360° views of the resort restaurants, chefs' bios and videos offered at Sandals Resorts and Beaches Resorts throughout the Caribbean including all of the properties in Sandals Resorts International's new "Luxury Meetings & Incentives Collection" that cater to the special needs of meeting and incentive groups. The collection consists of these resorts:

- St. John's, Antigua — Sandals Grande Antigua
  - Great Exuma, Bahamas — Sandals Emerald Bay
  - Nassau, Bahamas — Sandals Royal Bahamian
  - St. George's, Grenada — Sandals LaSource Grenada
  - Ocho Rios, Jamaica — Sandals Grande Riviera and Sandals Royal Plantation
  - Whitehouse, Jamaica — Sandals Whitehouse
  - Castries, St. Lucia — Sandals Grande St. Lucian
  - Providenciales, Turks and Caicos — Beaches Turks & Caicos
- [www.sandals.com/difference/restaurants/](http://www.sandals.com/difference/restaurants/)

## New Site Study: Using Cruises for Incentive Travel

CHICAGO, IL — The Site International Foundation, in cooperation with Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) recently released "Focus on Cruises for Incentive Travel," a study on the use of cruises as an incentive travel tool. "Understanding the popularity and awareness of cruising as a motivational tool, and the overall perception of the cruising industry is vital to incentive travel planners and industry partners," said Jane Schuldt, CITE, CIS, 2013 president of the Site International Foundation. "It is important to understand the challenges and concerns, as well as the motivation driving the use of cruises, so that we may better position this growing segment of our industry."

Key findings include:

- Only 4.9 percent indicated that they would never utilize a cruise ship venue for an incentive.
- Perception issues are a primary concern: 32 percent of respondents indicated that they were unaware of meeting space on cruise ships, and only 21.4 percent indicated that they were aware of private venues on cruise ships.
- Cruise length is an important factor in choosing ideal cruises. For groups, four- or five-night cruises are favored, while longer six- to eight-night cruises were favored for individual incentive travel.
- Buyers were more impressed with hands-on familiarization opportunities.

[www.siteglobal.com](http://www.siteglobal.com)

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## AIBTM and IAEE Renew Strategic Partnership to Offer Hosted Buyer Program and Education

ORLANDO, FL — The International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) and the Americas Incentive, Business Travel & Meetings Exhibition (AIBTM) announced in February a renewed partnership to offer a Hosted Buyer program for IAEE members to attend the event as well as an educa-

tion session in the AIBTM Learning Theatre to be held in Orlando, FL, June 10–12, 2014.

"Our initial success at AIBTM last year was very promising, and we are once again proud to partner with AIBTM on this industry event," says IAEE president and CEO David DuBois,

CMP, CAE, FASAE, CTA.

"AIBTM is delighted to renew its partnership with IAEE again this year," said Michael Lyons, AIBTM exhibition director. "We

share a common mission and values: to provide stakeholders in our industry with information and resources that will advance the industry's success through a focus on growth and relationship building. By establishing successful partnerships like this one, AIBTM is able to achieve its goal of delivering strong ROI to all the industry professionals who attend AIBTM in June in Orlando."

[www.aibtm.com](http://www.aibtm.com), [www.iaee.com](http://www.iaee.com)



LYONS

## IRF Report Highlights Top Motivation Trends in 2014

ST. LOUIS, MO — The Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) recently released its report "2014 Trends in Rewards and Recognition," which reveals that businesses will emphasize social aspects, retention and measurable outcomes in their motivation programs this year. The findings revealed 10 key trends in addition to other 2014 indicators. The first five are:

- **Talent Wars and Leadership Squeeze.** Many companies are targeting their competitors' key employees, which means it is more important than ever to recognize and reward top performers and bind them to your company over the long term. Many firms are using existing rewards and recognition platforms to align workforce skills and link behavior to the firm's broader business mission.
- **Holistic Motivation Is Hot.** The integration of social media technology into rewards and recognition programs is one of the most prevalent developments in recent years, with more than one-third of program owners incorporating gaming techniques or virtual elements. CSR also continues to be a hot topic for planners, with nearly half integrating it into their programs. More than 60 percent of program owners say they're either reviewing making wellness part of their programs, or have already begun to integrate it.
- **Expanding Budgets Improve Programs.** The recovering economy is having an extremely positive impact on motivation programs. Nearly 40 percent of incentive travel program owners and 42 percent of merchandise and gift card program owners are increasing their budgets this year.
- **Connecting People to Profits.** Businesses that have invested in building what some call a "culture of appreciation" are now looking for employee engagement to translate into more immediate, recognizable and revenue-related results. This represents a key opportunity for providers of non-cash award and incentive travel programs who can connect programs to the direct outcomes of sales, retention, productivity and customer satisfaction.
- **Big Data.** The opportunity to collect and analyze the massive amounts of data produced daily is being hailed as the next big opportunity for businesses of all sizes. HR departments and providers of rewards and recognition programs that can capture, translate and integrate this data to more effectively support the company's desired outcomes will be better able to position themselves to outperform the competition.

For additional details on the results and to read the full report, please visit:

[www.theirf.org](http://www.theirf.org)

## Attendance Soars at ADMEI Conference

DAYTON, OH — More than 200 destination management industry professionals from North America and Europe attended the Association of Destination Management Executives International's (ADMEI) 19th annual conference February 6–8 in Washington DC.

Networking events included an evening at the National Air & Space Museum. The conference concluded with the ADMEI Achievement Awards Event, with 13 awards presented to outstanding programs and three DMC professionals recognized for their contributions to the destination management community.

The 2015 conference will be held at Fiesta American Grande in Los Cabos, Mexico, February 12–14, 2015.

For more information about ADMEI and its programs to educate DMC professionals, visit [www.admei.org](http://www.admei.org).

By Chris Lee, DMCP

## Meetings for the Senses

**E**ach year, meeting planners and destination management companies around the world are challenged to impress an increasingly savvy clientele. Companies are challenged to keep guests on the edge of their seats and create powerful, meaningful and memorable experiences. Events need to be impactful — not stale. Attendees want to be at the forefront of what's new, trending and relevant. And, they want something interactive.

### Multi-Sensory Events

In the age of information, your guests' minds are constantly stimulated, but what about their physical senses? Building events and experiences to awe your clients by seeking creative ways to activate all five senses will differentiate your meeting in a crowded market and give your attendees something to connect with through sight, taste, scent, sound and touch.

### Start With Sight

Sensory experiences are only as vivid as the memories they leave behind. Photo booths offer guests visual mementos of their fun, and we often recommend syncing your photo booth with social media websites so that guests can instantly upload their photos and videos to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. For a new twist on the photo booth, slow-motion video is a visual treat. Guests can star in their own short films, with their antics heightened by suspenseful slow motion, capturing their reaction as a handful of colorful confetti rains down on them.

To document an event, start-to-finish time-lapse photography will allow your guests to relive the memories even after the party has passed. Originally used to capture natural events such as cloudscapes and sunsets, time-lapse photography packs an emotionally powerful punch. Give your guests fresh insight into the efforts that created their experience with a time-lapse video that begins with the transformational setup process and ends with the last person leaving the venue.

### Give Me Taste...Something I Can Sink My Teeth Into

Most event planners are familiar with craft beers, which have taken the nation by storm, but craft cocktails are also gaining in popularity, especially among those who prefer to sip something lighter than the latest Double IPA. Talented mixologists can design custom cocktails just for your event, or one-of-a-kind beverages based on each guest's individual tastes.



Additionally, while the use of natural and organic ingredients is a trend that's here to stay, sugary indulgences are always appreciated. Across the country, local candy boutiques have impressed us with sweet, custom-flavored candies, cupcakes and other treats that attendees can't help but sample, like Vanilla-rum Twinkies or dark-chocolate-dipped sea salt potato chips.

And, more than ever, guests want to experience tastes of the destination. Incorporate local ingredients into the menu, invite local breweries or wineries to do a pairing or tasting, or feature a guest chef who can share their innovative dishes derived from locally sourced ingredients.

### What's That...Smell?

The aroma of local, farm-fresh cuisine is a crowd pleaser at almost all events. At a recent event, the rich smell of a design-your-own-gourmet-grilled-cheese station had guests clamoring for a taste. Alternatively, scratch 'n' sniff stickers are making a comeback... in a unique way. The new version of this nostalgic technology offers interactive scratch 'n' sniff wallpaper, which can be customized to showcase the scents of your choosing. At an event in San Diego, Access Destination Services featured the local fragrances of fresh green grass, salty ocean waves and smoky beach bonfires in scratch 'n' sniff wallpaper, which was a huge hit.

### Now, I Want to Hear It

Because of the deep connections between sound and emotion, a live performance can set the tone of your event. As technology expands the virtual reach of musicians and

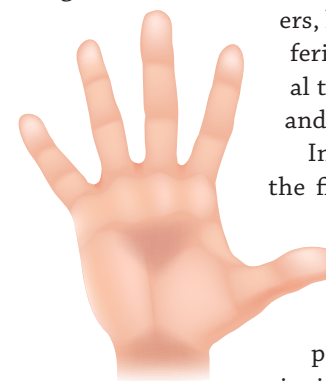


entertainers, a new respect has emerged for live performances. From the comedy acts of Chicago to the glee clubs of Las Vegas, live performances are integral to keeping your guests engaged and entertained, and local talent is especially well-received. To modernize the live performance, incorporate mobile apps into your events so that guests can send real-time song requests to the live band on stage.

To take it to the next level, consider holographic performances versus live performances or incorporate a flash mob to kick off the event.

### Literally, I'm Touched

Engage your guests by incorporating a pampering touch and give them a reason to relax. A VIP Green Room, where guests are treated to makeup artists, manicurists, shoe shiners, hair stylists and old-time barbers offering straight razor shaves is a personal touch that will enhance their moods and provide an opportunity to unwind.



In finding creative ways to activate the five senses, you'll see that the key to producing a truly great event is engagement. Whether you are planning a small VIP reception, a corporate social responsibility program or a large-scale gala, it's designing a number of different elements, that when all brought together successfully, become something much bigger and will truly engage attendees in what's going on around them.

C&IT

## Engaging the 5 Senses

- 1 SEE:** Impress your guests with optical delights, including social media-synced photo booths, slow-motion videos and time-lapse photography.
- 2 TASTE:** Quench your guests' thirst with craft cocktails, and indulge their cravings for sweets with custom candies and treats with local flair.
- 3 SMELL:** Use scratch 'n' sniff wallpaper to feature local fragrances.
- 4 HEAR:** Modernize live music with a mobile app that allows guests to request favorite songs in real-time or kick it up a notch with over-the-top performances.
- 5 TOUCH:** Incorporate tactile pleasures and interactive activities to ensure that your guests are "feeling" the experience.

“In the age of information, your guests' minds are constantly stimulated, but what about their **physical senses?**”



Chris Lee, DMCP

is chief executive officer of Access Destination Services, one of the most recognized destination management companies in North America. He has been involved in the hospitality industry since 1987. Chris is a co-founder and past president of the Association of Destination Management Executives International, a contributing author to *The Guide to Successful Destination Management*, and the more recent *Best Practices in Destination Management*. He was among the first to earn the DMCP certification and is a past Destination Management Professional of the Year honoree, the highest peer award in the industry. [www.accessdmc.com](http://www.accessdmc.com)

# Cruising Has Arrived

Cost Factors and Bottom-Line Value Make Meeting at Sea an Attractive Corporate Choice

By John Buchanan

Beginning in April on Celebrity Cruises, Canyon Ranch SpaClub will offer spa, beauty salon, wellness and fitness amenities presenting signature Canyon Ranch offerings.

Although meetings and incentive programs aboard cruise ships have been popular with many planners and their attendees for more than a decade, since the Great Recession the bottom-line value and other practical benefits of a cruise program have prompted many more planners to take a second look.

As a result, a landmark survey conducted by Site, in cooperation with the Cruise Line Industry Association (CLIA), and released last November, reported that 72.6 percent of respondents said they expected to book a cruise for an IT program over the next three years, while 52.8 percent said they planned to book a business meeting on a cruise ship.

"That report, and the fact that CLIA made a presentation at the last Site annual meeting, really tells you that cruising has arrived as a corporate choice," says Jo Kling, president of Miami-based Landry & Kling Events at Sea, which specializes in helping meeting planners create cruise programs.

Although cruise ships have traditionally been used more for incentive programs, Kling says, "meetings are coming on strong now. And that has been especially true since the recession."

The primary reason, Kling says is the bottom-line value. "Cost is a very important factor for planners now," she says. "Everybody is paying attention to budgets now. And being able to host a meeting in a way that costs less than most hotels, but actually provides more, is something that is becoming more and more attractive."

Tom Koenigsberg, chief brand officer at Irving, TX-based restaurant chain Cheddar's, has used cruises for more than a decade at three different companies.

Credit: Celebrity Cruises

One of the reasons he favors cruises, for both incentive programs and serious business meetings, is that “cruises are very economical,” Koenigsberg says. “So from an enterprise standpoint, as we look at our costs and what it costs to do a land-based program, we realize that with a land-based program, you have F&B minimums, and you are also paying out of pocket for things like coffee and doughnuts. Those things tend to add up very, very quickly. Then, you also have the cost of the hotel rooms. A cruise is all-inclusive, and it is an incredible value. And a much better value than a land-based program.”

Koenigsberg estimated that in an apples-to-apples comparison to a land-based program, a cruise is 30–40 percent less expensive.

Mark Bosworth, CEO of Doral, FL-based SwissJust, a direct sales company for essential oils and wellness products, corroborated Koenigsberg’s assertion that cruises offer dramatic bang for the buck.

“When we ran the numbers, the cost of a cruise was about the same or even

cheaper than a land-based program,” says Bosworth, who — after using cruise ships for five years for his incentive program — hosted his first cruise meeting in January 2013 on a Royal Caribbean ship and used a Carnival ship for this year’s meeting. “And part of the reason for that was that we always ended



**Helen Wylie, Corporate Administrator**  
Development Dimensions International Inc., Bridgeville, PA

*“You only have to write one check to pay in full for everything, with no variations or add-ons as you have in a land-based program. A cruise is easy.”*

up spending a lot of F&B costs in a hotel,” he says. “And on a cruise, you pay an all-inclusive price.”

In addition, Bosworth says, SwissJust got a four-day meeting for the same cost of a three-day weekend meeting in Miami.

The all-inclusive pricing model of a cruise program also translates to practical ease and convenience for a planner, Kling says.

