

WWW.TheMeetingMagazines.com

# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

## Meetings at Sea

Why Planners Are Loving  
Cruise-Based Events

PAGE 12



Carnival Cruise  
Line's new  
3,936-passenger  
Carnival Vista, the largest  
in the fleet, will launch in May.

**CLICK HERE TO  
DOWNLOAD/VIEW  
TABLET VERSION**

## How the Sharing Economy Will Affect Meetings

PAGE 24

Conference Centers

PAGE 28

Event Planning

PAGE 32

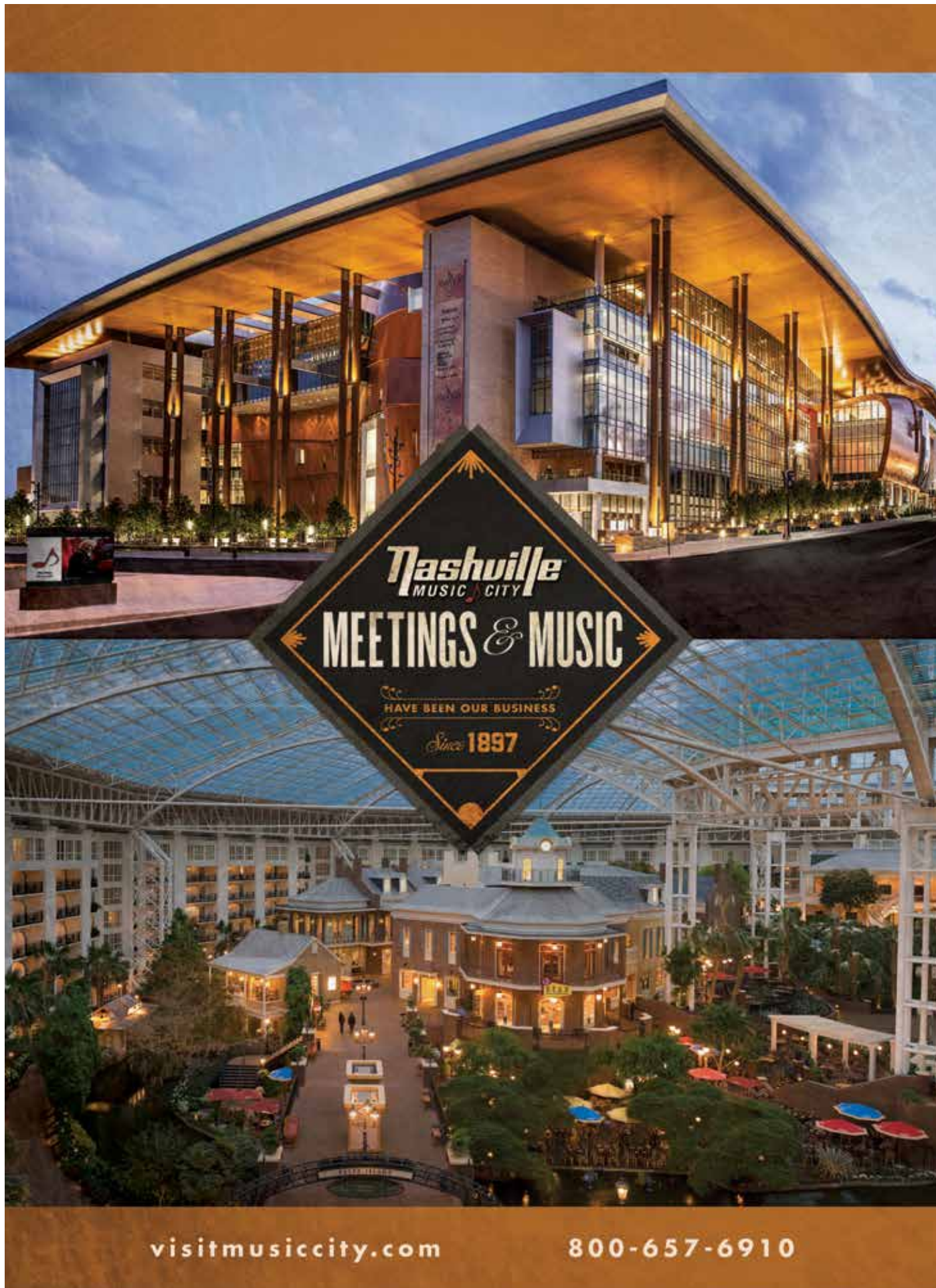
Atlantic City

PAGE 36

New Orleans

PAGE 42





visitmusiccity.com

800-657-6910

ISSN 0739-1587

USPS 716-450

# Contents

VOLUME 34 NO. 2

FEBRUARY 2016

## FEATURES

- 12 Meetings at Sea**  
Cruise-Based Events Generate Excitement, Save Money and Make a Planner's Job Easier  
By Christine Loomis
- 24 It's a Puzzlement!**  
How the Sharing Economy Will Impact the Meetings Industry Down the Road  
By Mark Rowh
- 28 The Conference Center Difference**  
Invested in Your Meeting's Success  
By Patrick Simms
- 32 The Building Blocks of a Successful Event**  
Exceptional Meetings Are Created From the Ground Up, Starting With a Well-Defined Goal  
By John Buchanan

## DESTINATIONS

- 36 Atlantic City**  
New Development Is Building New Meetings Business  
By Derek Reveron
- 42 New Orleans**  
From Carnivals to the Culinary Scene, the Crescent City Has Everything a Planner Needs and Attendees Want  
By Derek Reveron

## DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Publisher's Message**
- 6 News & Notes**
- 9 Snapshots**
- 10 Perspective**  
Sharing, 'Cheating' and Direct Booking  
By Dan Ruch
- 50 People on the Move**
- 50 Reader Services**

Credit: AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center



The AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center is currently expanding its conference space. **PAGE 28**

Credit: Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Bureau



Atlantic City boasts a growing meeting and convention business, with a host of new developments underway. **PAGE 36**

Credit: New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau



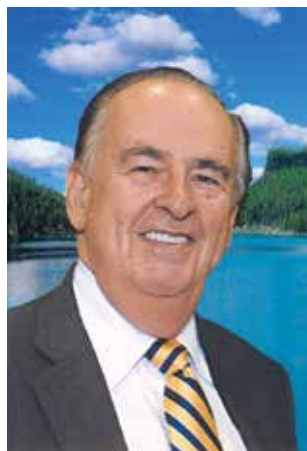
The Mardi Gras city "has entered a new era of growth and promise," according to the CVB's president and CEO. **PAGE 42**



# Publisher's Message

## Making Your Job Easier

Making your job easier is our Job No. 1 here at Coastal Communications Corp., and in this issue we offer you many superb ideas of how to create and develop successful meetings and events that generate excitement and meet your company's objectives. For example, what could be easier than arranging for a cruise-based event for a change of pace? In our cover story, "Meetings at Sea" on page 12, you will learn how efficient and cost-effective meetings and incentive programs can be



on board. After all, a cruise offers flexibility in areas such as itineraries and destinations.

Eldon Gale, director of events for Scentsy, is a huge fan of meeting at sea, especially when it comes to entertainment. Gale says, "You can hire entertainment on land, but cruises have it all built in," he says. "Band for your general session? Check. DJ with killer lighting and special effects for your dance party? Check. Broadway-style shows? Check. Multiple bands playing multiple genres of music so your attendees can listen to what they prefer...all at the same time? Check. Built-in kids programs? Check. You do have to be flexible and work with what the ship has to offer, but generally speaking,

cruise ships are going to have something to fit every age group and every interest level — and it's all included. Try achieving that on a land program!"

In addition to site selection ideas, you will discover a trove of fabulous ideas from fellow planners in "The Building Blocks of a Successful Event" on page 32. Time after time, planning pros agree that you must begin the process with a defined, clear goal to form a solid foundation upon which to assemble the rest of the meeting components such as content, speakers, audio-visual, F&B and more. Jacqueline Bidanec, CMP, HPN Global, reminds her clients to "feed their attendees well. Hungry stomachs make for unhappy people...spend the money to give people good meals if you want an attentive and happy attendee."

For more site selection suggestions, "The Conference Center Difference" on page 28 provides all the latest information on meeting package trends and how you can expect an optimal business event with seamless service.

To top it all off, we take you to Atlantic City (page 36) and New Orleans (page 42). These two iconic cities are on a mission to give you and your attendees everything you need and want so that you gladly return year after year.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

## www.TheMeetingMagazines.com CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
**Harvey Grotsky**  
harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR  
**Mitch D. Miller**  
mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

MANAGING EDITORS  
**Susan W. Fell**  
susan.fell@themeetingmagazines.com

**Susan S. Gregg**  
sue.gregg@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS  
**Ron Bernthal**  
**Karen Brost**  
**John Buchanan**  
**Sara Churchville**  
**Maura Keller**  
**Christine Loomis**  
**Derek Reveron**  
**Mark Rowh**  
**Patrick Simms**

PRESIDENT & CEO  
**Harvey Grotsky**

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS  
**David 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

WESTERN STATES/HAWAII  
**Marshall Rubin**  
818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907  
marshall.rubin@themeetingmagazines.com

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. © 2016



# THE CROSSROADS OF INSPIRATION & INNOVATION.



Grand Reopening in early 2017

Imagine a state-of-the-art meetings facility famous for innovative events in the heart of a destination world-renowned for inspiration. That reality is coming soon with the transformation of the Monterey Conference Center. Currently undergoing an amazing \$60+ million renovation, this facility will be LEED®-EB certified with 40,000+ square feet of flexible meeting space – over 70,000 square feet including the adjoining hotels.

The Monterey Conference Center is known as a hub of innovation within Monterey County, a destination replete with awe-inspiring scenic beauty and a vast array of unique places and extraordinary spaces to create life-and business-enriching moments. For a destination and venue that will inspire and invigorate your meeting attendees, look no further than Monterey.



For more details about the venue and the Monterey Conference Connection, please visit [MontereyConferenceCenter.com](http://MontereyConferenceCenter.com).