Helen Wylie, corporate administrator at Bridgeville, PA-based HR consulting firm Development Dimensions International Inc., first used a buyout of a Silversea luxury ship in 2009 for the company’s annual incentive program, which draws between 200 and 250 domestic and international attendees.

She and her attendees like the experience so much that they used a Silversea ship again last year.

Wylie agreed that not only is the all-inclusive pricing model of a cruise a critical component in its value proposition, but also is a convenience factor for planners. “You only have to write one check to pay in full for everything, with no variations or add-ons as you have in a land-based program,” Wylie says. “If you do a land-based program, you’re writing checks for the hotel, the DMC, the transportation company. And you have to reconcile and pay all of those invoices. There’s just a lot more involved. A cruise is easy.”

Koenigsberg said that convenience

as a planner also is a key benefit for Cheddar’s, especially since he has many other responsibilities as an executive at the company.

#### Food and Beverage

Another key benefit of a cruise ship is that virtually unlimited F&B services are included in the all-inclusive price.

“The food service aspect is definitely another thing that makes cruises attractive,” says Koenigsberg, whose very successful restaurant company has built its longstanding reputation on quality. The F&B benefit of cruises is now being rendered even more valuable as costs at hotels are rising sharply in top destina-



Incentive winner (l) Rita Kocjancic and her daughter, Kristyn, flank one of the ship’s lively entertainers as they enjoy fun and dancing during the on-deck party hosted by DDI Inc. on Silversea’s Silver Cloud.

tions as the pendulum swings back to a seller’s market.

“What really makes cruises attractive from an F&B perspective is having all of the food you want — as much as you want whenever you want,” he says. “That is very appealing to us and our people.”

And with a cruise, Kling says, “there is also the issue of the quality of the food and the range of options. You definitely get more variety and better value on a cruise.”

# GOOD MEETS ON TIME. GREAT MEETS ON ISLAND TIME.

## TAKE YOUR NEXT EVENT TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL ABOARD THE BRAND-NEW NORWEGIAN GETAWAY.

Norwegian Getaway has arrived and now sails round trip from Miami on 7-day cruises to the Eastern Caribbean. Inspire your clients, employees or associates with innovations that include:

- **The Waterfront** – A quarter-mile, oceanfront promenade lined with entertaining options
- **678 Ocean Place** – Features three decks of dining and entertainment
- **Aqua Park** – Five multi-story waterslides, swimming pools and hot tubs
- **Seafood Restaurants by Iron Chef Geoffrey Zakarian** – Part of 28 dining experiences; 11 are included in the cruise fare
- **Top-Notch Entertainment** – Broadway hits, including *Legally Blonde* and *Burn the Floor*

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Credit: Cheddar's



Kelly C. Baltes, the chairman and CEO of Cheddar’s restaurant chain, addresses attendees onboard ship.



Credit: Carnival Cruise Lines

The 948-seat Sapphire Dining Room is one of several restaurants located on the Carnival Breeze.

And many cruise ships are now offering top-quality specialty restaurants, such as sushi bars and Italian restaurants, as well as addressing consumer demand for more healthful fare including vegan, vegetarian or gluten-free options, Kling says.

The latest innovation, she says, features more flexibility in packages that al-

***“When we ran the numbers, the cost of a cruise was about the same or even cheaper than a land-based program.”***

**Mark Bosworth, CEO, SwissJust, Doral, FL**

low dining every night at a specialty food venue rather than the main dining room.

And on its Royal Princess ship, Princess Cruises has introduced a “Chef’s Table VIP Experience,” which is a perfect

way to give high-profile recognition and reward to top-gun incentive qualifiers.

In December, Carnival Cruise Lines announced the inception of two new main dining room concepts, American Table and American Feast. The former, to be offered on “Cruise Casual” nights, starting on the Carnival Glory, is designed to evoke a world-class restaurant experience with a focus on exceptional American cuisine.

American Feast also will be offered once or twice per voyage in the main dining room on “Cruise Elegant” nights. It has been designed to evoke the feel of an elegant, elaborate celebration with a sophisticated multi-course menu.

Carnival also has raised the bar for 2014 when it comes to onboard entertainment, booking major stars such as Jennifer Hudson, Lady Antebellum, Martina McBride and Jewel.

“And on a cruise ship, you’re getting that kind of Las Vegas-quality entertainment for free,” Kling says, “because it, too, is included in the all-inclusive price. And as a planner, you don’t have to think about it or have to arrange anything. It’s all done for you.”

### Other Benefits

Yet another important benefit of cruises, Koenigsberg says, is the camaraderie and sense of shared experience that is unique to cruises.

“On a cruise, the group is really together all of the time,” Koenigsberg says. “And that gives a cruise meeting a certain kind of camaraderie that you don’t necessarily get in a land-based program. In a land-based destination, when



the day’s meeting is done, people are spread out all over the city, so there is no shared experience. And camaraderie is very important to us as a benefit, particularly for the type of general man-

ager meetings that we do on cruise ships because they are the people who really drive our business.”

He noted that spouses also like cruises very much, “because their husbands or wives work very hard and a cruise gives them time together without their kids around.”



Credit: Princess Cruises

It is easy to check in with the office from this comfortable and updated tech center on The Royal Princess.

Related to that benefit, Bosworth says, is that cell phones do not always work on a cruise ship at sea. “And the fact that people weren’t using cell phones also meant they had more time to chat with each other and network,” he says. “And for us, that is a great benefit.”

Another benefit is that cruises are a unique experience for most attendees.

“It’s something different,” Wylie says. “Land-based programs are wonderful, too, and there are beautiful resorts out there.

But a cruise is just different. It’s just something new to do. And if you choose just the right cruise line for your group, that makes the experience all that much better.”

Koenigsberg and his attendees also value the special nature of a cruise.

“There is an exotic element and in some cases that is an element that people would normally not have the opportunity to get,” he says. “For example, a cruise ship that stops in the Bahamas and a number of exotic destinations like that along the way is not a vacation package that many

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people could string together on their own or afford. So that allows for a very exotic itinerary.”

As far as the overall experience goes, for both attendees and planners, Koenigsberg has high praise for Celebrity Cruises, which he has used

Kling cites another three new ships as representative of how the bar is constantly being raised.

In November, Royal Caribbean will launch its Quantum of the Seas. “It has a big wow factor,” Kling



MSC’s first year-round commitment to the U.S. market.”

Other new ships garnering a lot of attention and interest include the Regal Princess, which will be introduced in May as sister ship to the Royal Princess, according to The Cruise Web Inc.

#### Get Expert Help

Two things virtually all meeting planners who have used cruises agree on, in terms of practical tips that will ensure the best possible experience, are to work with a cruise professional such as Florida-based companies Landry & Kling and Buy the Sea to select the right line and ship for a program. Also, it’s vitally important to make a site visit to be absolutely sure that you know what you’re buying and why.

For the last five years, Bosworth has worked with Buy the Sea, operated by cruise veteran Shari Wallack. “Buy the Sea gives us very good service,” Bosworth says. “They’re very easy to work with and they make doing a cruise meeting very easy. And they’re just good people.”

Bosworth also strongly suggests a site visit before a booking. There is no standard cruise, he says. Every line is different and every ship is different, so the only way to have confidence that a planner has made an informed choice is to see the product first-hand to make sure

at three different employers, most recently two years ago.

One of the things that sets Celebrity apart, he says, is its exemplary service.

“When you’re trying to do a meeting on a ship with a contained group, the customer service you get around things like setting up meeting rooms is very important,” he says. “Or storing things you’ve brought onboard for different things you’re doing. And in those ways, Celebrity was very helpful. For example, they assigned a dedicated person to us and gave us walkie-talkies so we had instant and constant access to our customer service rep. And things come up all time, so that for us is a very big benefit, especially because we tend to have a lot of issues that come up. But we got awesome service from Celebrity.”

says, because it has been talked about a lot. And if you’re offering a program on a new ship that has already gotten a lot of attention, it gives you bragging rights to be one of the first groups to go on it.”

Another high-profile new ship is the Getaway from Norwegian Cruise Lines, which debuted in January in New York and provided supplemental housing for the Super Bowl before heading south to Miami, where it will be based year-round for Caribbean itineraries.

The Cruise Web Inc. notes that “The Getaway is the sister ship to the Norwegian Breakaway and while it will be similar in size and shape, the Getaway will have a personality all its own. Because it is based out of Miami, it will



*“Cost is a very important factor. And being able to host a meeting in a way that costs less than most hotels, but actually provides more, is something that is becoming more and more attractive.”*

Jo Kling, President, Landry & Kling Events at Sea, Miami, FL

#### New Ships

Based on ever-increasing consumer demand for cruises — especially among repeat passengers — the cruise lines regularly introduce new ships, often eclipsing the previous standard for excellence.

Carnival’s newest ship is the Carnival Sunshine. Because Carnival is highly focused on being the market leader in incentive programs, the ship features an enhanced array of dining and entertainment venues aimed at attracting companies that want to reward their employees with a truly exceptional cruise experience.

feature some of that beach city’s key aspects. For example, she will have a lot of Latin flavor at the Flamingo Bar & Grill and the Sugarcane Mojito Bar.”

The Divina from MSC (Mediterranean Shipping Company) also is creating a lot of buzz, Kling says. “It will also be sailing out of Miami to the eastern and western Caribbean year-round. It’s also

the ship has exactly the facilities and amenities that are most prized.

As an interim step to that process, Landry & Kling Events at Sea offers the popular Internet portal *Seasite.com*, which allows planners to investigate ships, check available cruise dates, and collect information on all other aspects of a particular ship. **C&IT**

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## Speakers

# Presenting for Maximum Impact

### Planners Must Design for Live and Virtual Audiences

As the meeting industry continues to evolve during its post-recession recovery, one significant new trend is the increase in the use of hybrid meetings that cater to two distinctly different kinds of audiences — live and virtual. In order to be successful, planners need to understand the unique needs and challenges involved in helping speakers and presenters deliver maximum impact, based on the underlying objectives of the event.

“You have to plan for two audiences having two different kinds of experiences,” explains Troutdale, OR-based veteran speaker Roger Courville, author of “The Virtual Presenter’s Handbook” (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009) and the former president of the Oregon chapter of the National Speakers Association. “That’s a meeting planner problem and a speaker problem. And both of you have to address the challenges.”

The speaker, Courville says, needs to be fully aware that there is a second audience and plan very clearly for how they’re going to engage that virtual audience. At the same time, however, the planner and presenter must carefully plan for maximum impact at the live event, too.

“If there is a mistake or shortcoming, it starts before the meeting, because you have to start the process by designing a new experience that is tailored to a specific goal,” Courville says. “And a big part of that is always thinking through how you are going to engage people and bring them into the conversation.”

At the heart of that mission is a

fundamental requirement for careful planning of how attendees — live and virtual — will be equipped with the essential information they need in order for the goals of the meeting to be met and success to be measured. “And one of the things I would suggest, as a speaker and presenter, that planners can do more effectively would be to ask — if not prod — the speaker about how they can help design that new experience, and what supporting information before, at and after the event is required to be able to do that.”

#### Proper Preparation

Chris Kelly, co-founder and principal of New York City-based Convene, which operates state-of-the-art offsite meeting venues in Manhattan, has been directly involved in the ongoing maturation and evolution of hybrid meetings. As a result, he has identified another obvious key to success.

“One of the things that we find that is basic but is often forgotten or overlooked is proper preparation, which requires a walkthrough with the speakers,” Kelly says. “What we have found time and time again, regardless of how many times the speaker has made similar presentations before, is that doing a simple walkthrough and getting the presenter familiar with whatever the presentation method is — meaning how things are set up and will be executed — often is the single most effective way to mitigate against problems with the presentation.”

It’s also a proven method for making sure the speaker clearly under-

stands the goals of the meeting and how those should be translated into the presentation.

Given those kinds of practical considerations, Nicholas Cox, Convene’s director of technology, stresses that comprehensive rehearsals are another key to success. “Ideally, you want to do a lot of formal rehearsals, to make sure that both the live and virtual components go as planned,” he says. “The basic idea is to make sure that the experience is essentially the same for both the live and virtual audiences within the context of the meeting. And part of that is making sure that audio levels are right and that your bandwidth allows the right speed of delivery to your virtual audience so nothing is delayed or disrupted. And accomplishing that sameness of experience, in real time, requires a very formal, quality-control process.”

#### Engagement Strategies

There probably aren’t many meeting planners left in the industry who do not grasp the notion that the catch phrase of the last few years has been “attendee engagement.”

However, Cox says, there are quite a few who still do not fully understand the differences between engaging a live attendee and a virtual participant.

By definition, he notes, the methods and quality of engagement are fundamentally different for live and virtual audiences. “That’s one reason why so many companies still want to have only live meetings, where they have face-to-face engagement,” he says. “That’s because in

a virtual meeting, there are only two dimensions — audio and video. You don’t have the human element that you do in a face-to-face meeting. So you have to know how to compensate for that to get the same results from a virtual audience in terms of engagement.”

For example, Convene preaches the need for a dedicated person in the live audience who will act as the onsite representative of and advocate for virtual attendees.

“The reason that is important is because the people who are at the event physically tend to take precedence with their questions and comments over the virtual audience,” Kelly says. “So the best way to prevent that or correct for that is to have someone who actually represents the virtual audience and makes sure they are equally engaged and heard.”

That advocate can field questions and comments from a live Twitter feed or Facebook page and relay them to the presenter. In another variation, tweets from both live and virtual attendees can

be prominently displayed for everyone to see and react to, which in turn drives a deeper level of collective engagement.

However, Kelly says, one hard-learned caveat for many planners is that while there are an ever-increasing number of technology options that can produce very dynamic events, the greatest audience engagement comes when the program or app interacts with the technology that participants are already most familiar and comfortable with. “As opposed to adding additional or new technology onto the conference platform,” Kelly says, “we like to think in terms of what kinds of tools are already in play with a particular group of attendees that we can adapt to the conference, instead of asking what kind of crazy new technology we can impose upon the audience.”

His point is that often the simpler the technology, the better the results. “Instead of looking for what’s newest and most technologically advanced, planners really should look for the lowest common denominator based on who their

audience is, their relative degree of technological sophistication, and the tools they know best and are most comfortable with,” Kelly says.

#### Technical Education

Another unfolding realization among meeting planners responsible for staging hybrid meetings and making sure presentations go off without a hitch is an understanding of ever more complex technical challenges.

For example, Cox says, the available bandwidth in many hotels and meeting venues — and the cost of accessing it — is a fundamental issue that must be analyzed and addressed. Related to that is the reality that with regard to the delivery of problem-free hybrid meetings, a venue is by definition only as good as its capabilities.

The rapid evolution of Wi-Fi technology and the numerous types of devices that many attendees carry means a planner must look carefully at how many total participants will be at a meeting and



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how many a prospective data network can handle.

Meanwhile, the list of new technology options that support meeting effectiveness keeps on growing.

One current trend that is generating a lot of excitement is highly interactive, cloud-based technologies. “One is TeleOffice, from iDeep Solutions Corporation, which provides innovative engagement capabilities with touch-panel screens,” Kelly says. “Attendees can actually interact with the screen itself and make notations, and those notations will be received by every attendee who has a Wi-Fi enabled mobile device. From a presenter’s point of view, that allows you to share screens in real time with your entire audience, both live and virtual. The only requirement on the recipient’s end is a Wi-Fi-enabled device.”

## Feedback Is Vital

Regardless of the type of meeting or the technological flourishes deployed, getting in-depth feedback from both live and virtual attendees is vital in order to assess the success of the event.

That is particularly important to Christina DeHaven, CMP, project manager at Universal World Events in Allentown, NJ, because she specializes in pharmaceutical meetings. And no component of a pharma meeting is more important than effective presentations and attendee comprehension, she says.

Therefore, a key weapon in her arsenal, especially for hybrid meetings, is an audience response system (ARS) that allows her to monitor and measure attendee engagement and learning.

“I have found that is necessary to help the speaker overcome the kinds of engagement challenges that can come up at both live and virtual events,” DeHaven says, adding that her common practice now is to make sure there is a steady flow of questions and comments from attendees — in real time.

One innovative provider she favors is Tallen Technology, which offers an assortment of ARS tools. Among the newest — and the one DeHaven likes best — is a Reply Ativa keypad equipped with Tallen Audience software. The de-

vice, about the size of a smartphone, features a fully dynamic color touch screen. Its capabilities include a virtual QWERTY keyboard, SMS text messaging, customizable viewing space, smart-card programming, self-paced testing and advanced Q&A management.

DeHaven finds such a sophisticated device essential to the ability of her clients to assess every aspect of the effectiveness of speakers and presenters and the overall success of a meeting.

However, she also uses the kind of on-site “attendee advocate” that Kelly and Courville recommend. DeHaven uses the same person to facilitate engagement of both live and virtual attendees.

“I believe that the most advanced ARS tools are critical to ensuring that the physicians that attend my meetings are

***“One of the things that we find that is basic but is often forgotten or overlooked is proper preparation, which requires a walkthrough with the speakers.”***

**Chris Kelly**

Co-Founder and Principal  
Convene  
New York, NY

engaged and that they are absorbing and understanding the information being presented to them,” DeHaven says. “So we throw in a lot of polling questions, just so we can get feedback and assess who was actively participating in the presentations. It’s not all just about information of data. We also want the speakers or presenters to have fun with the material and make it fun as part of the larger engagement strategy. It can’t just be about an overwhelming amount of technical information.”

What she has learned as the use of hybrid meetings increases, DeHaven says, is that planners and meeting hosts must be able to gather a clear measurement of just how engaged attendees were, both in the live audience and in the virtual arena.

“I want to know who we kept engaged for the whole time and who we lost,” she says. “And if we lost someone, we know whether we lost them at the beginning, in the middle or at the end. Or did everyone stay engaged and then say they enjoyed the meeting? And that kind of detailed knowledge about how your presenters are performing is very important.”

Although April Abernathy, director, program management, at Beaverton, OR-based Opus Events Agency, agrees with DeHaven’s assessment of the importance of attendee feedback, her focus is on making sure the right equipment and technology are deployed for a meeting and that everything will work as planned when it comes to problem-free presentations.

And for many planners like her who are new to the world of hybrid meetings, Abernathy says, a focus on technical fundamentals precedes a focus on more sophisticated capabilities such as audience engagement and feedback. “For us,” Abernathy says, “because we are relatively new to hybrid meetings, the most important thing is making sure that speakers and presenters are properly prepared and ready to go, with an understanding of the goals of the meeting and how success will be measured.”

But, she quickly adds, she has already mastered a valuable lesson she can pass on to other planners who are a step or two behind her on the learning curve. “And that is to take nothing for granted when it comes to staging a hybrid meeting and making sure your presentations accomplish what they are supposed to,” she says, adding that wise planners also will combine that with respect for Murphy’s Law — and that indeed, anything that can go wrong likely will.

And that, in turn, she says, just reinforces the need for extensive preparation and attention to every detail of the meeting.

“And when it comes to doing a hybrid meeting, the other thing I’ve learned,” Abernathy says, “is that you have to think in terms of the performance in both arenas. You can’t just say, ‘Oh, it’s really a live meeting. I just have to set up a WebEx event as the online portion. It’s not that simple.”

**C&IT**

## The Conference Center Difference



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**A**s convention centers and major hotel conference centers offer less space and fewer dates with limited amenities, turning to a conference center allows planners to stay within budget while offering attendees an experience with even more perks.

By Gabi Logan

Though the meeting industry has rebounded and hotels are taking more powerful positions in negotiations, conference centers are still proceeding cautiously, eager to work with planners to create the best agreement for all parties. Thriving conference centers are placing a higher priority in their packages, services, and physical spaces to help planners provide that intangible *something special* for attendees.

#### In the Seller's Market, Planners' Needs Can Take a Back Seat

"People feel like the economy is coming back, and they're willing to have more meetings, but while we're able to have more meetings, we're not able to pay more for them," shares Judy Anderson, senior manager, meetings and travel,

for Grapevine, TX-based GameStop. "I will choose locations that will keep rates steady. Going five dollars over my room rate will cause me to leave." While many planners share her sentiments, not all hotels are listening.

Julie Powers, CMP, manager, global accounts for HelmsBriscoe in the Lake Forest, CA, office, comes across a wide swath of the market in her work, and suggests the writing is on the wall. "We're going into a seller's market," she says. "We were starting to see it at the end of 2013 and now in 2014, it's going to be in full force."

When Joann Chmura, CMP, CMM, meeting and event manager at Stamford, CT-based Viridian Energy (at the time of this writing) set out to plan Viridian's main 2014 event, she had to begin at square one. "We were trying to find a location. We were going to Baltimore, because we outgrew the size of the hotel in DC. The hotel in DC knew they couldn't make it work, and we just shook hands and parted ways. I was trying to track someone down at the Gaylord

National Harbor, and when I did she was very apologetic about the initial lack of response. The person we dealt with at DC ended up going to Gaylord, and he didn't even follow up on our request.

"But we went to meet them, and then it took a couple weeks to get one room drawing," she continues. "Then I asked



***"We provide everything a hotel does, from dedicated meeting space to skill space to connectivity."***

**Mark Cooper**  
CEO, International Association  
of Conference Centres  
Chicago, IL

for a contract and one week went by, then another and so on. We were thinking about going somewhere else, and then in one day, we had six drawings. Location number three is what we finally went with, and since we signed I went

to Gaylord to tell them we went somewhere else, and they asked me why. I told them, 'It just wasn't going to work. You just weren't doing everything you could to work with us.'

"It's a seller's market with the hotels and convention centers, and it wasn't like that a few years ago," Chmura shares. "I just started getting the feeling that if we're not getting the focus now, how is

***"The conference center works out really well when what the center offers is in line with the goals of the event."***



**Robin Anderson, CMP, CCTE, CMM**  
Corporate Travel and Meeting Manager  
T-Systems North America Inc.  
Downers Grove, IL

it going to be while we're onsite? I think they lose sight that this is about relationships. Why burn that bridge? That person isn't going to be there forever."

### The Conference Center Difference

Many of the factors that make hotels and conventions centers play a little hard to get during the RFP and contract negotiation processes don't affect conference centers. "Conference centers behave very differently than hotels," explains Mark Cooper, CEO of the International Association of Conference Centres (IACC). "One of the best ways of explaining it is that hotels have their fingers in many different pies. When they look at the space they want to sell, they'll be looking at a number of different things: Are there conventions coming to town? Do they have leisure events, weddings or banquets? A traditional hotel is generally restricted in terms of how far out they'll commit because they don't know how the other cash cows will be.

"Conference centers are not affected by transient events," he continues. "In places like Florida, where you're affected by high season and tourist season, since centers

in Florida don't take that type of business, you can go when you want and not when the tourist season forces you to."

Educating meeting planners on the key differences between conference centers and convention centers is one of IACC's core goals for 2014. "It's a continual process," says Cooper. "We've noticed that when you have a very well-established, long-standing group of professional corporate meeting planners, they know the venues and they know the marketplace. They might gravitate naturally toward a hotel brand because they work with hotel brands in other parts of their job and parts of their corporate life, and they don't necessarily know that there are conference centers and that they are

very different than convention centers. "We focus on groups with less than 100 delegates, like training and board meetings," he explains. Cooper says some of the centers may not be able to accommodate very large conferences as they require many smaller breakout rooms and meeting spaces. However, "we provide everything a hotel does, from dedicated meeting space to skill space to connectivity," says Cooper.

"The conference center works out really well when what the conference center offers is in line with the goals of the event," agrees Robin Anderson, CMP, CCTE, CMM, corporate travel and meeting manager at Downers Grove, IL-based T-Systems North America Inc. "Mostly over the past year, when I've dealt with conference centers, it's been for events that can use the conference center services, training events and things like that.

"For me, one major benefit of conference centers is that it's all included," she continues. "With a hotel I have to make sure that the concessions that I want are there, like Internet and breakfast. When you compare the training environment in a conference center versus being stuck in a hotel in a portion of a ballroom, with the training environment you get the white board and items like that thrown in with the specs."

Powers says she has been dealing

with some amazing conference centers this year. "I use a lot of convention centers and conference centers, but I do like to go to an IACC-certified location for certain groups because they offer CMP packages that include sleeping rooms, meeting space, some F&B and some AV all under one roof," she says. "They even have ergonomic chairs, and when you're sitting there all day, it's easier on your body and makes you pay attention a little better."

According to Powers, "They've been so responsive and really easy to deal with. This year I've done a lot more business with them than in the past, and they've been very accommodating, even when there are certain clauses we need in the contract, and they're not able to come through on those, they will do what they can to accommodate the client's needs." Just what busy planners need in today's seller's market.

### Make Yourself at Home

Hospitality services are a key differentiating factor for conference centers looking to lure in meeting planners overwhelmed with choices and overwhelmed with their budgets. It's no longer enough to negotiate, customize meeting spaces and work closely with planners to ensure a smooth event.

For many planners, this attitude is music to their ears: "You want the venue to be an extension of you, and when you don't have a tremendous staff, you depend on the service level of the property," says Chmura. "It has to be more than a partnership between the venue and their client. It has to be more of a three-legged stool, with me, the conference center and the ancillary vendors they can partner with."

Powers agrees: "The best meeting experience is when they go out of their way to accommodate the planner's needs, because when it boils down to it, it's the end user who will rebook year after year so the more positive experience they have, the better it will be for the center."

In response to this growing need in the meeting industry, IACC has made one of its goals for 2014 to partner with the world's top hospitality schools. "As

an organization, our goal is to have the very best talent in the hospitality industry working in our member conference centers," explains Cooper. "We're looking to raise the profile of our centers with the very best talent, but we've found that a lot of students, as they're entering the market, haven't really heard about conference centers. They get blinded by big hotel groups like Kempinski or big sports venues. Little is taught that there is a huge need to help planners provide the best possible meeting to their attendees."

### Customized Packages

As the IACC ramps up its hospitality focus, many conference centers are already beginning to further customize their services and packages to ensure that meeting planners are getting exactly what they need. In a study of 26 dedicated conference facilities released December 2013, Easton, PA-based PGH Research found that complete meeting packages (CMPs) represent less than 10 percent of package sales for nearly half of respondents. For the purposes of their study, PHG defined dedicated conference facilities not specifically as IACC venues, but as locations that derive at least two-thirds of their total business from meetings and conferences.

Conference centers are often moving away from the CMPs they are known for and offering modified meeting packages (MMPs), because, as 60 percent of respondents indicated, they offer greater value to meeting planners. In the last three years, the volume of MMPs and day meeting packages (DMPs) has been on the rise for most venues, as planners look to save money by using different dining and guest room options.

"To some centers, an MMP is simply a CMP without breakfast," explains Neil Pompan, president of PHG, in a statement. "To others, it is a CMP without dinner. And to still others, it is a CMP without breakfast or dinner. But to the majority of respondents, an MMP is any package that varies from the CMP or DMP, which is created to fulfill a customer's need."

Tom Cappucci, a regional director for Pompan Hospitality Global Inc., adds

that this is a sign of conference centers' increased focus on hospitality. "With their relationship-based selling efforts, properties must ask more questions about a client's organization and the purpose of the meeting before presenting any package concept," he says in a statement. "Questions about company culture, meeting goals, attendee profiles and more are important in developing the right meeting package for a group. Once an understanding is established on the desired conference experience, a package can be designed to meet most, if not all of their goals and objectives."

As planners receive more pushback on rates and dates from hotels and convention centers, conference centers are stepping in to fill the hospitality void with custom packages, state-of-the-art facilities, and the space, staff and availability that planners need.

### New and Noteworthy

Two conference centers from Benchmark Resorts and Hotels have recently completed sweeping renovations of their meeting spaces. **The Chattanooga**, the only four diamond-rated, full-service hotel in Chattanooga, TN, has brought the outside in to its 20 meeting and event rooms with an award-winning renovation incorporating carpets that replicate the Tennessee River and local historical scenes as well as botanical art displays. For tech-heavy events, the Chattanooga has installed a new cyber café with custom seating. The venue offers a total of 25,000 sf of meeting space.

In the Chicago suburbs, **Eaglewood Resort & Spa** completed a \$1.2 million renovation of its more than 37,000-sf facility in 2013. While the meeting and common rooms received an update bringing in Eaglewood's Prairie-style design and homages to Frank Lloyd Wright, the center updated its Internet capabilities to 100 Mbps of bandwidth.

Dolce Hotels and Resorts has acquired and revamped **The Alexander**, centrally located in Indianapolis, IN. A style icon of the city, The Alexander's 16,500 sf of



***"They will do what they can to accommodate the client's needs. Just what busy planners need in today's seller's market."***

**Julie Powers, CMP**  
Manager, Global Accounts  
HelmsBriscoe  
Lake Forest, CA

event space, 157 guest rooms, and 57 extended stay spaces take a modern, colorful vibe and punctuate it with commissioned works of art noteworthy enough to draw enthusiasts on their own.