**MONTEREY**  
Inspired moments in meetings.®



## News & Notes

### Hilton West Palm Beach Celebrates Opening



Credit: Lila Photo

The Hilton West Palm Beach, Florida, opened January 29. Featuring 400 guest rooms and 43 suites, the hotel is connected to the Palm Beach County Convention Center and features 24,000 sf of meeting space. Gathered for the ribbon-cutting ceremony were (l to r) Leslie Pchola, area vice president, Hilton Worldwide; Mayor Mary Lou Berger, Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners; Randy Gaines, V.P. operations and new projects, Hilton Worldwide; Bruce Warwick, vice chairman, Related Companies; Stephen Ross, chairman, Related Companies; John Parkinson, general manager, Hilton West Palm Beach; Joe Berger, E.V.P. and president, Americas Hilton Worldwide; Edd Karlan, director of sales and marketing, Hilton West Palm Beach; Gopal Rajegowda, V.P., Related Companies; Ted Ratcliff, S.V.P. operations, East, Hilton Worldwide; and Mayor Jeri Muoio, West Palm Beach.

### Don Welsh Named New President and CEO of DMAI

WASHINGTON, DC — Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) announced that Don Welsh, CEO of Choose Chicago, has been chosen as the new president and CEO. "After a thorough search process that included a stellar



WELSH

group of candidates, we are thrilled that Don has accepted this position," stated Bob Lander, chairman of the DMAI board of directors and CEO of the Austin CVB. "We are confident that he will lead DMAI in becoming the premier destination management organization both in the U.S. and globally."

Welsh is a seasoned tourism executive with more than 35 years of experience in the industry. Prior to his role in Chicago, Welsh held the CEO positions at both the Seattle Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Indianapolis Convention & Visitors Association. Welsh also brings extensive hotel experience with him having served in various capacities at Westin Hotels, the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company and the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. [www.destinationmarketing.org](http://www.destinationmarketing.org)

### U.S. Travel Association Predicts Travel Trends

WASHINGTON, DC — The U.S. Travel Association recently released its inaugural Travel Trends Index (TTI), a two-prong indicator developed by the organization's economic research team to both track and predict the volume and pace of travel to and within the U.S. The TTI will be released on



DOW

the first Tuesday of each month.

The TTI, which measures travel trends as of December 2015, shows that travel growth leveled off at the end of the year and forecasts moderate growth in early 2016. Domestic leisure travel continues to strengthen, thanks to rising wages and low gas prices. Business travel, by contrast, contracted due to volatile markets and rising interest rates, although the TTI predicts a slight recovery for that segment in the first half of 2016. Inbound international travel, while still on a slight growth trajectory, has leveled off considerably due to the strong U.S. dollar.

"The clear picture that the TTI provides of the economic trajectory of travel will enable both federal policymakers and members of our industry to make informed decisions," said U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow. "The indispensability of travel and tourism to the broader economy has been evident for some time, but now we have the definitive resource for measuring both its recent and future performance. The TTI is a powerful tool and further cements travel's place as a leading U.S. industry." [www.ustravel.org](http://www.ustravel.org)

### Norwegian Cruise Line to Refurbish Fleet

MIAMI, FL — Norwegian Cruise Line has revealed details of The Norwegian Edge refurbishment program, which is overhauling the entire guest experience, from ship hardware to culinary enhancements and exclusive private destination developments. The Norwegian Edge reflects a two-year, \$400 million investment by the company through 2017 and demonstrates the line's commitment to exceptional quality and extraordinary experiences. The centerpiece of the program is an extensive ship refurbishment initiative that will elevate the experience on board the Norwegian fleet to this new standard.

The refurbishment program began in October 2015 with a full refresh of Norwegian Epic that included the debut of brand new venues such as

The Cavern Club; complete restaurant makeovers in La Cucina; and a new look for Cagney's, Le Bistro, Moderno Churrascaria, The Manhattan Room and the Garden Café.

Norwegian Gem followed in November, debuting significant enhancements including a complete makeover of Bliss Lounge; extensive interior refurbishments; refreshing of décor including new furniture and new flooring in all specialty restaurants and several complimentary outlets, as well as bars and lounges, to reflect a more contemporary look; new pool deck furniture; interactive digital signage and wayfinding technology; new teak flooring throughout outdoor spaces and corridors of upper decks; and upgrades to The Haven Courtyard and Sundeck with a new look includ-



A full refresh of the Norwegian Epic in October began The Norwegian Edge refurbishment program.

ing more shaded areas, cabanas and lounge chairs.

Throughout the course of the refurbishment program, a total of seven additional ships will go into dry dock for both guest-facing and technical enhancements: Pride of America and Norwegian Sun in spring 2016; Norwegian Dawn in summer 2016; Norwegian Spirit, Norwegian Sky and Norwegian Pearl in winter 2017; and Norwegian Jade in spring 2017. [www.ncl.com](http://www.ncl.com)

### Omni Breaks Ground on Louisville Property

LOUISVILLE, KY — Omni Louisville executives from Omni Hotels & Resorts along with Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer, the Metro Council, leaders from the Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Louisville Downtown Partnership broke ground January 29 on the Omni Louisville Hotel. The 30-story luxurious property will be the luxury brand's first property in Kentucky.

Set to open in early 2018, the Omni Louisville will be a catalyst to the city's growth and urban development. Considered the tallest hotel in Louisville and located one

block from the Kentucky International Convention Center, the hotel will be the cornerstone in the city's most exclusive entertainment, retail and office district, "Fourth Street Live!" The hotel will feature 612 finely appointed guest rooms and suites topped by 225 luxury apartments.

The hotel will offer approximately 70,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space. Meeting and convention attendees will have access to an additional 300,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space at the Kentucky International Convention Center. [www.omnihotels.com](http://www.omnihotels.com)

### Commune Hotels & Resorts and Destination Hotels Merge

SAN FRANCISCO and DENVER — Commune Hotels & Resorts — the international lifestyle hotel management company comprising Joie de Vivre Hotels, Thompson Hotels, tommie and Alila Hotels & Resorts — and Destination Hotels, the preeminent operator of independent hotels, resorts and residences in the U.S., announced January 22 that they have merged.

Geographically, Commune and Destination operate in highly complementary markets and with very little overlap. In addition, through the

merger, each company significantly strengthens a key portion of its portfolio: Commune brings a broader set of urban offerings across North America, Asia and Europe, while Destination contributes a wide array of resort properties in premier destinations from coast to coast. The respective customer bases also are complementary, giving each company immediate access to new individual travelers and groups focused on the independent and lifestyle market. Together, Commune and Destination will have a larger sales, marketing

and revenue management platform and distribution system.

Commune and Destination are committed to maintaining individuality across each property and brand, and offering the independent traveler a compelling array of properties from which to choose. The combined company will be based in Denver with offices in San Francisco, New York, Singapore and Shanghai and will manage more than 90 properties in seven countries. [www.communehotels.com](http://www.communehotels.com), [www.destinationhotels.com](http://www.destinationhotels.com)



## News & Notes

### SITE Index Forecasts Continued Growth for the Incentive Travel Industry

LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA — 2015 was one of the best years ever for the incentive travel industry, not just in North America, but also around the globe. And, 2016 is projected to be another banner year, according to the 2015 Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Index Benchmark Study, an annual analysis and forecast of the incentive travel industry.

“The SITE Foundation has been working to improve our research processes, data quality and response rates with the goal of providing deeper insights into why incentive travel is a vital business tool. The 2015 SITE Index not only demonstrates the business case, but also provides buyers and sellers valuable insights into industry trends and predicts optimism for growth in the global incentive travel industry in 2016,” said Tina Weede, vice president, research and education, SITE Foundation, and president, USMotivation, Atlanta, Georgia.

Overall, both buyers and sellers report a slight increase in incentive travel budgets over the past year with a median spend per participant of around \$3,400. And, many companies are planning to increase their budgets, and the number of eligible participants, in the next 12 months. While budgets may be increasing, nearly three-quarters of buyers are managing costs through a variety of ways such as planning shorter programs (34 percent), having fewer inclusions (29 percent), and selecting less expensive destinations (29 percent).

“Buyers and sellers of incentive travel will benefit greatly from reviewing the SITE Index report, applying the findings and implementing strategies based on information relevant to their business. While times are good, it is vitally important we stay on top of prevailing trends and prepare for the future to ensure that our businesses and the global incentive travel industry remain strong for years to come,” added Weede [www.siteglobal.com](http://www.siteglobal.com)

### Bay Area's Graton Resort & Casino to Expand

ROHNERT PARK, CA — Graton Resort & Casino, a resort, gaming and entertainment destination in Sonoma County, California, is expanding to create a 200-room resort, which also will feature a spa, meeting and convention space, and an outdoor pool area. The \$175 million, 342,000-sf addition, to open in fall 2016, will expand the amenities at the existing \$800 million casino and entertainment facility, which opened in November 2013.

The six-story hotel at Graton Resort & Casino will connect to the casino, and feature a variety of guest rooms and suites ranging from more than 500 sf to 2,600 sf. It also will feature an opulent lobby and bar, a luxurious spa and 20,000 sf of flexible event and convention space that includes seven separate rooms as well as prefunction areas and smaller breakout meeting rooms. The centerpiece of the resort will be the pool area that will be an extension of the hotel lobby and provide an outdoor connection to the convention and meeting space. The Graton Resort & Casino is owned by the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria and is managed by Station Casinos LLC.

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

### Royal Sonesta New Orleans Completes Major Renovation



The Royal Sonesta New Orleans.

NEW ORLEANS, LA — Now that the renovation to the iconic Royal Sonesta New Orleans is complete, the guest experience is even more refined with 483 newly reimagined rooms, including 36 suites, welcoming guests with charm and luxury. The entrance to the hotel is now adorned throughout with elegant furnishings, warm colors and delightful artwork. A new fitness center is well equipped with free weights and state-of-the-art equipment. The hotel's R Club Level has been expanded from 29 to 58 rooms and features a new R Club lounge, which has an elevated level of personalized service and amenities.