Within the IACC family, the 32,000-sf **Emory Conference Center Hotel** in Atlanta, the city's first LEED Silver-certified sustainable conference center has recently completed a sweeping renovation. The two main amphitheatres, the 240-seat Emory auditorium, the 74-seat Oak Amphitheater, breakout areas and restrooms have been completely rebuilt, and all meeting spaces refurbished. Inspired by the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, the conference center also features 325 guest rooms.

One of the most exciting recent renovations to an IACC conference center is taking place in Galveston, TX, at the **San Luis Resort, Spa & Conference Center**, where the conference center takes up the first two floors of the 16-story property. Retaining its sweeping views of the Gulf of Mexico, the completely overhauled, 40,000-sf meeting space features custom art from two staff artists, Herman Miller Setu chairs and flip-top training tables. The renovation continues into 2014, but 90 of the resort's 250 guest rooms have already been refinished.

In northern Virginia, IACC's **Executive Conference and Training Center** (ECTC) in Dulles has recently expanded to 10,000 sf of flexible meeting space, double its available meeting areas. Two miles from Dulles Airport, ECTC's state-of-the-art AV and cuisine make for a comprehensive meeting space. Five premier partner hotels are located nearby. **C&IT**

# Destination Marketing



## Planners Benefit From Effective Digital and Social Media Campaigns

By Derek Reveron

**D**estination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), also known as Convention & Visitors Bureaus (CVBs), are hopping on the digital and social media marketing bandwagon to promote their destinations to planners and the public, vie with competitors for meetings, and grow return on investment.

Indeed, DMO websites are centerpieces of marketing efforts. The sites are integrated with social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest to provide resources and information that meeting planners need to sell destinations to groups and executives.

Looking to leverage the power of social media, DMOs are forging social media partnerships with hotels, restaurants, attractions and others to co-promote destinations. Many DMOs are stepping up marketing via smartphones and tablets and optimizing their websites to make browsing easier on the small screens of mobile devices.

### Websites Provide a Wealth of Information

DMO websites are often the first stop for 25-year meeting planning veteran Maureen Santoro, manager of group operations at Atlas Meetings + Incentives in Milford, MA. "When I first started as a planner with no experience, CVB sites were a great help to learn about destinations," says Santoro. "But as I grew as a planner and became more experi-



***"But now I'm back to using the websites again, very much so due to the information they offer. They are a lot more sophisticated and designed like a planner thinks."***

**Maureen Santoro**, Manager of Group Operations  
Atlas Meetings + Incentives, Milford, MA

enced and well-traveled, I used them less. But now I'm back to using the websites again, very much so due to the information they offer. They are a lot more sophisticated and designed like a planner thinks."

Santoro knows what she wants on

DMO sites. "I look for downloadable versions of information such as meeting and convention services booklets, links to suppliers and a planner's toolbox," says Santoro. "There are also checklists and templates to help with planning. I also check meeting schedules to see if there is a large city-wide happening to tell me if pricing is going to be an issue because availability will be tight."

Recently, Santoro navigated the

Visit Tucson site as she began planning a four-day meeting for 60 executives of an industrial machinery company. She examined several sources. "I spent a good amount of time on the site," says Santoro. "I looked at everything — hotels, resorts, things to do, the weather,

transportation, the Tucson region and volunteerism opportunities, which are important to the clients. When I was done absorbing what I could on the site, I got the name of a CVB person from the site and called that person. She gave me valuable information about hotels to consider that I couldn't get on the website."

Santoro finds that DMO digital information helps her zero in on attributes of a destination to educate and persuade groups and C-suite executives. "If I'm trying to convince a group to go to a destination and I don't know much about it, then I'm not going to sound convincing," says Santoro. "The information I get from a website in combination with speaking to somebody is invaluable in taking the information and passing it along to clients. If they are on the fence about a location, it might actually help make up their mind."



***"We have one customer that goes to Australia every year. Very often, they want to do something different...so the CVB information in a place like Sydney can be very useful."***

**Mary Ann Willingham**, Director, Meetings IQ Operations  
& Account Management, Travel Leaders Group LLC, Plymouth, MN

### Traditional and Digital Marketing Activities

Planners are finding that social and digital media play an increasingly large role in DMO marketing. The Destination Marketing Association International's 2012 DMO Marketing Activities Study sums up the progress: "Although traditional marketing (print/broadcast advertising, consumer shows/events) still commands a large share of DMO leisure marketing dollars, there is a noticeable commitment toward digital marketing," the report states.

"DMOs have fully embraced a wide variety of online activities into their overall destination marketing efforts. Banner ads and search engine marketing (SEM)/adwords dominate, comprising more than half of DMO online budgets. Social media is now a permanent element of destination marketing, with almost all responding DMOs present on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube," states the report.

Numbers tell the story. Traditional marketing methods account for 63 percent of the total of all DMO marketing budgets, while digital efforts make up 34 percent, the study reports. Ninety-

eight percent of DMOs use Facebook, 91 percent are on Twitter and 88 percent utilize YouTube.

Much of the information that DMOs market to planners also is available on digital sources other than CVB websites. For example, planners such as Mary Ann Willingham, who extensively use services such as Cvent also use CVB marketing information. Willingham, director, meetings IQ operations and account management for Plymouth, MN-based Travel Leaders Group LLC, says that they also use CVB sites because they don't want to rely on a single source for information that's important to their clients. "We use CVB sites as much as anything to make sure we haven't overlooked any information. And the information from

Cvent can be a starting point to contact CVBs for more specifics and establish a relationship if none exists."

Willingham cites an example of how she uses CVB digital information. "We have one customer that goes to Australia every year. Very often, they want to do something different, like a different restaurant or activity. So the CVB information in a place like Sydney can be very useful. Information that we get on a community, whether we get it from a CVB or Cvent, is crucial to a presentation, because the more information you have about a destination, the better," says Willingham.

### Combine Campaigns

DMOs are creating advertising campaigns that integrate Web, mobile and traditional print advertising. For example, San Francisco Travel's "San Francisco. It Begins Here" campaign has several components. These include save-the-date and invitation emails for sales missions to other cities. The emails stress three points that surveys indicate

people associate with San Francisco — inspiration, innovation and ideas. The campaign includes follow-up emails to thank attendees and contact information for questions.

The campaign also includes social media. San Francisco Travel is a social media sponsor at the Meeting Professionals International (MPI) 2014 World Education Congress, Minneapolis MN, August 2-5, 2014 and will provide attendees with a game app they can download from the MPI and San Francisco Travel sites. The app allows users to identify things that remind them of San Francisco and win prizes. In addition, San Francisco Travel advertises via banner ads on the websites of major industry associations such as

MPI and the Professional Convention Management Association.

San Francisco Travel also is exploring the use of mobile devices to reach planners. "We are currently in the evaluation stage," says John Reyes, executive vice president and chief sales officer. "It can be helpful because many people are searching for information with their mobile devices as an extension of how they search for information. DMOs certainly have to evaluate mobile." Social and digital media are becoming an indispensable part of DMO marketing efforts. Visit Seattle set up a special website to support a marketing effort called 2daysinSeattle. The campaign is based on the attributes of Seattle and provides information about attractions and venues. The campaign includes an interactive map of attractions and venues based on messaging captured from social media bloggers that Visit Seattle brought to the city for a free two-day visit to blog, tweet and write about the city during their visit. Planners and the public use the interactive map to help plan their itinerary.

Visit Seattle also is looking at offering interactive apps and product-specific applications such as an e-cookbook and a guide for Washington state wine. (Washington is the nation's second largest wine producer). Other considerations for apps include adventure travel and the outdoors.

Like many DMOs, Visit Seattle mea-

sure how often users access its digital media. For example, Visit Seattle offers a 90-page free online document entitled Seattle Fresh that is downloaded up to 10,000 times a month, says Tom Norwalk, president and CEO of Visit Seattle. Also, the CVB's Facebook page has more than 500,000 fans.

*"It can be helpful because many people are searching for information with their mobile devices as an extension of how they search for information. DMOs certainly have to evaluate mobile."*

**John Reyes**, EVP/Chief Sales Officer  
San Francisco Travel, San Francisco, CA



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Visit Seattle also recently launched ef-

orts to measure online searches for the destination. The CVB's research reports show how often Seattle appears on the Internet in searches for travel-related products, primarily hotel stays. Seattle officials are comparing their share of search results to competitors such as Vancouver, Portland, San Francisco and Denver. The CVB may use the results to

## The Latest and Greatest Tools

Following is a summary of the latest methods that DMOs are using to market to planners and the public, according to the DMAI 2013 digital and mobile marketing toolkit

### Mobile

The opportunity in mobile for DMOs is huge because more transactions in the meetings, travel and tourism industry are taking place via smartphones and other handheld devices. About 16 million people in the U.S. made some type of travel booking via mobile devices in 2013, up from more than 12 million in 2011. Eighty-four percent of mobile users say they use mobile devices to search for business locations, maps or driving directions.

As a result, many DMOs are creating mobile-enabled websites prior to introducing mobile apps. The goal is to encourage people who habitually access DMOs via desktop computers to do so with smartphones. "The lack of a mobile site or having a hard-to-navigate mobile

site is the No. 1 deterrent to booking travel on a mobile device," according to the DMAI Toolkit.

### Facebook

Up to 52 percent of social media users have changed travel plans based on its content. Facebook, of course, is the dominant social media. "Facebook applications give users a richer branded experience and allow DMOs to connect with users beyond conversation and move towards actionable goals," according to the DMAI Toolkit. "An effective Facebook page not only attracts fans, but is enticing and informative enough to keep them coming back and sharing. Because the majority of time (27 percent) spent on Facebook is with content on the newsfeed." Facebook users who like a DMO brand expect exclusive content and offers, interactions with others and promotions, games and other one-of-a-kind experiences.

### Twitter

Some DMOs use Twitter-promoted accounts to display a destination's branded page to users most likely to find it relevant. Promoted tweets appear at the top of Twitter search results pages, and are used mostly to tout DMO events and announcements. Many DMO websites feature Twitter. Some DMOs use Twitter Web Analytics to measure the number of Twitter followers, determine what (and how often) website content is distributed over Twitter, and estimate ROI.

### Pinterest

Pinterest, one of the fastest growing social networks, allows users to build an online collection of themed bulletin boards consisting of photos and other art. Users "pin" the art to the boards and share the postings with followers. Users can re-pin postings from other boards to their own as well as to Facebook. DMOs are using Pinterest to create themed boards to promote attractions, venues, special events, restaurants and more. DMOs use Pinterest to drive users to their Facebook pages and websites.

### Strategic Partnerships

More DMOs are developing social media partnerships with hotels, venues, attractions, restaurants and others. The

collaborations diversify DMO content, and promote DMO resources via links on partners' websites.

## The Future Is Now

Experts predict that one day all DMOs large and small will fully embrace all forms of digital and social media marketing. "It's about using it to stay in touch with planners and feed them bits of information that is pertinent to their

group," says Michael Carrier, president, Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau. "Planners want to know things like when new restaurants open and changes in hotels and facilities, and digital media provides an opportunity to instantly let them know about those things. But it's still a relationship business. You have to be able to back those things up with solid relationships and trust between your team and planners." **C&IT**

## Case Studies From the DMAI Toolkit

The 2103 Digital & Mobile Marketing Toolkit by Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) is available online at [www.destinationmarketing.org/2013-digital-mobile-marketing-toolkit-0](http://www.destinationmarketing.org/2013-digital-mobile-marketing-toolkit-0)

The 84-page study includes marketing case studies from 10 DMOs including Visit Denver, Visit Baton Rouge, San Francisco Travel Association, Fredericksburg Convention & Visitor Bureau, New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau, Visit Florida, San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau, Pocono Mountains Visitor Bureau, Tourism British Columbia and Mexico Tourism Board.

The two case studies below illustrate what the DMAI study provides.

### Visit Denver

The mainstay of Visit Denver's mobile marketing effort is its mobile app, which was originally introduced in 2010. A new version was re-launched in 2012. Since the original launch, the app has been downloaded more than 200,000 times and has accumulated over 2.5 million page views.

Visit Denver sought to expand the app's social media

reach by launching the "Denver Dares" campaign.

The effort encouraged users of the app to share their experiences with social media buddies. The campaign consisted of activities in Denver that were divided into 10 categories. Each category received a name and a badge that social media users could earn. The badges appeared on users' Facebook pages. Denver Dares was promoted in attendee meetings and destination planning guides, on a landing page on [www.VisitDenver.com](http://www.VisitDenver.com) as well as placements in hotel lobbies.

### Visit Baton Rouge

Visit Baton Rouge commissioned a survey of the organization's Facebook and Twitter followers to determine why and how the public and planners use the platforms.

The survey found that Facebook generated an additional 3,184 trips that lasted 2.7 days because visitors were influenced by Facebook. Twitter produced 380 trips that lasted 3.2 days. "This research as well as continued education on social media has allowed Visit Baton Rouge to maintain sustainable growth in the social spectrum," stated the DMAI case study.

# Destination

## Hidden Jewels That Make Meetings Shine

# Florida's Best

By Patrick Simms

The Hilton Sandestin Beach & Golf Resort on Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast.

With all the focus on Orlando among corporate planners considering the Sunshine State, it's refreshing to see a company that diversifies its Floridian destinations, taking advantage of cities such as Jacksonville, Boca Raton and Key West for business meetings and incentive programs. Richardson, TX-based Lennox Industries is one such company, giving each of these cities — as well as Orlando — a piece of its meetings “pie,” as Cecilia Daddio, CMP, event and incentive manager, colorfully puts it. “Florida is one of our favorite destinations for different types of meetings. Whatever message you are trying to (convey with your event), Florida has an appropriate site, whether beachy or not. There are hidden jewels out there that work for the budget.”

### Jacksonville

One of those jewels is Jacksonville, which Daddio likens to San Antonio and New Orleans in terms of its accessibility, affordability and convenience to attractions for attendees on their free time. The 963-room Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront (110,000 sf of meeting space) was a short commute from the airport for about 450 attendees of a recent Lennox business meeting, and “those who wanted to could explore the riverfront,” Daddio relates. Jacksonville Landing, situated in the downtown area along the St. Johns River, offers dining, shopping and nightlife. “And within 30 minutes, they could reach Amelia Island or St. Augustine,” she adds.

The Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront.