In addition to Desire Oyster Bar, the hotel's casual restaurant on world-famous Bourbon Street, The Royal Sonesta New Orleans also features: Restaurant R'evolution, the award-winning innovative eatery of modern-style Cajun and Creole cuisine under the guidance of chefs John Folse and Rick Tramonto; Irvin Mayfield's Jazz Playhouse, where the city's and the nation's legendary musicians jam daily; and Le Booze, “the” whiskey destination on Bourbon Street. [www.sonesta.com/royalneworleans](http://www.sonesta.com/royalneworleans)

## Snapshots



Credits: 1-4 Conventa, Tina Ramuljic; 5 FICP

**1-4** The SITE Board of Directors and Foundation Trustees gathered in scenic Ljubljana, Slovenia for the SITE Incentive Summit, held in conjunction with Conventa and sponsored by the Slovenia Convention Bureau. More than 160 attendees representing hotels, DMCs, airlines, governments and students from 10 countries across Central Europe participated in the SITE Education Day. Not only did attendees gain insights on the latest incentive travel trends, they learned how to market their destinations to the global incentive industry. Participants (with Slovenia mascot) **1** included (l to r) SITE Foundation President-elect Rhea Stagner, D.V.P. sourcing and supplier relations, Maritz Travel Company; Board Member Jacque Goldy, V.P. incentive sales, MGM Resorts International; V.P. Business Development Philip Eisvold, account director, Aimia; Board Member Eda Ozden, director, business development, MEP Destination Business Solutions; SITE Director of Events Anita O'Boyle; SITE Foundation V.P. Fundraising John Iannini, V.P. Melia Hotels International; and Miha Kovacic, director, Slovenian Convention Bureau. **5-7** Financial & Insurance Conference Planners recently wrapped up the 2016 Winter Symposium, where more than 100 planners and hospitality partners gathered at the historic Omni Parker House to ring in 2016 with education and networking.



By Dan Ruch

## Sharing, 'Cheating' and Direct Booking: 3 Travel Trends to Watch in 2016

**N**ext year is poised to be a good year for business travelers who want more options and better value. The maturation of the sharing economy, airline consolidation, and tension between online travel agencies (OTAs) and vendors will fuel next year's trends. In short, we will see more sharing, less loyalty (more "cheating") and more direct booking.

Before diving into each trend though, let's paint the scene. The Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) reports that U.S. spending on travel increased 3.1 percent in 2015 and will grow only 3.7 percent in 2016. Growth is slow in large part because airfare inflation is nonexistent.

Nonetheless, trip volume will grow over five percent in 2016, which is a sign that face-to-face interaction still matters. Indeed, the GBTA reports that 57 percent of millenni-

business, too. This is good news for employers because sharing economy vendors are usually more cost-effective than their traditional counterparts. For example, at my company Rocketrip, we find that travelers who use Airbnb beat their projected hotel budget by an average of \$110 per night. Likewise, Certify finds that the average cost per Uber ride is \$30.03 versus \$34.38 for taxis.

In 2016, expect to see sharing economy services roll out more perks and partnerships for business travelers. A good example is "Business Travel Ready," a new Airbnb certification for hosts that offer business-friendly amenities such as Wi-Fi and a designated work space as well as 24-hour check-in and a policy of no host cancellations within seven days. Another good example is the new partnership between Airbnb

“The **sharing economy** will continue to challenge legacy travel services as millennials increase their share of business travel spending.”

als believe technology can never replace face-to-face business meetings, and millennials are two times more eager to travel for business than baby boomers. This matters because millennials will soon be the dominant business travel demographic, if they aren't already.

Keep in mind that the business travel ecosystem is dealing with stagnant growth and demographic change. With that said, here are my predictions for 2016:

**1 The sharing economy wins a giant chunk of business travel spending.** The sharing economy, led by Uber and Airbnb, has struck home with business travelers. Certify, a provider of travel and expense management software, reports that 55 percent of business travelers now choose Uber, outpacing taxis for the first time ever. The sharing economy is here to stay.

Millennial travelers are accustomed to using the sharing economy in their personal lives, so they expect to use it in

**2 Less loyalty, more promiscuity.** Over the past seven years, the airline industry experienced a string of mergers that have changed the dynamics of loyalty. Delta picked up Northwest Airlines (completed in 2010); Continental merged with United (2012); and most recently, US Airways joined American Airlines (2015). For business travelers who were loyal to the legacy brands, it was like waking up next to a stranger. With fewer airlines but just as many frequent travel-

and American Express (a corporate travel powerhouse) that allows cardholders to spend American Express reward points on Airbnb bookings.

Uber and Airbnb get all the attention, but don't underestimate other sharing economy players. HomeAway, a sharing platform for vacation rentals, was acquired by Expedia for nearly \$4 billion. There's no reason why they can't pivot towards business travelers, taking advantage of Expedia's reach and reputation.

ers, airlines had to address what journalist Josh Barros coined "Elite Bloat."

Consequently, most of the airlines have de-based their reward programs, and they have added more levels of elite status while raising minimum eligibility requirements. Whereas frequent flyer earnings and elite status used to be based on the distance and frequency of travel, they are now based on revenue. The old model favored road warriors; the new model favors cost-insensitive travelers and folks who spend heavily with airline credit cards. In November, American Airlines became the last major U.S. carrier to switch to a revenue-based reward program.

As a business traveler, why be loyal if it doesn't pay off? It makes more sense to "swipe" airlines, a la Tinder, until you find the best combination of price and in-flight comforts. Southwest and Virgin understand this. They have aggressively wooed business travelers by expanding their coverage network and adding premium cabin amenities such as fast Wi-Fi and live streaming. With loyalty dying and travel spending stagnant, other airlines will likely follow in their footsteps.

**3 Travel vendors versus OTAs: the "frenemies" get feistier.** Hotels, airlines and rental car agencies will vie to reclaim direct bookings in 2016. This is the only way to cut down on the fees they pay to online travel agencies (OTAs) such as Expedia and Priceline. It's a "frenemy" situation because as much as vendors hate paying OTAs, they do drive a lot of transactions. Generally, OTAs have much better booking sites and mobile apps, which are a draw for those tech-savvy millennials.

This vendor versus OTA conflict isn't new — it's just getting more aggressive. For instance, in September, Lufthansa Airlines introduced a surcharge of €16 on all tickets booked through global distribution systems (referred to as GDSs — essentially virtual networks that facilitate travel-related transactions between buyers and sellers). They believe this will encourage travelers to book directly on *Lufthansa.com* instead of with OTAs. It's not an absurd idea — budget airlines such as Southwest have managed to thrive without OTAs. This strategy keeps



**Dan Ruch**

is the founder and CEO of Rocketrip. Dan founded Rocketrip in 2013 after 10+ years in the ad tech space. Prior to founding Rocketrip, he was V.P. of Europe for Tremor Video, a leading provider of technology-driven video advertising solutions and ran Tremor's business development efforts in the U.S. Early on in his career, he worked at Tacoda until its successful exit to AOL and at Mindshare and Maxus Global — GroupM's agencies. [www.rocktrip.com](http://www.rocktrip.com)



their flights off the major travel agency sites, and, in theory, has enabled them to offer cheaper fares by eliminating agency fees and commissions.

Cutting out the middleman can backfire, however. In October 2014, Marriott started offering free Wi-Fi to guests who booked directly. Understandably, travel agents were angered. So in August 2015, when Marriott ran a global YouTube campaign encouraging guests to book directly, they caused a true uproar among travel agents. The backlash forced Marriott to pull the video ads.

This tug-of-war between vendors and travel agents will continue to fuel a spree of mergers and acquisitions on the OTA side. In 2015 alone, Expedia has acquired Travelocity, Orbitz and HomeAway, as I already mentioned. In the last two years, Priceline Group picked up Kayak and OpenTable, among other companies. The OTAs want to grow to a scale where they can't be ignored, and they seem to be succeeding. Search "book travel" on Google and you'll find that Kayak and Expedia own the first five results, or half the first page of listings.

### In Competition, Travelers Win

2016 will be defined by competition. The sharing economy will continue to challenge legacy travel services as millennials increase their share of business travel spending. Airlines, all vying for loyalty amidst stagnant growth, will realize that perks have to extend beyond points and elite status. OTAs and vendors will try to one up each other in the booking wars. This is all great news for business travelers who can share, "cheat" and directly book their way to better deals, perks and experiences. **C&IT**



# Meetings at Sea



Caribbean Princess dockside charter housed attendees at the Fifth Summit of the Americas in Trinidad.

Credit: Joyce Landry, Landry & Kling

## Cruise-Based Events Generate Excitement, Save Money and Make a Planner's Job Easier

By Christine Loomis

**T**he question is not why would you hold a meeting or incentive program at sea — it's why wouldn't you? There are so many advantages, including cost and time savings, that planners owe it to themselves to at least consider convening on a cruise ship.

Small or large, corporate meeting or incentive program, today's cruise industry is ready to accommodate business at sea. Planners may be surprised at how efficient and cost effective cruise meetings and incentive trips can be to plan and execute. Cruises offer flexibility in terms of itineraries with sailings

from three days to two weeks, and in destinations, with ships sailing in nearly every corner of the globe.

### The Advantages of Meeting on a Ship

According to Jo Kling, president of Landry & Kling ([landrykling.com](http://landrykling.com)) — the first travel company focused exclusively on meetings at sea and corporate charters — meeting and events on ships is a growing part of the meetings industry, and has been for many years.

Cruise-based meetings also are high value. Kling says the

### TODAY'S AGENDA

## GOALS ACHIEVED. REWARD THE TEAM.



### "THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR CRUISE LINE" THE WORLD'S BEST INCENTIVE

An employee-of-the-month plaque or a Carnival cruise vacation? Hmm, not exactly a toss-up.

Incentivize your organization with, say, a Caribbean cruise at the end of their carrot stick. Your team can relax in our luxurious Balcony staterooms, savor an excellent meal at the steakhouse, enjoy sunsets on the Lido Deck...the reward opportunities are endless. Show your appreciation for your team's milestone accomplishments! We promise to pamper your team all day long and well into the wee hours.

**You know what else is fun? Easy planning.**

A Carnival Meetings & Incentives representative will help you plan everything you need for your incentive program, starting with which ship, itinerary and departure port best meet your needs. Our professional team looks forward to working with you to plan the perfect program.

Searching for great incentive ideas? Your search is over: There's no better reward than a Carnival cruise vacation. Our 24 ships offer a host of high-end amenities, an extensive variety of activities and entertainment, delicious dining options, plus Carnival's friendly and attentive service.



Call 800-519-4574 | Visit [carnivalmeetings.com](http://carnivalmeetings.com)



***“If you let a cruise be what a cruise is, you’ll provide a great diversity of experiences that are certain to please the broad range of your attendees.”***

**Eldon Gale**, Director of Events  
Scentsy, Meridian, ID



cost of programs aboard ships is typically 20–30 percent less than those at hotels of comparable quality. “Ships offer much more budget flexibility than hotels, as meals and entertainment are included in the cruise fare,” she says. “And there’s no added cost for use of a ship’s AV equipment and no need for linens, risers, plants, florals, lighting, labor, etc.”

There’s also little or no added cost for onsite transportation, often a large budget item. Transportation is either built into shore excursions or unnecessary for attendees getting to and from all the activities, dining and entertainment venues onboard. There is a lot, in fact, for attendees to do on ships, which speaks to another saving for planners.

“While ships have a resort environment,” Kling says, “there are no resort fees and there’s no charge for use of shipboard fitness facilities.”

All of that underscores the ease of planning a shipboard experience. “There’s no menu-planning or budgeting required for meals,” Kling says. “And special diets are easily accommodated with no extra planning.” Likewise, delivery of room gifts is typically easier and less expensive on ships than in hotels.

Cruise lines have already lined up many of the best activities at each port, so planners don’t have to find and vet those. And with all the activities onboard, creating itineraries and schedules is less complicated and less work than at comparable land destinations.

Eldon Gale, director of events for Scentsy, a global direct sales fragrance company, has booked five programs at sea including a combined leadership training and incentive program in the Caribbean for 1,100 Scentsy leaders and consultants. The group cruised on Royal Caribbean’s Independence of the Seas in January, which included two days at sea and one port of call in Mexico. Like Kling, Gale says that ship-based programs offer much to attendees and planners that land-based

programs can’t match, perhaps especially entertainment options.

“You can hire entertainment on land, but cruises have it all built in,” he says. “Band for your general session? Check. DJ with killer lighting and special effects for your dance party? Check. Broadway-style shows? Check. Multiple bands playing multiple genres of music so your attendees can listen to what they prefer...all at the same time? Check. Built-in kids programs? Check. You do have to be flexible and work with what the ship has to offer,

but generally speaking, cruise ships are going to have something to fit every age group and every interest level — and it’s all included. Try achieving that on a land program!”

Gale also points out that ships often have extras not available at most hotels, giving planners added creative power. “Oftentimes ships will have things you’d never have on land, like a theater with full theatrical lighting; different drapes, drops and backgrounds; a movable orchestra pit; and special effects such as fog.”

Gale used the ship’s theaters for two general sessions for his group in January. “It’s a great way to have a meeting because all the AV you need is built into the ship,” he says. “We augmented it a bit with TelePrompTers and confidence monitors, but when you consider that you’re not paying for lighting or

sound, it really saved us quite a bit of money over a land program. We also had smaller special-topic meetings in the ship’s conference center.”

As for dining, Gale notes that while land programs generally offer a set plated menu or basic buffet to meet attendees’ needs, cruises provide significantly more options. “Attendees get to choose exactly what they are eating every meal of the day, often ordering off of a menu with dozens of choices. If that’s not enough, all ships have extensive buffets that are much larger and more diverse than anything you would get from a hotel banquet team. Still not enough? Most ships now

offer multiple specialty dining outlets where you can get some of the best food you’ll find anywhere. There are surcharges for specialty restaurants, but the charge is a fraction of what you would pay for the same experience on land.”

Because the group of 1,100 was too large for one seating, Gale had tables at both of the ship’s seatings and let attendees choose which they wanted when registering. “Other times,” he notes, “we’ve had enough people to take over a whole deck



The Central Park neighborhood on Royal Caribbean’s Allure of the Seas, one of seven distinct neighborhoods on the ship.

Credit: Landry & Kling

RELOCATE YOUR  
POINT OF VIEW.  
MODERN LUXURY  
LIVES HERE.



## DISCOVER THE ULTIMATE CORPORATE ESCAPE—AT SEA.

Celebrity Cruises will indulge your guests with luxurious accommodations, globally-inspired cuisine, exciting entertainment, engaging activities, and stunning destinations. Our team will help you accomplish your business objectives while you network, build loyalty, and reward your top performers.

### EXPERIENCE THE CELEBRITY DIFFERENCE WITH ALL THIS—AND MORE:

- Modern, upscale staterooms featuring airy spaces with all the right, tasteful details
- Modern facilities, including theaters and conference/meeting rooms with state-of-the-art A/V equipment—all complimentary
- Wide range of amenities and turn-down options
- Award-winning cuisine with menus crafted by our James Beard-featured chef, Cornelius Gallagher, Jr., plus 24-hour in-stateroom dining
- Large, luxurious theater perfect for company meetings or award presentations
- Premium vacation experiences with activities and entertainment to satisfy every taste

Learn about our latest offers:  
celebritycorporatekit.com  
1-800-722-5934

**TheCelebrity  
Commitment**  
Real tools. Real solutions. Better business.

**Celebrity X Cruises®**

©2016 Celebrity Cruises Inc. Ships' registry: Malta and Ecuador.





Artist's rendering of a luxurious suite on Regent Seven Seas' new Explorer ship, set to launch in July.

Credit: Regent Seven Seas

of the dining room so the seating was open, and they could rotate tables from night to night. We've bought out specialty dining as well, and that's always a nice experience for smaller or VIP groups."

The biggest advantage to a cruise setting may be the inherent flexibility. "Your attendees can make the experience what they want it to be.

Chances are you would never plan bingo, an art auction, games of name that tune or adult scavenger hunts as part of typical land programs," Gale says. "The beauty of a cruise is the diversity of activities onboard. There truly is something for everyone on board, and your guests can do as much or as little of it as they want."

### Working Through the Challenges

There are some challenges as well. "It is what it is," Gale says, and planners will only end up frustrated if they don't accept that framework. "Cruises are designed to appeal to a broad spectrum of people. (Cruise lines) do this week in and week out and they are very good at it. Unless you are chartering a ship, you need to be flexible and not try to micromanage the experience. Just let the cruise be what the cruise is and you'll have a much easier time.

"If you try to take the same land program you have always done and force it onto a ship, you're going to be disappointed," Gale continues. "Cruises require you to re-visit things a bit, to work what you typically do into what they

offer. Don't make the mistake of not letting your attendees enjoy what cruising is really all about. The more you over-program and try to change things up, the more frustrated you'll become. Look for ways to maximize what the cruise experience is for your attendees, and they'll have a great time, and you'll be a lot more relaxed."

The notion of working with what ships offer is echoed by many experts. Jeanna Steele, partner with Sea Planners Group ([seaplanners.com](http://seaplanners.com)), which plans, manages and promotes group programs at sea, says, "You are sharing space with 1,000 other people and standard programming. You may want to do your awards show on the third night at sea at 7:00 p.m., but that may be the night the ship does its production shows. You will have to find an alternative time or date. It is all about advance planning."

Kling puts it this way: "Your meeting at sea will be more successful if you create a fresh new agenda, built on using the ship's facilities, activities, teambuilding opportunities, entertainment and dining options. In other words, fit your business agenda to the ship environment rather than trying to fit the ship into your same old traditional agenda just because it's familiar."

Planners can minimize problems by making requirements clear early in the process, and being flexible enough to work with what ships offer and can do.

Internet access has been a stumbling block for many groups wanting to book conferences and other types of meetings onboard ships, especially meetings for which conducting work is part of the agenda. The Internet has not been comparable to what's available on land — but that is changing.

"Due to current bandwidth limitations onboard ships, you do not see complimentary unlimited Wi-Fi offered to groups very often," Steele says. "More likely contracts include a certain number of minutes of Wi-Fi per passenger or something like that. But I see this evolving quickly in the industry. IT gets better every day, and every cruise line is making strides. I am on five-plus ships every quarter, and every quarter it gets better."

## Get Sea Certified

MPI and Cruise Lines International Association partnered up to provide a cruise-oriented certification course for planners. The Meetings & Events at Sea Certificate course provides planners with what they need to know to execute meetings, events and incentive programs on a cruise ship. The next course is in June in Vancouver at Cruise360, the official conference of the cruise industry.— **CL**

# FEEL FREE TO INSPIRE.

Boost your business and reward your attendees with the freedom and flexibility of Freestyle Cruising® aboard Norwegian Cruise Line's award-winning fleet. A Norwegian cruise is a unique, valuable and memorable experience that is sure to motivate and inspire.