Credit: Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront

There is plenty of recreation to be sought in Jacksonville beyond the riverfront. The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens, which turns 100 years old this year, will celebrate by opening the new Land of the Tiger exhibit in March featuring endangered Asian tigers. Home to more than 2,000 rare and exotic animals and more than 1,000 plant species, the zoo is Northeast Florida's most visited attraction. The zoo offers rooms and locations throughout the park for themed events as well as behind-the-scenes tours and scavenger hunts for groups.

The city's more refined side is represented by The Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens, which has started a renovation project that includes the Olmsted Garden (a riverfront garden that dates back to 1931) as well as the entire Riverside Avenue portion of Cummer's campus. Rentable event spaces at the museum include the Hixon Auditorium, Terry Gallery and Italian Gardens, with maximum capacities of 130, 300 and 50, respectively.

Twenty miles southeast of Jacksonville, the seaside Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, a landmark since opening in 1928, caters to lovers of the outdoors with 36 holes of golf on the Ocean Course and Lagoon Course, beachfront event options, an oceanfront fitness center, 15 tennis courts, pools and panoramic views of sand and sea from most of the resort's

250 luxury rooms and suites. There is more than 25,000 sf of flexible indoor function space, which includes a 6,240-sf ballroom that can accommodate 450 attendees.



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Ponte Vedra Inn & Club in Ponte Vedra Beach features 36 holes of golf on the Ocean and Lagoon courses.

## Orlando

Just as Lennox Industries found an ideal partner in the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, another industrial company, Cleveland, OH-based Eaton, held a successful meeting at the 400-room Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek, which is adjacent to Walt Disney World Resort. About 180 attendees flew into Orlando from various points in North and South America as well as Mexico, Canada, Asia and India. Marty Bogenschutz, principal, with Cincinnati, OH-based meeting planning and marketing firm Nuvera Group, organized the four-day program. Florida in general was a smart site choice for the early February event. “Because of the weather, you eliminate some of the risks that you would have meeting up in the North or Midwest with weather-related delays in air traffic,” Bogenschutz explains. And Orlando in particular has the airlift to service an international group.

Selecting a hotel in Orlando, as in any first-tier city, requires considerable narrowing down, and finding a modestly sized property was important to the Eaton group. “We considered a couple of the major properties, the ones that you would think of initially. But we felt a group of 180 would be lost in some of those hotels, where we would be one of maybe four, five or six groups in-house. We would be a small fish in a very large pond. So the Wyndham was a perfect fit for us.” The Wyndham’s meeting space is “very compact in one area near the main elevators. And the large foyer and prefunction areas are great for receptions,” Bogenschutz adds. The hotel offers 25,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting and event space.

He gives the Wyndham staff kudos for accommodating the

F&B needs of Eaton’s culturally diverse group of leaders. “We worked with our conference services manager and the chef directly, and we told them that we wanted attendees to feel that the menus were created with them in mind. They came back and customized menus to a degree that I don’t think we would get at a larger property,” he says. “Everything worked out at the Wyndham, from the F&B to the AV. And the proof is that within about six weeks after our first event, we rebooked for the following year.”

A major objective of Eaton’s meeting was to allow leaders from around the world to “get to know each other personally,” Bogenschutz says. Various activities were offered to facilitate that networking. Apart from coordinating golf and spa time, Nuvera Group worked with AJ’s Freelancer Bass Guide Service and West Orange Trail Bike and Blades. “We found that many people in the group, especially the Europeans, liked to bicycle, and fishing was much more in demand than I would have thought.”

Orlando itself is in high demand, having recorded 57.2 million visitors in 2012, according to Visit Orlando. Clearly, a big reason for that achievement is the 40-square-mile tourism empire known as Walt Disney World Resort. Recent Disney developments are advantageous for meeting groups, not just tourists, however. The company promises new private-event options for groups with both the multiyear transformation of Downtown Disney into Disney Springs (opening in phases through 2016) and Fantasyland at Magic Kingdom Park (opening in phases through 2014). In addition, private events can be booked at the newly opened Splitsville, a 50,000-sf upscale entertainment center in Downtown Disney that offers bowling, billiards, dining, music and nightlife. Coming to Disney’s Animal Kingdom in 2017 is the mythical land Avatar, inspired by the James Cameron film.

Universal Orlando Resort is also set to expand with this summer’s debut of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Diagon Alley. The new expansion is designed to recreate some



The Seven Dwarfs Mine Train in the newly expanded Fantasyland at Walt Disney World Resort is scheduled to open in spring 2014.



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A rendering of the Hogwarts Express, which will transport guests between The Wizarding World of Harry Potter's new Diagon Alley, opening this summer at Universal Studios, and Hogsmeade at Islands of Adventure.

of the experiences and places found in and around London in the Harry Potter books and films. The themed environment will double the size of the area dedicated to Harry Potter's adventures, expanding it across both Universal theme parks — Islands of Adventure, where guests now experience Hogwarts and Hogsmeade, and Universal Studios. Guests will be able to travel between the two areas aboard the Hogwarts Express.

## Tampa

The city of Tampa, located on the west coast of the state near the Gulf of Mexico, has its own expansion that will make for a nice respite for attendees between meeting sessions. The Tampa Riverwalk, a 2.2-mile waterfront walkway connecting most of downtown's attractions, is in its final phase and is anticipated to be complete in 2014. The Riverwalk is a perfect spot for meeting attendees to bike, walk, rollerblade and relax with views of the Hillsborough River. A new restaurant and brewery called Ulele is opening along the Riverwalk in spring 2014. Other attractions include the Tampa Bay History Center, which lets attendees stroll through a 1920s cigar store, among many indigenous activities; and MOSI – Museum of Science and Industry, the largest science center in the Southeast with more than 450 interactive exhibits.

Thanks to the 2012 Republican National Convention, Tampa's technology infrastructure has been improved, with AT&T installing 11 in-building cell systems connecting The Tampa Bay Times Forum, Tampa Convention Center and nine area hotels. The system features 4G LTE mobile Internet service and more than 200 Wi-Fi hotspots. Since the convention, over the period October 2012–March 2013, Tampa's hotel occupancy rate has been quite healthy at 66.8 percent, up 1.9 percent over the same period for 2011–2012, according to Smith Travel Research.

## Destin

Groups destined for the west coast of Florida also may consider Destin, known for its white sands and emerald waters. "The World's Luckiest Fishing Village" is naturally the home of

the Destin History and Fishing Museum, showcasing the oldest seine (net) fishing boat still in existence, The Primrose, built in 1925. A bit less predictably, groups can explore the nearby Air Force Armament Museum, with planes and weaponry dating from the early days of WWI, through modern-day materiel such as the fastest plane ever built, the SR-71 Blackbird.

Groups can convene at the award-winning Emerald Coast Convention Center, which offers 12 meeting rooms, ranging from 450 to 10,800 sf, that can be combined to create a 21,000-sf free expanse Emerald Grand Ballroom. After the day's meetings, attendees can partake of a matchless selection of seafood restaurants. At least 20 different types of fish are caught in Destin's waters during any season, with local favorites including red snapper, amberjack, yellowfin tuna and triggerfish.

## Palm Beach County

This Southeast Florida county is perhaps underutilized for incentives, in light of what it has to offer: upscale resorts in Palm Beach Gardens, Palm Beach and Boca Raton, combined with cultural venues such as the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts and the Flagler Museum, upscale shopping at Mizner Park and plentiful top-notch golf courses. Lennox



Rendering of the 403-room Palm Beach County Convention Center Hilton Hotel, which is slated to open in fall 2015.

Industries recently staged an incentive at the Boca Beach Club, A Waldorf Astoria Resort. Part of the renowned Boca Raton Resort & Club, the resort has its own distinctive amenities including a half-mile stretch of private beach, oceanfront bar, and pool oasis with three pools. Just a short shuttle ride away is the 44-room Spa Palazzo, inspired by Spain's legendary Alhambra Palace. An elite group of 125 Lennox qualifiers enjoyed a "totally different feeling" from going to the Boca Raton Resort & Club, according to Daddio, yet attendees "were able to enjoy amenities in both places." With its cabanas and natural reef for snorkelers, The Beach Club "makes you feel as if you were in a Caribbean destination, but is much easier and quicker to get to." The Boca Raton Resort & Club houses 1,047 guest rooms and suites, and 144,471 sf of meeting space.



**Cecilia Daddio, CMP, Manager, Events & Incentives**  
Lennox Industries, Richardson, TX

*"Whatever message you are trying to (convey with your event), Florida has an appropriate site, whether beachy or not. There are hidden jewels out there that work for the budget."*

on JetBlue from Colombia and Costa Rica. To accommodate additional traffic, the airport is at work renovating terminals and adding a new runway.

## Fort Lauderdale

"It took a while for the word to get out that Fort Lauderdale is no longer just a spring break destination," according to Rachelle Stone, DMCP, vice president, South Florida Office, AlliedPRA Destination Management. "The whole beachfront and boardwalk has gone through a major renovation, and it looks absolutely beautiful." Over the last five to seven years, major upscale hoteliers, including Ritz-Carlton, Hilton and Starwood, have established a presence in the area, making it more attractive for corporate groups.

Stone also points to popular offsite activities such as private yachting on the Intracoastal Waterway and restaurant buyouts. Among several eateries that represent the best of Fort Lauderdale's cuisine, she cites YOLO (You Only Live Once) on Las Olas Boulevard, specializing in American dishes and accommodating from 20–500 guests with its Private Dining Room, O-Lounge and Garden Patio; Timpano Chophouse on Las Olas Boulevard, with private and semi-private facilities for up to 500 attendees; and Truluck's Seafood Steak & Crab House at The Galleria, offering the Hemingway Room for up to 40 seated guests, with the entire restaurant available for up to 325 guests. These restaurants "have the space, capacities and knowledge of how to work with groups, and they do a great job," she says.

What's more, Fort Lauderdale is becoming more accessible, with increased service to the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport. New service on United has launched from San Francisco daily, as well as an expansion in Latin America service with new flights

## Miami

Accessible from both the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport and Miami International Airport, this major metropolis boasts temperatures that average 76 degrees year round and nearly 50,000 hotel rooms. Attractions include the Art Deco District, South Beach nightlife and Biscayne Bay National Park, which offers Eco-Adventure tours. Notable offsite venues include new Marlins Park, home of the Miami Marlins; Miami Seaquarium; the Adrienne Arsht Center for the

If the sun and the sea aren't incentive enough, maybe our multi-million dollar renovation will be.



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\*Valid on groups of 25 or more, certain restrictions apply.

Performing Arts; and the New World Center, which offers the rentable 2,330-sf SunTrust Pavilion.

Surrounded by stellar lodging options such as Loews Miami Beach Hotel, Eden Roc Miami Beach and what is now the Trump National Doral Miami (see New & Noteworthy below), the 390-room Trump International Beach Resort Miami is sometimes overlooked in the local meetings market. But with its 22,000 sf of meeting space, including a 5,075-sf oceanfront ballroom, the hotel is certainly well prepared to host corporate groups, as Dina Jacobson, principal at Eventech, confirmed. A meeting planning and marketing firm specializing in the technology sector, Eventech recently brought 200 employees of a “high-energy startup, a leading player in the database space” to the Trump International from New York, San Francisco and points in Europe and Australia. Over the course of the three-day meeting, the group was able to take over the meeting space, according to Jacobsen, “which was important to our group because there’s so much that happens on the fly that we needed that flexibility.”

She admits to having “a little trepidation” with choosing the Trump property “because I thought maybe we would be competing with a lot of the vacation travelers, but we received so much support and attention from their event staff. I was

*“Because of the weather, you eliminate some of the risks that you would have meeting up in the North or Midwest with weather-related delays in air traffic.”*



**Marty Bogenschutz**, Principal  
Nuvera Group, Cincinnati, OH

really impressed that their banquet captain had worked there for many years. He was an older gentleman and would be servicing the event until midnight, and then we’d see him there first thing in the morning for breakfast. You could tell he was a hospitality person through and through. And the director of IT helped us install our 24-hour tech support room, where we needed to have uninterrupted heavy-duty Internet access for customer service. He probably didn’t need to be there, but it was a really nice gesture.”

#### Key Largo

Known to most planners as the home of the exclusive Ocean Reef Club, Key Largo is also the “Diving Capital of the World” with a living coral reef a few miles offshore. Stone finds Key Largo to be a “niche market” suitable for groups looking for a secluded getaway. “It’s more of a spinoff, adjunct destination, for example a Miami/Key West program. I don’t generally have



The newly named Trump National Doral Miami remains open during its comprehensive, \$250 million makeover.

groups staying longer than two days in the Keys.” The Ocean Reef Club she describes as “very much turnkey. So when I have groups calling me and asking me for help with the Ocean Reef, I do steer them back to the hotel and say, ‘Check with the hotel first because you may not need my help.’ And nine times out of 10 they find they really don’t. There is a need for a décor partner and a transportation partner, but really that’s it.” The Ocean Reef Club offers 30,000 sf of meeting space complemented by 36 holes of golf, a salon and spa, more than a dozen restaurants, a 175-slip marina and a private airstrip.

#### New & Noteworthy

Strategically located in the heart of the Art Deco district of South Beach in Miami Beach, the Shelborne will be “reborn” this year as **Shelborne Wyndham Grand South Beach**. The resort’s pool and lounge area leads right up to the boardwalk and a long stretch of beach. The 200-room Shelborne Wyndham Grand will have more than 15,000 sf of meeting and event space, an onsite fitness center and luxury spa suites, as well as an exclusive nightclub. The renowned celebrity chef Iron Chef Morimoto will operate all F&B at the Shelborne Wyndham Grand South Beach including his first outposts in Miami Beach — Morimoto South Beach, the Bistro, The Grill.

Miami’s iconic Doral Resort has been newly renamed the **Trump National Doral Miami**. The resort, which is a distinguished member of Associated Luxury Hotels International, is currently undergoing a \$250 million capital improvement plan. The 800-acre property features five championship golf courses — including the historic, completely redesigned Blue Monster golf course — 693 guest rooms and suites, The Spa at Doral, and more than 100,000 sf of meeting and event space. The property remains open during the renovation, which is slated for completion this fall.

The 641-room **Hotel InterContinental Downtown Miami** recently completed a \$34 million renovation that included upgrading and redesigning its 65,000 sf of meeting space.

Credit: Trump National Doral Miami

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Dina Jacobson, Principal  
Eventech, Los Altos, CA

The 598-room **Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa**, the largest beachfront resort on Northwest Florida’s Gulf Coast, has completed a \$5 million renovation. The property’s 32,000-sf meeting space features a new beachfront-inspired design. The resort also has the 9,504-sf Emerald Ballroom and 5,600-sf Coral Ballroom with new touchscreen lighting, carpeting, wall treatments and paint. The boardroom features new teleconferencing facilities.

Located near Tampa, the new **Streamsong Resort** opened its main lodge in January. The lodge includes a conference center with 14,000 sf of flexible indoor meeting space — creating 24,600 sf of total meeting space on the property — and 40,000 sf of outdoor venues. Also, there is 4,500 sf of banquet space in the clubhouse. The property is home to two nationally ranked golf courses, Streamsong Red and Streamsong Blue, which *Golf* magazine called “the best new courses you can play.” There also is a 7,000-sf spa, a lakeside pool and fine dining restaurants.

The 520-room **Hilton Tampa Downtown** (30,000 sf of function space), previously the Hyatt Regency Tampa, recently completed renovations to be converted to a four-star luxury hotel.

South of Fort Myers on Florida’s Gulf Coast is the three-mile-long causeway to Sanibel Island, where limited development and pristine beaches allow the charm of authentic old Florida to remain intact — the perfect island retreat for the harried and the overworked. The island’s redesigned **Sundial Beach Resort & Spa** now features the new Resort Centre with 12,000 sf of flexible space, which accommodates up to 300 attendees. Newly renovated meeting facilities include nine separate event rooms all with expansive Gulf views, a full business center and complete AV capabilities. In addition, the resort offers a unique outdoor event space with water views.

In Lake Buena Vista, FL, **Four Seasons Resort Orlando**

at Walt Disney World is under construction in the residential community of Golden Oak, near the Osprey Ridge Golf Course. Slated to open in summer 2014, the 444-room property will offer more than 37,000 sf of meeting space, including grand and junior ballrooms with 14,000 sf and 6,000 sf, respectively.

**Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando Resort** has completed a massive, \$22 million renovation. The 750 guest rooms were completely renovated with all-new furnishings, beds, window treatments and artwork. Outside, the hotel’s artistic façade has been refurbished in exquisite detail. The hotel also now offers the world’s first and only “Despicable Me” hotel suites inspired by the popular animated film.

In Ponte Vedra Beach, FL, **Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa** recently unveiled the results of a multimillion-dollar, resort-wide renovation project, which involved every aspect of the 63-acre oceanfront resort including its 56,000 sf of flexible function space. All ballrooms, prefunction areas, meeting rooms and boardrooms have been completely revitalized with new artwork and golf memorabilia reflective of the entire resort. The Villas at Sawgrass are also available for meetings and breakout rooms for up to 12 people.

Construction of the **Palm Beach County Convention Center Hilton Hotel** has begun following a groundbreaking ceremony in December. Located adjacent to the Palm Beach County Convention Center and across the street from CityPlace, West Palm Beach’s Arts and Entertainment District, the 403-room Hilton Hotel is expected to expand larger convention and event business within the county when it opens in 2015. “The new Hilton Hotel will allow The Palm Beaches to compete

with many more regional convention facilities and increase our stature in the meetings industry,” said Discover Palm Beach County President and CEO Jorge Pesquera.

Fully renovated in 2012, the 397-room **PGA National Resort & Spa** in Palm Beach Gardens (39,000 sf of meeting space) has opened a Lakeside Lawn courtyard with panoramic views of the golf, lakes and fountains; and the new Palm Terrace and Bar 91.

### More Than Just Sun ‘n’ Fun

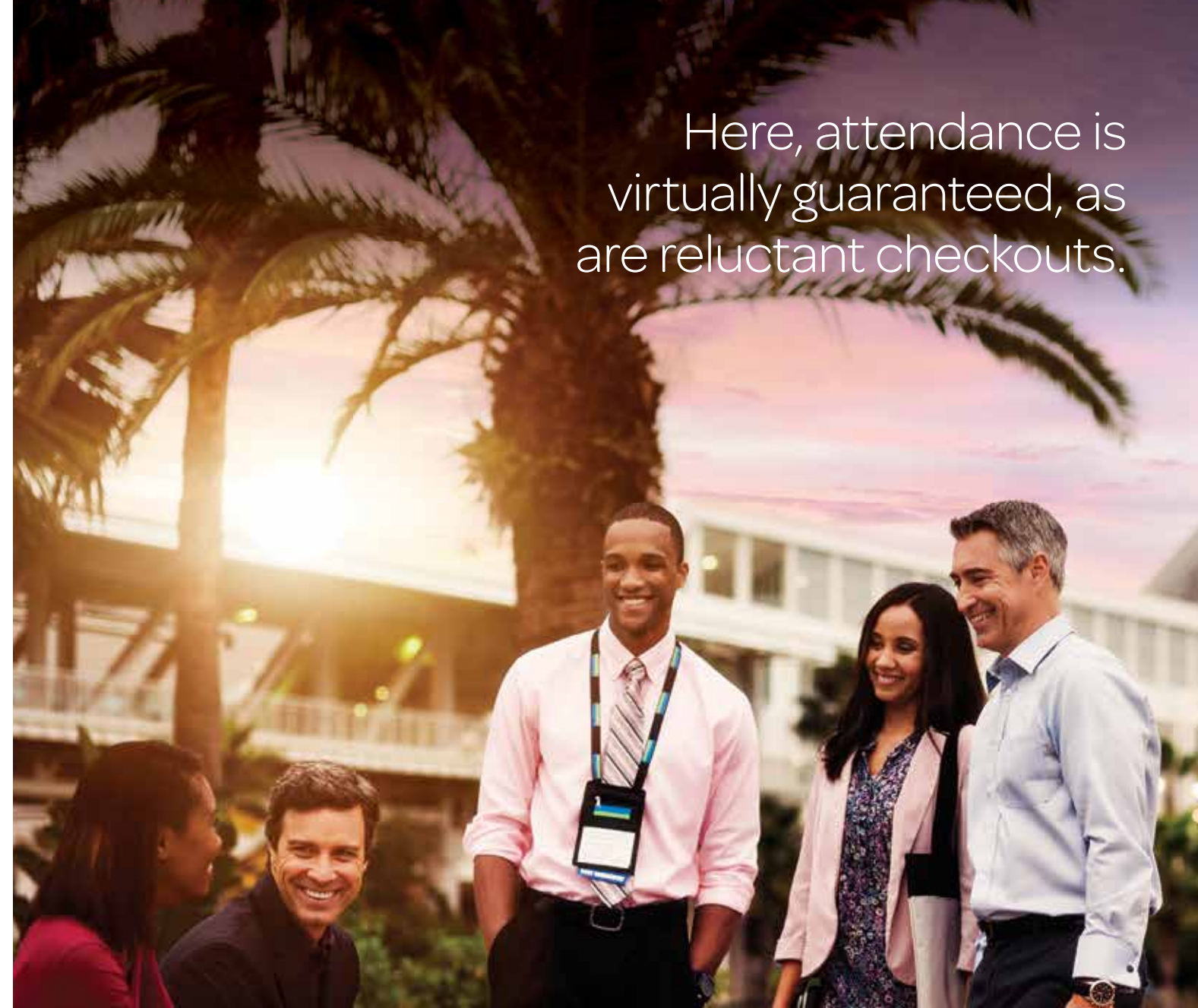
From niche markets like Key Largo to one of the most popular meeting destinations in the world, Orlando; from upscale Palm Beach to value-added Jacksonville, Florida packs much diversity under that generic sun ‘n’ fun tag. **C&IT**



Sundial Beach Resort & Spa on Sanibel Island boasts event space with views of the Gulf of Mexico.

Credit: Sundial Beach Resort

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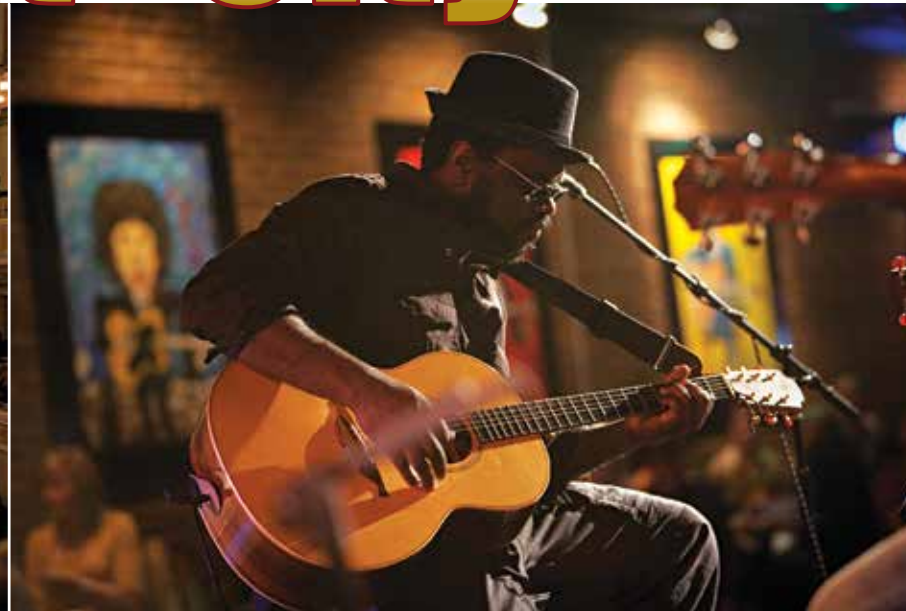
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From left to right: James Beard Award-winner chef Sean Brock at his new Husk restaurant; the Schermerhorn Symphony Center; the Nashville music scene; Omni Nashville Hotel.  
Credits (l to r): Andrea Behrends; Nashville CVC; Nashville CVC; Omni Nashville Hotel



## Nashville Is a National Hot Spot for *Dining, Culture, Music — and Meetings*

By Christine Loomis

**N**ashville seems to be the 'it' spot. There has been a lot of investment in downtown, and there have been so many improvements in facilities and infrastructure. There's a lot of excitement about Nashville right now."

Christopher Bartholomew, a senior meeting planner for Shaklee Corporation, experienced it firsthand when the company brought 5,000 attendees to town last summer for the Shaklee Global Conference, which had previously met in the city in 2007.

"Nashville is very compact and convenient," Bartholomew adds. "I hesitate to say this, but it's sort of like Las Vegas in that regard. You can walk out of your hotel door and have entertain-

ment right there. But it's far better than Las Vegas, at least for our group. Nashville is fun and exciting, and has all the great music and dining, but it also always feels like a place where you can really bring family."

2013 for its National Dealer Meeting, a group of 1,279. Dayne Patrick Sean Sullivan, CTA, of Adventures LLC, has planned Mahindra's meetings for seven years and sees Nashville as a destination that is very proactive in the meetings and incentives industry — an attribute that's not only good for corporate and incentive groups but also for planners.

"We met in Nashville for several reasons," he says. "The city's central geographic location makes it convenient for attendees who wish to drive, and it also offers ease in flying in and out of the airport. Nashville has a friendly atmosphere, and the downtown area has a lot to offer attendees when they're not in meetings. And the convention and visitors bureau is very easy to work with and offers great assistance in planning and logistics."

### Meetings Row

While Music Row is arguably Nashville's most famous neighborhood, it has been joined by a host of others with claims of their own. Consider the wholly revitalized heart of downtown, which could rightfully be called Meetings Row. Anchored by Music City Center (MCC) and Omni Nashville Hotel, both opened in 2013, the compact area also includes Schermerhorn Symphony Center, Bridgestone Arena and the Country Music Hall of Fame (CMHF). And it intersects with the city's down-and-dirty live music scene on Lower Broadway, a.k.a. Honky Tonk Row, making it easy for planners to create meetings and functions that flow seamlessly and satisfy diverse needs.

The city believes it has hit exactly the right note with its expansion initiatives, and according to Butch Spyridon, presi-

dent of the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp., corporate America agrees. "Reception for the new campus, and by that I mean Music City Center, the Omni Hotel and the expanded Country Music Hall of Fame, has been far beyond our expectations. We reached out with great success to groups that had outgrown us and groups that wouldn't have previously considered us," he says. "There was a perfect storm in terms of a changing music scene (no longer is it just about country), a growing dining scene, Music City Center and a national TV show. It elevated the city, and it has not slowed down yet."

Even before the ABC TV show "Nashville," the city was featured in *Bon Appetit*, *GQ* and *The New York Times*. "The New York Times," Spyridon says, "looked at the whole city — the burgeoning fashion, music and dining scenes, as well as the new construction and facilities — and concluded that the city itself was destined to be the next big hit."

That's exactly what brought *GQ* to Nashville for its sales conference. At first glance, urbane, fashion-forward *GQ* doesn't seem like a natural fit for the middle Tennessee city.

"Our mission as a brand is to find the best that's out there, especially in places that people wouldn't necessarily think about, places beyond New York and L.A.," says Peter St. John, who planned the October meeting when he served as brand promotion manager for *GQ*. "In featuring Nashville in the magazine,

we featured a city that's incredibly vibrant and with amazing dining, art and music scenes.

"We like to take the team to those "of-the-moment" places, cities that are hip and current and maybe surprising. Nashville is all of that, so it speaks very well to what we do as a publication and to who we are as a brand."

### Dining Elevated

Nowhere is the city's "of-the-moment" status more apparent than in its explosive dining scene. "The food scene started with talented local chefs. But there had to be a foundation to support new restaurants," Spyridon says. "That came as the music scene evolved and as Music City Center grew; both have supported our growing dining scene, which now includes well-known chefs from other areas. Seven restaurants have opened in the past year within

a two-mile radius of Music City Center, and they're doing well."

Fame and awards aside, Nashville restaurants, chefs and caterers appear able to rise to any challenge meeting planners put to them.

"When you think about bringing New York City media people to Nashville, the expectation might be that the food could not live up to what this group has access to every day," St. John says. "With the *GQ* team in particular, coming from a publication that writes so much about the best food and restaurants in the coun-

**"The New York Times ...concluded that the city itself was destined to be the next big hit."**

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



ment right there. But it's far better than Las Vegas, at least for our group. Nashville is fun and exciting, and has all the great music and dining, but it also always feels like a place where you can really bring family."

Mahindra USA Inc., which manufactures the world's No. 1 selling tractor, met in Nashville in 2012 and returned November



Robert's Western World, the Home of Traditional Country Music.



Mahindra USA's 2013 National Dealer Meeting

try, even in the world, it could be a challenge to please everyone. But we all left with stretched stomachs from the incredible food.”