### OUR MANY ONBOARD INNOVATIONS INCLUDE:

**Freestyle Dining** – Up to 28 dining options (with up to 11 FREE)

**Destination Variety** – From 3-, 4- and 7-night itineraries, you can choose the perfect, awe-inspiring itinerary

**The best variety of entertainment at sea** – Enjoy Broadway shows, the comedy of The Second City® and more at no extra cost

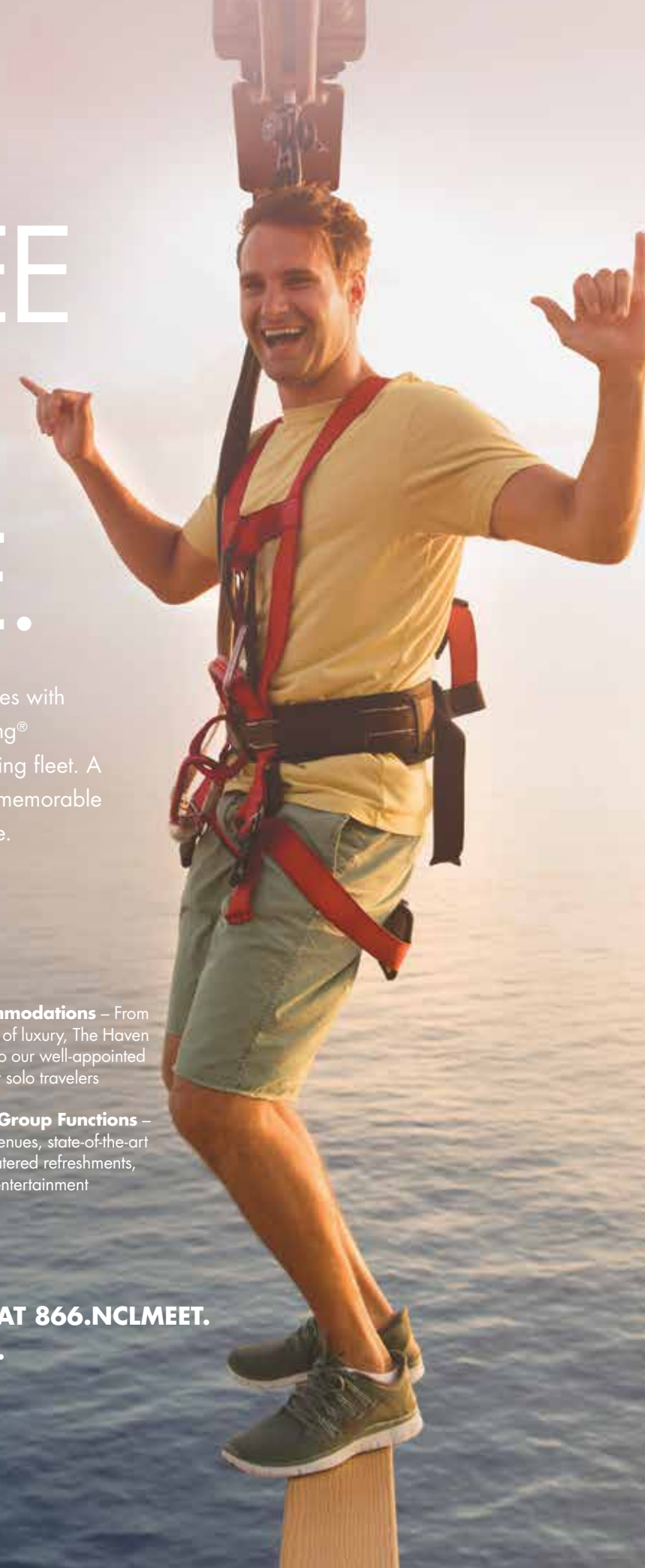
**Flexible Accommodations** – From our private world of luxury, The Haven by Norwegian® to our well-appointed Studios priced for solo travelers

**Customizable Group Functions** – Complimentary venues, state-of-the-art AV equipment, catered refreshments, cocktail parties, entertainment and dining

**WANT TO LEARN MORE? CALL US AT 866.NCLMEET. OR VISIT [EVENTS.NCL.COM](http://EVENTS.NCL.COM) TODAY.**

**NCL NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE®**

©2016 NCL CORPORATION SHIPS' REGISTRY: BAHAMAS AND USA 32001 01/16





Steele says that one of the biggest trends in the cruise industry today is more technologically advanced ships. New ships are being built with high-end technology, including high-speed and accessible Internet, and older ships are being retrofitted with better technology — all good news for planners.

Another challenge planners may face is a client's hesitation about meeting on a ship. "That's natural when considering an unusual venue," Kling says. "It's their responsibility to ensure maximum return on time and budget invested." Her advice to planners is to find out what those hesitations are before presenting a full proposal. "That way," she says, "you can get some assistance from your cruise adviser so you can easily and confidently address those concerns."

## Sailing Overseas

For groups wanting an overseas destination, an exotic destination or multiple destinations in one trip, cruise lines can deliver — and offer savings over hotel-based programs in foreign countries.

Steve E. Some, president of IME Connect, which provides

***"They were able to experience...three different countries in six different ports, yet have that 'U.S.' level of comfort."***

**Steve E. Some**, President  
IME Connect LLC, Parsippany, NJ



incentive, meeting and event logistical planning services for a wide range of companies, chose Royal Caribbean for a program for 740 incentive qualifiers from a large HVAC distributor. The group sailed in the Mediterranean on Allure of the Seas last September. Cruise programs represent about 15 percent of IME's total programs.

When it comes to running programs in foreign destinations, Some says there are advantages to basing a group on a



Credit: Carnival Cruise Line



Artist's rendering of Oceania Cruises' new 684-passenger Sirena, which will be christened in April.

Credit: Oceania Cruises

cruise ship. "Cruise pricing is in U.S. dollars so you don't have the worries of a fluctuating exchange rate as you do in a land-based program."

He also points to the cruise advantages of visiting multiple destinations without unpacking and repacking multiple times or paying for added flights or other travel between destinations. But it's more than simple logistics. "For this particular group," he says, "they were able to experience the beauty, culture, history and culinary experiences of three different countries in six different ports, yet have that 'U.S.' level of comfort and the same accommodations nightly."

And that's exactly what many incentive groups are looking for.

Some chose Royal Caribbean based partly on it being able to accommodate a group of 740, but there were other factors as well. "Due to the size of the group, it came down to two cruise lines," he says. "RCCL came through with very aggressive pricing and concessions, which was very attractive to the client. In addition, the outdoor venues for cocktail receptions were much larger than those offered on other cruise lines' vessels."

Like many planners, Some chose to book air for his groups independent of the cruise line. "We handled that ourselves," he says. "It allowed us more control with the

flights, access to all the airline records and allowed simplicity with name changes."

Foreign destinations are a major draw, especially for incentive groups looking for the newest destinations and that ever-important wow factor. Cruise lines continually up the ante with new ports and itineraries. Kling says there are many new and exotic ports in play and on the horizon, including in China, which she says is booming, South America, Europe, Antarctica and Cuba. That makes cruises "great for the 'been there, done that' incentive qualifiers and top-tier groups," she says.

## Planning, Contracts and Negotiating

Planning a program at sea is different than planning on land, which is why many planners turn to a broker or other third-party expert for help.

"The pre planning can be a challenge," Gale says. "You plan everything through the cruise line's corporate office and never meet the team that will execute your event until you set foot on the ship. Even doing a site sailing — which is essential — won't guarantee you'll have the same crew for your sailing that you did for your site. Crews change regularly, which is why all your planning is done through corporate. A broker can be very

Rendering of the SkyRide on the new 3,936-passenger Carnival Vista, the largest ship in Carnival's fleet, that will launch in May.



When it comes to successfully executing an inspiring incentive reward program, Oceania Cruises offers *Your World. Your Way.*®

- FREE Pre-Paid Gratuities
- Intimate, luxurious ships catering to just 676 guest on *Insignia*, *Regatta*, *Nautica* & *Sirena* or 1,246 guests on *Marina* & *Riviera*
- Finest Cuisine at Sea, served in a variety of distinctive open-seating restaurants, *at no additional charge*
- FREE and Unlimited soft drinks, bottled water, cappuccino, espresso, teas and juices
- Full-ship meeting and conference capabilities with complimentary a/v equipment
- Customized itineraries, awards events and private receptions
- Extraordinary high staff-to-guest ratio ensures exemplary personalized service

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION  
VISIT US AT  
[www.oceaniacruises.com/incentives](http://www.oceaniacruises.com/incentives)

JAN16316



Finest Cuisine at Sea | Destination Specialists | Intimate & Luxurious Ships

Alaska | Asia & Africa | Canada & New England | Caribbean & Panama Canal | South America | South Pacific & Australia | Transoceanic



# 10 Planning Tips

Shari Wallack, president of Florida-based Buy the Sea ([buysea.net](http://buysea.net)), offers these tips for planners considering or planning a program on a cruise ship.

1. Understand the features, benefits and value of a charter versus a group booking.
2. Make sure your meeting and function requirements are spelled out in the contract.
3. Make use of the onboard entertainers for award ceremonies, cocktail parties and private events.
4. Let the ship's shore excursions department help you plan custom events ashore; it's easier than hiring a DMC in each port.
5. Don't overschedule your guests. Give them free time to enjoy the ship and the ports.
6. Leverage all-inclusive liquor packages.
7. Use a ship's specialty restaurants. Buyouts are perfect for dine-arounds.
8. Explore beyond the traditional cruise ship and try a sailing vessel or European river cruise for smaller groups looking for exclusivity.
9. Customize your program with logos, recognizable colors, door magnets and corporate bags, tags, hats, bracelets and other items. Make it easy for your guests to locate one another onboard.
10. Consider using a qualified cruise broker or cruise incentive planner to help you choose the right ship for your program. An expert who knows the cruise lines and ships and who has worked previously with corporate clients can save you a lot of time and get you on the right ship. — CL



Wallack

helpful. Brokers know the ships, the shore-side team, and they know what has been and can be done onboard. They can be a tremendous advocate for you as well as an oftentimes needed source of reason."

There's also the question of comparing ships and site visits. "It's important to understand the differences between the cruise brands," Gale notes. "You need to understand the differences between the total ship offering and the target demographic and how that relates to your group. This is where a broker is incredibly valuable. Yes, you could do site inspections on multiple ships to see them physically, but to truly understand the experience and personality of each ship, you need to sail



Celebrity Infinity recently upgraded its offerings, including a restaurant conversion to the signature Tuscan Grille.

them. This would be a monumental task on your own. A broker can help you identify what's important for you and select a ship that meets those needs, be it dining or entertainment or luxury accommodations. No ships out there are going to tick all the boxes for everyone, so you need to narrow down what's most important to you and go from there."

Gale worked with Shari Wallack, president of Buy the Sea, a Florida-based cruise brokerage company, for his January meeting.

In terms of contracts and negotiating, cruise lines and hotels have similarities and differences. "In theory," says Steele, "the concepts are the same — room block, space, amenities, cancellation, attrition, force majeure — but the detail is much different. Planners need to understand their pricing and amenities, and they will find that many of the things that are negotiated for in hotel contracts can also be requested in cruise contracts, such as complimentary Internet access."

There also are differences, and some of them, Gale says, favor planners. "Generally speaking, ships have very generous cancellation clauses. I've booked five programs at sea and in each case, we had a cancellation schedule that allowed us to walk away four to six months prior to sailing without paying a dime. I don't advocate taking advantage of this; however, because of it you have more peace of mind that if something changes, you have flexibility and options. Hotels would never give you such flexibility. And if your numbers don't come in where you thought they would, you can easily adjust your room block."

Kling points out that cruise ships typically charge a single supplement if only one passenger will be in a stateroom, which can be hefty, and that single rates may be limited to a fixed percentage of the group size. She also notes that because cruise lines don't have "walk-in" clientele and can't make up for cancelled reservations as hotels can, there are typically no refunds once the final payment has been made, usually 60 to 90 days in advance of the sailing. It's also important to note that ships have tight security, and passport and other personal information is typically required by cruise lines no later than two weeks prior to sailing, so planners have to make sure clients and attendees understand this.

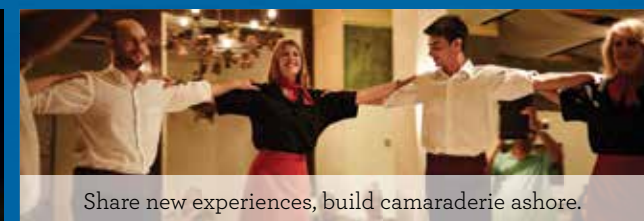
## HOLD A CONFERENCE IN BARCELONA, BREAKOUT SESSION IN VENICE, NETWORK IN ATHENS, and enjoy yourself everywhere in between.



Inspire your team with something truly extraordinary — a cruise with Princess®. First-rate dining, entertainment and meeting facilities — all the makings of an event for the ages



Meeting rooms big or small



Share new experiences, build camaraderie ashore.



Experience world-class dining and entertainment



Plenty of ways to unwind

Call 800-815-9288 or visit [princess.com](http://princess.com) to learn more.



©2016 Princess Cruise Lines, Ltd. Ships of Bermudan and British registry.





NCL's Norwegian Pearl will undergo a refurbishment in winter 2017.

Credit: Associated Luxury Hotels International

There's no question that there's much to learn when putting a corporate program on a cruise ship. But the fact is that cruise lines want corporate business, and they're able to offer meeting venues and services that can save companies money and draw attendees.

"Cruises have a high perceived value for a lot of people," Gale concludes. "They are a 'bucket list' item for many people, so qualification and interest is often quite high. If you let a cruise be what a cruise is, you'll provide a great diversity of experiences that are certain to please the broad range of your attendees. And it doesn't hurt to mention that it makes the planner's job a whole lot easier as well."

## Cruise News

**Oceania Cruises'** big news is the launch of their newest ship, the 684-passenger Sirena. The fourth Oceania ship of its capacity, Sirena will be christened this April following a \$40 million refurbishment and feature a new specialty restaurant, Tuscan Steak, and Red Ginger, a favorite from the Marina and Riviera ships. A new lunchtime experience called Jacques Bistro will feature dishes from legendary chef Jacques Pépin. During its inaugural season, the ship will sail on Mediterranean and Caribbean itineraries.

**Regent Seven Seas** is launching Seven Seas Explorer in July, "the most luxurious ship ever built" and the largest in the fleet. New specialty dining options, a new Culinary Arts Kitchen and a one-of-a-kind, \$10,000 per night ultra-luxury suite are just a few of the highlights. Also just announced is a two-year \$125 million refurbishment program for the entire Regent fleet designed to align with Explorer's offerings, providing passengers with a consistent look and feel in public spaces and suites on all ships. Seven Seas Navigator, the line's most intimate ship carrying just 490 guests, will be the first to receive the upgrade, followed by Seven Seas Voyager in late 2016 and Seven Seas Mariner in the spring of 2017.

**Carnival Cruise Line's** new 3,936-passenger Carnival Vista, the largest in the fleet, will launch in May 2016. New ship features include: SkyRide, an open-air cycling experience; the world's first Imax Theater on a ship; an expanded water park; Seafood Shack, a New England-inspired eatery; RedFrog Pub, including the line's first onboard brewery. Beginning in the fall, the ship will sail from its home port of Miami. Carnival's new fathom brand, designed exclusively to bring community service volunteers to countries in need, embarks on its maiden voyage in April from Miami to the Dominican Republic.

Debuting in May 2016 is **Royal Caribbean's** third Oasis-class ship, Harmony of the Seas. The megaship, which spans 16 decks and offers 2,747 staterooms with capacity for 5,479 passengers double occupancy, features seven neighborhoods, 20 dining options, three multi-story waterslides including the tallest waterslide at sea, faster Internet speed and more.

**Celebrity Cruises** continues to upgrade its Millennium-class ships, the most recent being Celebrity Infinity, which received a new Rooftop Terrace venue in December 2015 — the first in Celebrity's fleet — which features a large outdoor film screen and stereo surround sound. The project also included renovations to the Penthouse and Royal Suites, as well as conversion of the ship's specialty restaurant to the signature Tuscan Grille. Celebrity Summit will receive similar upgrades during a dry-dock in March 2016.

**Norwegian Cruise Line** also is upgrading its fleet. The Norwegian Edge program will invest \$400 million in upgrades over two years through 2017. The centerpiece of the program is an extensive ship refurbishment initiative that began in October 2015 with a full refresh of Norwegian Epic, followed by Norwegian Gem in November. A total of seven additional ships will go into dry-dock for both guest-facing and technical enhancements: Pride of America and Norwegian Sun in spring



Credit: Princess Cruises

The theater in Princess Cruises' Regal Princess.

2016; Norwegian Dawn in summer 2016; Norwegian Spirit, Norwegian Sky and Norwegian Pearl in winter 2017; and Norwegian Jade in spring 2017.

**Princess Cruises** recently announced a \$450 million multiyear product innovation and cruise ship renovation campaign called The Come Back New Promise, intended to enhance the line's onboard guest experience. Recent new initiatives include: "Crafted by Curtis" menu items by award-winning chef and restaurateur Curtis Stone, available in the main dining room on all ships; new luxury beds installed in staterooms across the fleet through 2018; the new Salty Dog Gastropub, available on select ships. Previous initiatives include: new original musical productions; onboard festivals; Discovery at Sea activities and shore excursions developed through a partnership with Discovery Communications; and a mobile messaging service for passengers to connect with one another onboard. **C&IT**



INCENTIVE PROGRAMS ABOARD  
REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES®

ARE THE

*ultimate reward*

Seven Seas Explorer® | Seven Seas Voyager®

Seven Seas Mariner® | Seven Seas Navigator®

Intimate, Luxurious Ships

From 490 to 750 Guests With All Ocean-View Suites and Private Balconies

Visiting Nearly 350 Destinations Worldwide

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

**EVENTS@RSSC.COM**

**305.514.4920 | WWW.RSSC.COM/CHARTER**

*Regent*  
SEVEN SEAS CRUISES®

THE MOST INCLUSIVE  
LUXURY EXPERIENCE™

**FREE**  
Unlimited WiFi\*

**FREE**  
Unlimited Shore Excursions

**FREE**  
Specialty Restaurants

**FREE**  
Unlimited Beverages  
Including Fine Wines  
and Premium Spirits

**FREE**  
Open Bars and Lounges  
PLUS In-Suite Mini-Bar  
Replenished Daily

**FREE**  
Pre-Paid Gratuities

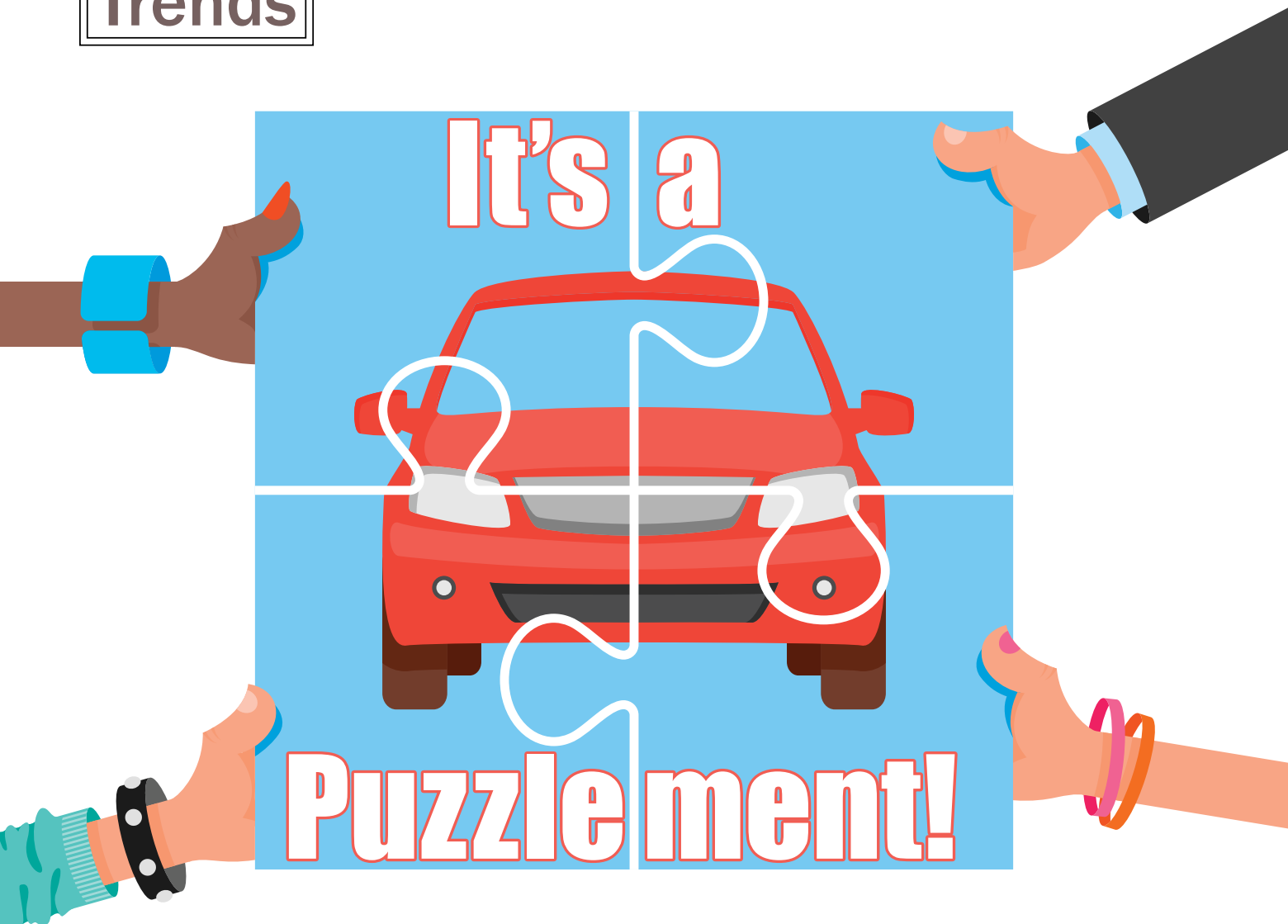
**FREE**  
Full-Ship Meeting and  
Conference Capabilities With  
Complimentary A/V Equipment