The group of 50 GQ attendees raised forks at several notable meals, including brunch at the Capitol Grille, located in The Hermitage Hotel, and dinner at Rolf & Daughters, housed in the historic Werthan Factory Building in Germantown and named by *Bon Appetit* one of 2013's Top 10 New Restaurants in the nation. There were lunches and catered events, and a test of local ice cream sandwiches, too. “All of it not only lived up to our expectations, it absolutely surpassed our expectations,” St. John says.

The Shaklee group depended on meals and breaks provided by Gaylord's catering team and concessions at Bridgestone Arena. “Our food needs can be complex,” Bartholomew notes. “We're a health and wellness company, and our business leaders and customers walk the walk. We require healthful foods, and we have many attendees who require dairy-free or gluten-free dishes. Both the Gaylord and Bridgestone Arena worked with us to create what we needed. We are also a global organization, and we had a group of about 200 from China in attendance. They had specific breakfast requirements and the Gaylord team worked to customize foods for them as well.”

James Beard Award-winner chef Sean Brock opened Husk Nashville in May, an addition to his original Husk in Charleston, SC. Located in a historic home in the Rutledge Hill neighborhood, Husk offers private dining in the Stables, a meticulously renovated space accommodating up to 30 for a reception or 26 seated for dinner. It exudes warmth with its polished wooden floors and walls of salvaged barn wood. The menu offers just what you'd expect — a new take on Southern food that converts the most discerning diners. “Our management team came in a day early and ate at Husk on Sunday night,” St. John says. “They even had pig's ears—and they were delicious.”

At The Southern Steak & Oyster in downtown's SoBro (south of Broadway), the private dining space for up to 75 is VIP-ready. The GQ group ate lunch there after a half-day of meetings and the chicken salad remains high on their list of faves.

## Something Old, Something New

Among the newest stars to rise on Nashville's compelling skyline is the 800-room Omni Nashville Hotel, opened

September 30. It sits across from Music City Center and is connected on several levels to the adjacent Country Music Hall of Fame, creating adjoining function space in the two buildings that can be utilized in creative ways. The hotel has a total of 80,000 sf of meeting space.

“We based our meeting at the newly opened Omni Nashville and Music City Center,” Sullivan says. “The deciding factor for holding this meeting in Nashville was space that has come online recently and the flexibility it afforded. The Omni's downtown location also provided a true Nashville experience for attendees with access to the city's nightlife, and it was within walking dis-



The Omni Nashville Hotel towers above the expanded Country Music Hall of Fame, which is integrated with the hotel.

tance to our meeting and offsite venues. We have used Omni hotels in the past and service has always been great, and we knew we could expect the same again.”

The Omni's catering department received high praise. “Staff was quick to respond to the needs of my attendees,” Sullivan says. “This group is very culture-and-food diverse. We had attendees from five countries with varied food requirements, and the hotel was proactive in assuring that each person was fed in the manner in which they were accustomed and given the type of food they required.”

Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center was Shaklee's base in 2007 and 2013. “The Gaylord staff gave us a five-star experience in terms of food quality, service level and responsive-

ness to requests,” Bartholomew says. “Our main venues were in the Delta Ballroom area of the hotel — the largest ballrooms. Most evening functions were in the Delta Lobby A area, which opens onto a nice patio and has floor-to-ceiling windows, so there's easy flow between indoors and out. We were able to be creative with other meeting spaces offered by the hotel. For example, we set up a photo shoot in one ballroom and a store setup in another. I really loved the great hospitality we experienced at Gaylord. The staff members we worked with were very personable without sacrificing focus on the business at hand. They had exactly the right combination of charm, grace and execution.”

## Meeting Time

Nashville has a substantial and eclectic collection of spaces in which to do business, 2.1 million sf of it in Music City Center, which opened in May. By year's end, some 200 events were already booked for 2014.

Mahindra USA Inc. held the majority of its meetings at Music City Center. “We used part of the Grand Ballroom, one of the exhibit halls and most of the breakout space,” Sullivan says. “It's laid out very well — though they should have put more outlets around as they seem to run a lot of cords.”

Sullivan has high praise for most of MCC's staff, especially the AV and catering departments. There were problems, however, mostly related to a system in which only one person, the V.P. of operations, can make decisions. “She ended up being a roadblock in the planning because she had to personally approve everything, and I told her that,” Sullivan notes. “I would ask the conference service staffer if we could do something and she would always have to go back to the V.P. to ask.”

Sullivan also felt there was unneeded nickel and diming — the V.P. wanted an additional \$500 for the group to use an unused room for 35 minutes to stage dancers — and he found about \$2,567 in double billing. His caveat to planners: “Be cautious about what space needs you will require, request a detailed bill

and make sure you have read the handbook; they continue to add more rules and then tell you that's how it must be done.” That said, Sullivan calls MCC “an incredible, state-of-the-art facility,” and he plans to send out an RFP for a 2015 Nashville meeting.

The GQ group was based at The Hermitage but met in Schermerhorn Symphony Center, which nicely bridges classical ambience and contemporary needs. “We didn't necessarily want a new space, but it had to meet our logistical requirements with respect to AV and other technology,” St. John says. “The Schermerhorn has a new but classic aesthetic, and it feels established yet up-to-date. It has authenticity and character. In other words, it really captures what Nashville is today and that worked well for our meeting.”

Although the majority of Shaklee's meetings were at the Gaylord, Shaklee wanted attendees to experience Nashville as a destination, and using Bridgestone Arena for some sessions made that easy. “We programmed long lunch breaks between sessions so folks could explore the city on their own. After our Saturday general session, we provided hotel shuttles until 1 a.m.



Gaylord Opryland Resort's convention center.

so attendees could go out on Broadway after the meeting to all the music venues and get the downtown experience.”

### Function Phenoms

Whether for teambuilding, galas, touring or free time, the best way to play in Nashville is to listen. And sing. And dance. And taste.

Sullivan booked a function at the Country Music Hall of Fame at the suggestion of the CVC. “We wanted to give our attendees a true taste of Nashville and the country music for which it’s famous, so we brought in Georgette Jones, daughter of George Jones and Tammy Wynette. The evening was amazing. The staff worked with us to customize our menu for our multinational attendees and went out of their way to ensure that the event was a success. This whatever-it-takes attitude is what we found from most people in Nashville, and this venue exemplified that.”

The GQ team went for a broad experience. One afternoon, half the group visited Corsair Distillery to get insight into Tennessee’s burgeoning craft-whiskey industry. The other half toured United Record Pressing, where vinyl meets the digital age. Another day, they all gathered at Imogene + Willie, one of the city’s trending clothing stores, where St. John staged lunch. “It’s a great space,” he says. “The lunch, catered by Otaku South, was amazing Southern-style Japanese food. It was a very cool, very Nashville experience, and everyone on the team got a pair of jeans before we left.”

Teambuilding took place at Mercy Lounge at the suggestion of Spyridon. St. John had wanted something interactive but en-

.....  
“The deciding factor for holding this meeting in Nashville was space that has come online recently and the flexibility it afforded.”  
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Dayne P. S. Sullivan, CTA, Meeting Planner, Event Manager, Mahindra Inc. USA, San Antonio, TX



gaging and related to an authentic experience in Nashville. “The first part was a performance by three singer-songwriters, which was so good as well as interesting. Then we broke into groups and wrote songs about GQ. There was no real criteria for who won — maybe Group 2 was loudest — but everyone had a great time during the entire thing.”

For the finale, St. John chose Aerial, a private event space on Broadway that can host up to 250 attendees. The glass-enclosed rooftop with a sleek bar and surrounding 2,000-sf patio was ideal for the high-style event. “We wanted to curate our own experience, a GQ honky-tonk,” St. John says. “We set the stage with a massive marquis sign — a huge metal G and Q with light bulbs on them, set up outside. We started with cocktails on the patio accompanied by a singer and guitar player, and then a chef from one of Nashville’s top restaurants, The Catbird Seat, did our sit-down dinner. We had awards, speakers and a full-on



The new Music City Center opened last May.

dance party, and then we went out honky-tonking on Broadway. It was a total success.”

### New & Noteworthy

In 2013, the chic **Hutton Hotel** became Nashville’s first Forbes Four Star property and was lauded in the 2013 Forbes Travel Guide for its stellar service and green initiatives. The Hutton offers 247 guest rooms and 13,600 sf of meeting space.

The 410-room **Sheraton Music City Center Hotel** features an outdoor courtyard that can host up to 500 for a reception among its 32,000 sf of meeting space. Updates this past year focused on the fitness center, underscoring the property’s resort feel. And even groups can take advantage of complimentary airport transportation.

**Hilton Nashville Downtown** continues its reinvention. Phase one, completed in December, included all 330 guest rooms, the Grand Ballroom and meeting rooms, and a new executive lounge. Phase two, slated for completion late summer, will transform the atrium lobby and lounge and feature a glass circular entrance and a re-imagined lobby bar. The Hilton offers 17,800 sf of meeting space.

The **Renaissance Nashville Hotel**, which lost its competitive advantage of being attached

to the convention center when Music City Center opened, embarked on a \$20 million upgrade to its 700 guest rooms, among other enhancements. The full rollout will be unveiled in early 2014. The hotel also will benefit from the proposed \$230 million redevelopment of the convention center site announced by the city in December, a mix of office, retail, dining and entertainment space, including a museum and conference center.

### More Options for Business

Nashville’s continuing evolution has changed it and the way people think about it, perhaps especially planners. “Because of the recent media attention, the TV show, award ceremonies, etc., the city’s reputation has become much more refined and cultured,” Sullivan says. “Nashville now offers planners more options, and these options allow for greater opportunity for doing business.”

C&IT

Credit: Music City Center

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## Destination

# Down on the Bayou

## Let the Good Times Roll in Louisiana

By Karen Brost

There's nothing quite like a great accolade to attract visitors to a city. *National Geographic Traveler* magazine has named New Orleans as one of the 21 "must-see" destinations in the world for 2014. The New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau even helps along the process of planning meetings in their city by offering suggested themes like "Big Ideas in the Big Easy," "Get Jazzed in New Orleans" and "Get Down to Business, then Just Get Down."

and Great Meetings



CBORD attendees network at Joe's Joint at Grand Oaks Mansion, an indoor recreation of a Southern mansion located inside Mardi Gras World.

Credit: Bordway Photography

### New Orleans

Kelley DeMarchi, senior marketing and events manager for the technology solutions company The CBORD Group, staged her company's 33rd annual user group conference in New Orleans in October. She has had the city on her radar for a while.

"We chose New Orleans because after Hurricane Katrina we've been hearing a lot about the refresh of the city, and our attendees like to have fun. This is an educational conference, and it's all about the professional development for our customers. New Orleans was always in the back of our minds, and we thought 'Hey, let's give it a try.'"

### High-Tech Hotel

CBORD chose the Hyatt Regency New Orleans for its conference, which attracted approximately 625 attendees, includ-

ing customers, vendors and staff. DeMarchi explains why they decided on this hotel. "We chose the Hyatt due to the newer technologies that they have. They have RFID key cards, and they have a high-speed elevator system, so you use your key to get on the elevator. There are no buttons inside of the elevator."

She explains how it works. "You flash your key and it will tell you what elevator bank (to go to) and right outside it will flash 'this elevator is going to floors 21 and 24.' Maybe two people get on and it goes directly to floor 21 and then it will go directly to floor 24. Those were two technology features (that appealed to us). We are a technology company, we write software, so we thought our group would be really interested in that.

"We also selected the Hyatt due to location," she adds. "They are right next to the Superdome but they are a decent walking

distance, about 10–15 minutes, from Bourbon Street. So for us, that was kind of important. We weren't right around the corner. We knew people would find it on their own, but for our professional development (program), it was good to say we're not right next door to the French Quarter."

The Hyatt has 1,193 guest rooms, including 95 suites, as well as 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space. As DeMarchi mentioned, the hotel is adjacent to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. It is also located near the New Orleans Arena and the city's new Medical District.

"We do an opening session the first evening to kick off our meeting with a small welcome reception in the hotel right after," DeMarchi explains. "For our opening session, we brought in a speaker this year, Curt Steinhorst." She explains that Steinhorst represents Jason Dorsey, known as "The Gen Y Guy,"

who is an expert on marketing to different generations. "He's been on MSNBC and on the 'Today Show,' all different programs. Curt Steinhorst is part of his Center for Generational Kinetics. He talked about the generational divide. It went over very, very well. It engaged everyone," she continues, "and our users range anywhere from mid-20s to, I would say, early to mid-60s, with the average being right around 40, both men and women. Of our attendees, 70 percent are from the college and university market and another 25 percent roughly come from health care.

"The speaker actually connected to everybody. It didn't matter — age, background, anything. We had phenomenal reviews. People booked him for their own personal events after the fact. It really kicked off our program on a high note. That was our first night."

## Mardi Gras World

DeMarchi describes another highlight of their conference. “For one dinner of our program, we actually take the group off-site to explore the city and we took them to Mardi Gras World. It’s very unique to New Orleans.” Mardi Gras World gives visitors a behind-the-scenes look at the warehouses where the Mardi Gras floats are created. “We provided a little bit of a tour so they could see the artisans working, and we walked through one of the warehouses where all of the floats are stored.”

For their reception, CBORD used the Grand Oaks Mansion. “It’s actually a mansion inside of a warehouse (at Mardi Gras World),” DeMarchi explains. “We had a little reception where they could just mingle around with food and beverage and some entertainment, and it was really neat. I highly, highly recommend Mardi Gras World. They were great to work with.”

Grand Oaks Mansion is one of several event venues within Mardi Gras World. This replica of an antebellum mansion is surrounded by “starlit” skies, gardens and pathways. “You feel like you’re outdoors even though you’re inside,” DeMarchi explains.

DeMarchi’s site visit was coordinated by the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau, and they introduced her to Mardi Gras World. “That was one of the driving forces when I did the site visit. I looked at Mardi Gras World as an offsite option and fell in love with it. It really kind of put New Orleans on the top of our list. We look for something very unique to the city that you can’t get somewhere else.”

DeMarchi also was happy with the airlift into New Orleans. Her attendees come from all over the country as well as from five or six international destinations, including Canada, Australia, Singapore and the Middle East. “(The airlift) was very easy. I didn’t hear any complaints.”

Several airlines expanded their service into Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport in 2013. American Airlines added daily departures to Dallas/Fort Worth; Delta Airlines added daily service to New York’s JFK airport and Los Angeles; and Southwest Airlines initiated daily service to Austin, TX. After completing a \$300 million modernization project, which included the expansion of Concourse D and the addition of six new gates, the airport recently opened a new consolidated rental car facility called Conrac, to meet the airport’s anticipated growth over the next 15 years. The new



The Mercedes-Benz Superdome offers a variety of group event spaces including Club XLIV.