Customized Itineraries,  
Awards Events  
and Private Receptions

Africa | Alaska | Asia | Canada & New England | Caribbean | Mediterranean | Northern Europe | South America

\*FREE Unlimited WiFi applies to all suite categories and is valid for one log-in per suite. Ships' Registry: Bahamas and Marshall Islands. ©2016 Regent Seven Seas Cruises®





## How the Sharing Economy Will Impact the Meetings Industry Down the Road

As the world changes with break-neck speed, so, too, does the meetings world. Many of us are finding it difficult to keep pace with the incredible number and variety of changes that bombard us on a daily basis — not to mention the ever-present information overload accompanied by the dizzying feeling that we can never catch up.

And so it is with the sharing, or peer-to-peer economy, which has rapidly evolved in part due to all the new devices and downloadable free apps that

have inundated the market. Billion-dollar lodging and ride-sharing companies, such as Airbnb and Uber, did not even exist a decade ago, and are now emerging as genuine competitors to long-established traditional providers.

Perhaps not surprising for a trend of this magnitude, opinions vary on the long-term impact on the transportation and hospitality sectors — and the meetings industry that depends on them. Some see an inexorable move toward increased collaborative consumption or

sharing of resources in new ways. Others are less convinced.

At the same time, traditional providers are feeling great pressure to compete effectively against a wave of emerging collaborative alternatives for services — especially in the lodging and transportation arenas.

One fact that can't be denied is the growth of the companies leading the charge in the sharing economy.

A report for 2015 just released by travel and expense management software provider Certify reveals that Uber

accounted for 41 percent of total ground transportation transactions compared with 20 percent for taxi service and 39 percent for car rentals. Prior to the fourth quarter of 2015, only San Francisco and Boston reported Uber as having a greater percent of rides than car rental.

Also in the ride-hailing space, Lyft experienced an increase of 712 percent in 2015 from the previous year, although the second-largest provider represents just a small part of total rides overall.

### Is Sharing Really New?

"The sharing economy certainly isn't going anywhere," says Debbie Friedman-Hueller, senior meeting and event planner at dairy cooperative Land O' Lakes Inc. in St. Paul, Minnesota. "In many ways, it's what we as meeting planners have been doing for a very long time." She explains that this includes providing shared rides based on convenience, matching individuals as roommates based on shared interests and repurposing space. "This formula of looking at the ebb and flow of traffic to create a pattern to maximize use — think breakout space — is now being picked up mainstream for housing, ride service, even renting pets," she says.

It's important for meeting planners to understand how meeting attendees view options provided through the sharing economy, according to Friedman-Hueller. In considering how attendees view the value of, for example, hotel room blocks at destinations, planners should realize they may prefer staying in a nearby home with the luxury of at-home amenities such as a kitchen, full bathrooms and living spaces. Similarly, these kinds of choices may appeal to travelers' personal preferences for how money is spent.

"People tend to like to give their money to people, rather than to large corporations," Friedman-Hueller says. As an example, she cites an alternative to paying \$1,000 to a large hotel chain for a week-long stay. "People feel better about giving a thousand dollars to a young couple to stay in their house for a week, and if that means knowing that this couple is going to Europe on that money, they

feel like they are now part of contributing to that dream."

Planners also may find themselves becoming advocates of the shared transportation services. In her own case, Friedman-Hueller encourages attendees to download the Uber app prior to arriving onsite and lets them know the radius in which the company operates.

"It'll be interesting to see how long it is before we stop providing airport shuttles and instead offer an Uber credit for the amount of an airport run," she says. "This will allow the attendees to take more control of their own travel plans, and also take the huge burden off the shoulders of planners in trying to organize travel manifests and shuttle runs."

Friedman-Hueller recalls a meeting in Miami last May when local cab drivers went on strike.

"This could have put a huge damper on the overall attendee experience because

ing solutions manager for Balboa Meeting & Event Solutions in San Diego. She notes that the new target audience for meeting planners is quickly becoming the fast-growing millennial generation, a generation that seeks engagement and is all about sharing experiences.

"Understanding what's important to millennials during the meeting experience and being able to put these new ideas and expectations into play is essential for the success and future of the meetings industry," she says. "One way to do so is by embracing the shared economy and figuring out how to leverage it to our advantage, while keeping the meetings industry current."

Sanicki points to Uber and Airbnb as leaders in this movement.

"Transportation and housing are big logistical pieces of most meetings," she says. "Getting creative to promote shared experiences with Uber and Airb-

*"The sharing economy certainly isn't going anywhere. In many ways, it's what we as meeting planners have been doing for a very long time."*

DEBBIE FRIEDMAN-HUELLER, Senior Meeting and Event Planner, Land O' Lakes Inc., St. Paul, MN



they would have been relegated to the hotel and to the scheduled bus times that we had in place for offsites and to the airport," she says. But instead of getting anxious, she says attendees simply asked if Uber was still up and running. "Indeed, Uber was still in play and attendees couldn't have cared less that all cabs were out of use."

### Demographics Count

Meeting planners also should keep in mind that the demographics for the meetings industry marketplace are changing, says Rebecca Sanicki, sour-

nb can encourage attendee engagement, and it will help meetings to stand out from other, more traditional meetings."

She adds that experiential-based companies such as Airbnb want to partner with meeting planners, and there can be some definite advantages to doing so. "Increasing room block size, which increases overall attendance and promotes a meeting community for your event, is just one plus," Sanicki says. "Essentially, this means opening the door for expanding your reach and your audience — and theirs."

Planners also should be aware of



potential weaknesses, notes Carolyn Davis, owner of Strategic Meeting Partners in San Diego.

“On a personal level, I am a big advocate of the shared economy and use those services whenever possible,” she says. “It’s a great concept in the fact they allow underused resources to be put to their best use.”

At the same time, she acknowledges the challenges that may be faced in planning meetings.

“On a professional level, I do have some reservations,” she says. “With the shared economy model, in many cases you will never truly know the quality of service until it’s too late.”

Davis recalls an incident where a colleague who regularly flies into town via private aircraft decided to try Uber for the first time.

“Instead of a late model Cadillac Escalade pulling up to his plane as the engines were spooling down with a driver ready to pull bags, he and his passengers had to drag their bags to the curb and wait for the Uber driver to arrive,” she says. “Once Uber did arrive, he noticed the vehicle was not clean and the driver not professionally dressed.” She adds that on the positive side, the vehicle was black and the driver was personable, but the overall result was somewhat lacking.

“The shared economy model is an excellent concept,” she says. “But at this point, I’m not willing to risk my professional reputation.”

## Targeting Business Clients

In growing their companies, sharing economy providers are reaching out more aggressively to businesses rather than just individuals.

Airbnb, which labels itself as the world’s leading community-driven hospitality company, has made it clear that the public at large is not its only target audience. Since its 2008 founding, the San Francisco-based company has grown to provide accommodations in more than 34,000 cities in more than 190 countries.

Recently the company upgraded its services to appeal more to business travelers. Improvements include a new product suite that not only reduces the com-



*“On a personal level, I am a big advocate of the shared economy. On a professional level, I do have some reservations... in many cases you will never truly know the quality of service until it’s too late.”*

CAROLYN DAVIS, Owner  
Strategic Meeting Partners, San Diego, CA

plexities hosts face in accommodating guests, but also helps in attracting those traveling on business while expanding the Airbnb for Business program. Hosts now can add a badge noting that their listings meet specific expectations of those traveling on business.

Listings that are identified as “business travel ready” will feature business-friendly amenities such as Wi-Fi, a designated workspace, iron and hair dryer. Travelers also can take advantage of 24-hour check-in and a policy of no-host cancellations within seven days.

Originally not considered much competition for traditional hotels, Airbnb seems to making significant inroads as it attracts more business travelers. According to the Professional Convention Management Association, the trend is especially significant in larger cities. Not only does this represent unwelcome competition from the hotel viewpoint, but it may also offer challenges to meeting planners. In tasks ranging from negotiating contracts with hotels (with smaller numbers of meeting attendees staying at a given hotel, for example) to advising participants about transportation to the meeting site, planners will need to take this option into account.

According to the Certify report, the popularity of Airbnb is increasing. Data from Airbnb found that compared with hotels, on average corporate travelers stay twice as long in Airbnb accommodations, and they have rated their satisfaction with Airbnb an average of 4.3 stars compared with 3.79 stars for hotels.