The Ernest N. Morial Convention Center introduced The Great Hall, a 60,000-sf ballroom, in January last year.

facility was designed to increase the airport’s rental car inventory from 800 cars to approximately 1,800.

## Blending the Old With the New

Jeff O’Hara, DMCP, CMP, and president of the destination management company AlliedPRA New Orleans, says that the current trend is for corporate groups to hold meetings in the hotels and then do one night offsite.

He described a few offsite venues that have been popular with corporate groups. “One new venue that blends the old and the new is the Civic Theatre,” he explains. “It just reopened in the last year, and it’s actually the oldest theater in the South, so it’s got a lot of great architecture. They also equipped it with a lot of technology when they reopened it, so there’s a lot of great AV opportunities, a lot of great branding opportunities. That’s located right in the central business district.”

The Civic Theatre, which was built in 1906, has a modular flooring system that can be raised and lowered. The venue can host banquets for up to 200, a reception for up to 650, and it has a theater capacity for up to 700.

“A great new venue at the WWII Museum is the US Freedom Pavilion,” O’Hara adds. The venue was designed to pay tribute to the 16 million Americans who served in the armed forces during the war. “We’re doing a corporate event there in March for 1,300 people. We’re using the inside space and the outside space. Just the inside space would be great for something like 300–500 people. That one has been selling a lot. They’ve built in a lot of great AV, so there are a lot of great branding opportunities. It’s a huge room with big glass windows all the way up and planes hanging from the ceiling.” Those aircraft include a Boeing B-17 “Flying Fortress,” a SBD Dauntless and the TBM Avenger.

“Club XLIV at the Superdome just expanded,” he continues. It’s a private lounge that pays tribute to the New Orleans Saints’ victory in Super Bowl XLIV. “They went from a capacity of about 475 people to where they can hold about 1,000. It’s very sleek and high-tech. It’s part of the Superdome complex. We’ve done about five groups over there in the last six months. They renovated that about a year ago in time for Super Bowl.”

O’Hara describes another activity called a “second line parade” that’s popular with corporate groups. “It’s where we close down the street and send a high school marching band down to get the group from their hotel and lead them to wherever their venue is. Everybody loves that — I don’t care how

*“I looked at Mardi Gras World as an offsite option and fell in love with it. It really kind of put New Orleans on the top of our list.”*



Kelley DeMarchi, Senior Marketing and Events Manager  
The CBORD Group Inc.

old they are or how well-traveled they are. We’ve done it for anything from 40 people to 1,000. It’s more cost-effective than you would think.”

## Convention Center News

In the Metropoll XIV, Volume II report by RRC Associates, a Smith Travel Research company, meeting planners ranked the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center No. 1 out of 40 destinations in the category of “new or expanded

convention centers.” The convention center contains more than 1 million sf of contiguous exhibit space, 140 meeting rooms and the 4,000-seat New Orleans Theatre. The center introduced The Great Hall, a 60,000-sf ballroom, in January last year.

The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center was the site of *Entrepreneur Magazine’s* 6th Annual Growth Conference in January. The event was held in the center’s La Nouvelle Ballroom and attracted 600 attendees.

“We select cities that have an inherently strong local entrepreneurial community and ones that will thrive from a free event such as this,” explains Lisa Murray, vice president of marketing for *Entrepreneur*. “The other part of our decision can be attributed to the vibrant city of New Orleans itself. The city’s vibe embodies creativity and innovation, two factors entrepreneurs are known for and we believe factored to some degree in their decision to attend. The final factor is accessibility. A certain percentage of our attendees follow us all over the country, so we pick a destination that is conducive for travel but also affords the potential for new business opportunities.”

Since UPS sponsored the event, the fact that the convention center has a UPS Store onsite made the facility a good choice. “We were able to showcase the sponsor in a very unique way,” Murray notes. “In addition, the convention center was able to accommodate all of our requests and ensured our event was front and center for their local community.”

Murray described some of the conference’s highlights. “Our keynote presentation with artist Erik Wahl captivated attendees with his visual storytelling while reinforcing the



Civic Theatre, New Orleans’ oldest historic theater, reopened last year.

true meaning of risk-taking. (Secondly), through their stories, *Entrepreneur Magazine’s* ‘Entrepreneur of 2013’ award winners honored at our luncheon offered inspiration to attendees. (And thirdly), hundreds of attendees lined up to pitch *Entrepreneur’s* editors for a chance to have their businesses featured.”

The New Orleans Convention Center also will be the site of the Electric Power Conference & Expo in April. The event is expected to attract approximately 4,000 attendees and 260 exhibitors. Participants have a choice of eight hotels at varying price points, ranging from the Hampton Inn & Suites Convention Center New Orleans to the W New Orleans. The event’s largest room blocks are at the 1,622-room Hilton New Orleans Riverside and the 320-room Downtown New Orleans Marriott at the Convention Center.

“We were looking to bring the 15-year old event to a new location,” explains Show Director Jamie Reesby of Access Intelligence. “We had previously rotated between Chicago (Rosemont) and Baltimore. Electric Power was to go to New Orleans back in 2006 and had to relocate due to the hurricane. We are excited to have the opportunity to bring the event back to NOLA. We feel it will help rejuvenate our event and bring new attendees, as well as from the Gulf Coast. The CVB has created a microsite and offered to help promote the event to their database, as well.”

The convention center, which is the sixth-largest convention center in the U.S., recently upgraded its wireless networks



The US Freedom Pavilion: The Boeing Center, which opened last year at The National WWII Museum, accommodates up to 700 attendees for a seated dinner.

to provide service to all public spaces, meeting rooms, the New Orleans Theatre, The Great Hall and a prefunction area. The center’s Xirrus Rapid Deployment Kits now make it possible for a wireless network to be created in a matter of minutes. As a result of the new technology, thousands of users can be served simultaneously.

The New Orleans Convention Center Club XLIV also has made a strong commitment to going green through a multi-

faceted initiative that focuses on waste reduction, water conservation, energy conservation and clean air practices.

### Noteworthy in New Orleans

In other New Orleans news, the **Sheraton New Orleans Hotel** recently completed a \$50 million revitalization project that included a floor-to-ceiling redo of the hotel's 1,100 guest rooms and suites, its Sheraton Club lounge, lobby and more than 100,000 sf of meeting space.

The **Omni Royal Orleans**, located in the city's French Quarter, has invested \$15 million to revitalize and modernize its 345 guest rooms and public spaces. It also added 24 wrought iron balconies to preserve the historic nature of the property. The hotel offers 14,000 sf of event space that includes 17 meeting rooms.

**The Roosevelt New Orleans, A Waldorf Astoria Hotel**, recently opened its new Fountain Lounge as a nod to its historic past. When the lounge originally opened in 1938, it was a place where the A-listers of the day gathered in an atmosphere as "casual and carefree as a night in Paris." The hotel offers 504 rooms, including 125 suites and Pure allergy-friendly rooms. It also provides a choice of 23 meeting rooms, including the Huey P. Long Executive Boardroom.

### Baton Rouge

Louisiana's capital city is located 80 miles northwest of New Orleans and can be reached by flights operated by American, Delta, United and US Airways through Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport. One of the city's largest venues is the Baton Rouge River Center, located on the banks of the Mississippi. It contains a 70,000-sf exhibition hall that can be combined with the venue's arena to create more than 100,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space.

Unique venues that confer prestige and elegance to any corporate event are available at the Governor's Mansion, and at the Old State Capitol in the rotunda and the House and Senate chambers. And plantation houses, such as Magnolia

*"We are excited to have the opportunity to bring the event back to NOLA. We feel it will help rejuvenate our event and bring new attendees."*



**Jamie Reesby**, Show Director  
Access Intelligence, Houston, TX

Mound Plantation, Houmas House Plantation and Gardens, and Nottoway Plantation infuse events with the elegance of the old South.

Visit Baton Rouge offers meeting planners a wealth of resources, including assistance with RFPs, welcome bags and liter-



The Baton Rouge River Center is located along the banks of the Mississippi River in downtown Baton Rouge

ature for attendees, onsite registration assistance and an image and video gallery. The bureau also will line up a local dignitary to welcome the group and help arrange for a local expert to deliver the keynote address.

### Shreveport-Bossier

Billed as Louisiana's "Other Side," Shreveport-Bossier is accessible via the Shreveport Regional Airport, which is served by American, United, Allegiant and Delta Airlines. The area offers more than 10,000 hotel rooms as well as the 350,000-sf Shreveport Convention Center and the 24,000-sf Bossier Civic Center. The cities also provide a choice of unique venues for off-site events, including the Space Planetarium and Imax Theater at Sci-Port: Louisiana's Science Center.

The Shreveport-Bossier Convention & Tourist Bureau is currently offering a "Golden Ticket" program, which offers \$1,000 to qualifying groups to help offset the cost of meeting room rental, food or transportation. Details are available at [www.shreveport-bossier.org](http://www.shreveport-bossier.org).

### Lafayette

Located 135 miles west of New Orleans, Lafayette has a choice of event venues, including the 40,000-sf Cajundome arena, home of the Lafayette Ragin' Cajuns basketball team. The Cajundome Convention Center, located adjacent to the arena, contains nearly 100,000 sf of event space on two levels well as a 5,000-sf mall area. The Lafayette Convention & Visitors Commission offers an app called the "Lafayette Travel Mobile Concierge" that can help meeting attendees visiting the area find "all things Cajun," including restaurants, shopping and local attractions.

### Pick Your Passion

The slogan of the Louisiana Office of Tourism is "Pick Your Passion," referring to the wide range of attractions and amenities the state's destinations have to offer. Plan a meeting here and you just might experience what DeMarchi did: Many of her attendees extended their stays, both pre- and post-conference. She explains, "I did have to increase my room block about 100 rooms over what I anticipated."

**C&IT**

Credit: Baton Rouge CVB

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## ON THE MOVE



SUGLIA

The Sheraton New York Times Square Hotel, New York, NY, has appointed **Jesse Suglia** as director of sales and marketing. He formerly served as director, travel industry and international sales, at Omni Hotels & Resorts, Kempinski Hotels and The Global Hotel Alliance.

The InterContinental New York Barclay, New York, NY, has named **Joseph Gaeta** as director of sales. He was general manager of the Benjamin Hotel, New York, NY.



GREEN

**Darren Green** was named senior vice president of sales at the Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board (LA Tourism). He most recently served as director of sales for the Starwood Hotels and Resorts' New York metro market team.

Melia Hotels International has named **Brandi Ronk** as director of group sales for their global collection of hotels and resorts. She formerly was director of operations for Maritz Travel. **C&IT**

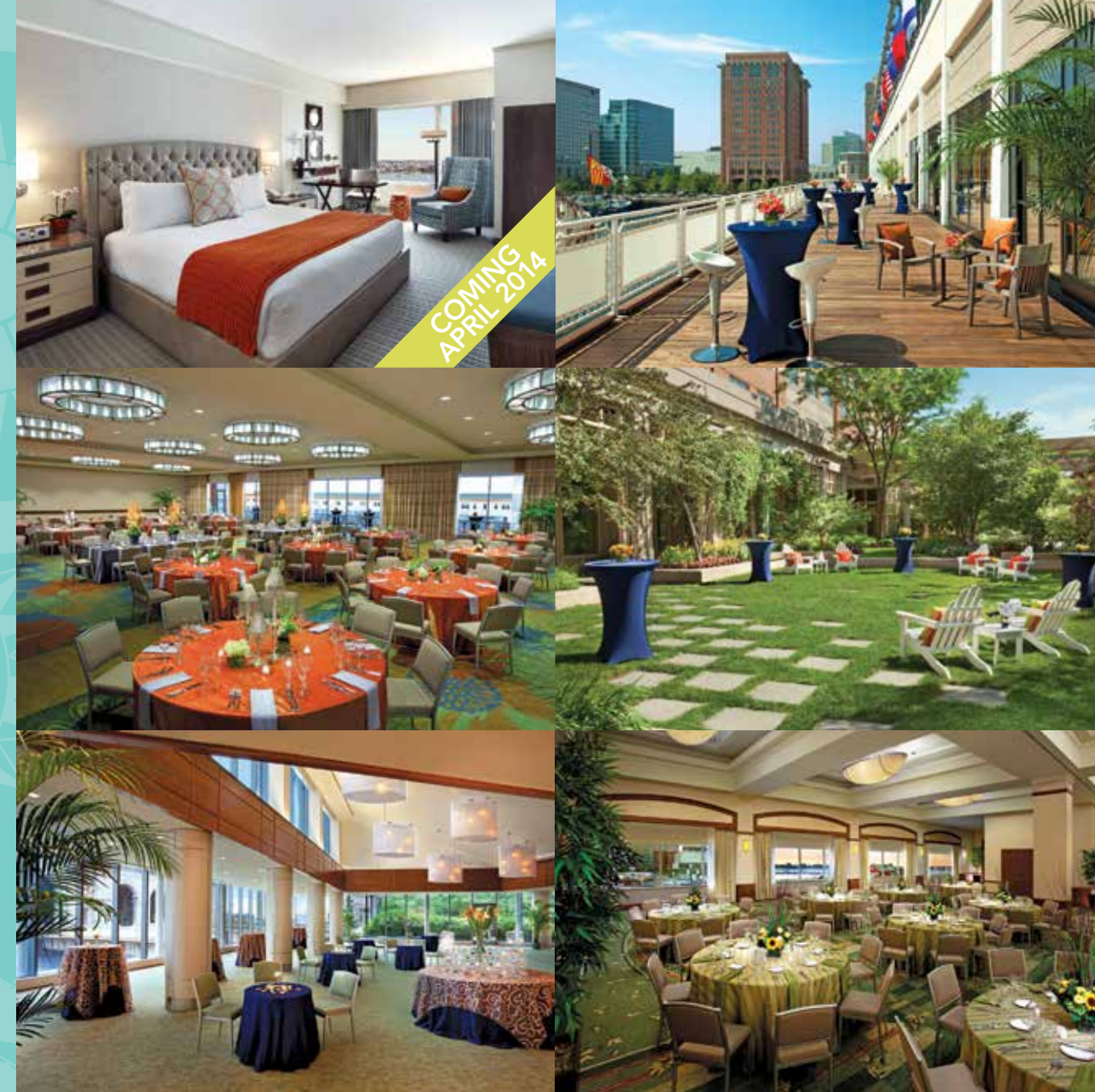


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