And in November, American Express announced a first-of-its-kind integration with Airbnb and created an on-platform loyalty program. Key elements of the program include:

- **Signup:** American Express card members will be able to create an Airbnb account by using their existing *americanexpress.com* user ID and password. This will allow them to quickly sign up and put a card on file, so booking is fast and easy in the future.
- **Verification:** Similar to the way Airbnb community members can verify via LinkedIn or Facebook, card members who set up an Airbnb account with their Amex login or choose to “Verify with Amex,” will have an “American Express Card Member” badge on their Airbnb profiles. This gives hosts and guests more information about each other and further builds trust within the community.
- **Membership Rewards Points:** Card members now can use membership rewards points for all or part of their booking — directly on the Airbnb site.
- **Amex Express Checkout:** Card members now can fly through checkout on Airbnb by using Amex Express Checkout, a technology that Amex launched in July, which enables card members to use their Amex login to check out faster by autofilling their card and billing details in just a few clicks.

Less well-known but also reaching out to the corporate world is HomeAway, which offers more than a million

vacation rentals in 190 countries around the world. In addition to the primary purpose of vacation housing, the company offers properties for business applications such as workshops, company retreats and teambuilding activities. Offerings include thousands of homes featuring 10 or more bedrooms, as well as access through a mobile app to concierge-type services ranging from Uber cars to childcare and grocery delivery. Some upscale rentals also include access to caterers, private chefs, assistants and event planners.

Similar movement can be seen with transportation providers such as Lyft. According to company reports, Lyft is the country’s fastest growing rideshare platform, completing 7 million rides per month in more than 190 cities and exceeded 40 percent market share in Austin and San Francisco.

Recently, Lyft has been garnering attention with the addition of major investors. In early January, the company announced a \$500 million investment from General Motors. GM will have a seat on Lyft’s board, and the two companies will

transportation, but also as an option for business travel whether transportation is needed for a meeting across the city or out of town.

Of course there is no bigger name in the sharing economy than Uber, which now operates in more than 300 cities in 56 countries.

The company advertises its services as up to 40 percent cheaper than a taxi, potentially saving as much as \$1,000 per employee yearly.

For businesses, Uber ensures that only trips that follow a company’s policy can be charged to its account. It also allows corporate clients to add or remove employees readily from their account and review trip information for each ride. With trips billed to one payment method, all expenses are maintained in one place. Details for each business ride include the expense code, cost, vehicle type and route.

## Emerging Providers

Uber, Lyft and Airbnb may be grabbing most of the headlines, however, as trust builds within the sharing commu-

*“Dive deeper to get a good understanding of what your target audience is seeking and expecting from their meeting experience and then embrace their mindset.”*

REBECCA SANICKI, Sourcing Solutions Manager,  
Balboa Meeting & Event Solutions, San Diego, CA



collaborate in creating an autonomous on-demand network and in offering a series of national rental hubs where Lyft drivers can rent short-term vehicles. That new wrinkle will mean even those who do not own a car could potentially join the ranks of the company’s drivers.

Lyft markets “Lyft for Work” as a set of options that includes not just daily commutes and supplements to public

nity other companies are finding a niche within this emerging economic model.

In Indianapolis, the Blue Indy electric car-share service offers business travelers a cost-effective alternative to taxis or car rentals. Launched in September, the station eventually will include 500 cars and 1,200 charging stations at the airport, convention center, hotels and other locations around the city.

In Miami, miRide is a new luxury black car app/service promoted as an affordable alternative to traditional options. It has acquired more than 3,000 users since its August 2015 launch, averaging nearly 400 rides a day. For business professionals and corporate clients, it offers fixed-price rides that can be obtained promptly or scheduled for future pick-up.

Offering booking via a smartphone app, the service provides chauffeur-driven luxury sedans, SUVs and sprinter vans. At the same time, it operates as a state-certified and fully licensed and insured fleet.

Meeting planners should stay on top of the latest news about peer-to-peer apps such as TaskRabbit, a mobile marketplace that finds people to hire for various and sundry jobs and tasks, such as office work and messenger services.

Also, there’s DogVacay for attendees who need a place to house their dog while at a conference. They offer a comfortable host home and claim the service is less expensive than a kennel.

As attendees can’t travel to meetings with their bicycles, Spinlister provides a way to “rent a bike from someone like you.”

Did a meeting-goer forget his business suit? Try Poshmark’s mobile app, which is for people to buy or sell their clothing.

## Final Thoughts

Looking to the future, perhaps the most significant factor for meeting planners is simply adjusting to the changes in expectations of those who will be attending meetings.

“Dive deeper to get a good understanding of what your target audience is seeking and expecting from their meeting experience and then embrace their mindset,” Sanicki says.

This should include connecting with them via the technology they use in their daily lives such as mobile apps and social media, and using this knowledge to create meeting experiences where attendees are truly engaged.

“Don’t fear all this,” she concludes. “Embrace the shared economy and get creative with the ways you can leverage it.”

C&IT



# Hotels & Resorts

## The Conference Center

By  
Patrick Simms

### Invested in Your Meeting's Success

Last October, the International Association of Conference Centres confirmed the vitality of the industry in its 2015 edition of Trends in the Conference Center Industry, which reported that IACC members have seen occupancy and rates rise over the previous year. In particular, the study indicated that conference centers with more than 200 guest rooms projected a 6.5 percent increase in annual occupancy over 2014.

In the same month, it became clear that IACC itself was poised for growth with a newly elected dynamic leader:

Alex Cabañas, CEO of Benchmark Hospitality International, who began his two-year term as global president. Cabañas is spearheading the IACC 2020

task force, which is developing the organization's strategy for the next five years. At the time of his appointment, Cabañas noted that "our members support and learn from each other. There is a kinship within IACC like no other association that I've been affiliated with."



*"(The Chattanooga staff) knew all the details about our conference and were there as a partner in making our first conference successful, not just a company we were renting space from."*

**Andy Johns**, V.P. for Communications  
WordSouth, Rainsville, AL

Among IACC's 400 global members is The Chattanooga, the only IACC-certified hotel in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where Cabañas gave a speech at

WordSouth's StoryConnect conference last year. A communications company for the southern U.S. telecom industry, WordSouth welcomed about 80 clients to The Chattanooga to discuss and experience "the power of story and storytelling in marketing," explains Andy

Johns, vice president for telecommunications. "We had Alex Cabañas as one of our speakers because Benchmark is a company that obviously embraces story-

Lansdowne Resort, which offers 55,000 sf of flexible meeting space, is undergoing a multimillion-dollar renovation.

telling." Apparently, the speaker choice was a success. "Previously, my sessions were always the highest rated, and Alex took that away from me last year. But I forgive him for that," Johns quips.

#### Partnering in Success

WordSouth's first StoryConnect was held at The Chattanooga in 2014, and "the conference center difference" started to become apparent to the organizers at that time. Johns relates: "We had never done the conference before. We went to a couple of different places around town looking for space, and we thought all we needed was to rent some space and then do it. But when we arrived at a couple of the hotels I remember specifically they had forgotten we had an appointment to tour the space, and that kind of set the tone before we got to The Chattanooga, which was a conference center-type environment. We walked into the main auditorium, and they had our name and company logo (displayed). They knew all the details about our conference and were there as a partner in making our first conference successful, not just a company we were renting space from."

Besides the meetings-focused attitude of the staff, the 199-room hotel offers meeting facilities that excel in both variety and quality. More than 25,000 sf of high-tech conference space includes a 16-seat Executive Boardroom, five general session rooms, 12 breakout

rooms, a 7,752-sf newly renovated ballroom and an 85-seat amphitheater. "The amphitheater is built exactly for (meeting groups) with all the lighting and sound options and comfortable seats," Johns remarks. "We've all been to places where the space is not inviting for the attendees to listen to sessions for hours." And given the property's Benchmark management, planners can be assured their group will enjoy all the services that "high tech" entails, including videoconferencing, webcasting and complimentary wireless Internet throughout the hotel.

Similarly, Dolce enjoys a strong

brand recognition and reliability in the conference center industry, and that was a motivation for Wyndham Hotel Group to acquire Dolce Hotels and Resorts' portfolio of 24 properties back in February 2015. "Dolce is a terrific strategic fit for us," said Geoff Ballotti, president and CEO, Wyndham Hotel Group, in a statement at the time of the acquisition. "With over three decades of established brand equity, Dolce is a respected leader in the group space with outstanding destination properties and some of the best meeting product offerings available in the market today."

Alex Cabañas (inset), global president of IACC, spoke at WordSouth's StoryConnect conference held at the Chattanooga.



### Meeting Package Trends

The International Association of Conference Centres recently polled 378 member conference center properties regarding CMP (complete meeting package) trends influencing meeting planners and venue operators. Some findings:

- 95 percent of venues have offered non-traditional (flexible) meeting packages for over 5 years.
- 55 percent reported that meeting planners wanted to tailor a package specifically to meet their needs.
- 65 percent reported that planners are starting to request new inclusions beyond the normal meeting room, F&B and tech inclusions. The top additional items requested were teambuilding, local cultural trips, coaching and facilitation. Although many IACC

venues offer free attendee Wi-Fi, the inclusion of high-bandwidth Wi-Fi to support the use of collaborative technologies was highlighted as a growing trend. The survey also indicated that the inclusion of collaborative technologies, such as audience participation and meeting apps, had potential for future packaged pricing.

- Food & beverage enhancements lead the list of the top components included in customized packages, with 76 percent of those surveyed reporting they tailor packages with non-standard F&B items. Indoor teambuilding and meeting room configurations were second at 70 percent, and outdoor teambuilding was fourth. Also included in the list of components used to customize delegate packages were AV, Wi-Fi and culinary teambuilding activities.

C&I



# Conference Centers in the News

The 297-room **AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center**, Austin, Texas, is expanding its 40,000 sf of existing conference space with a 15,000-sf ballroom complemented by 5,000 sf of prefunction space and a 5,500-sf banquet kitchen and bakery. The facilities will be located in the new Robert B. Rowling Hall, to be opened July 2017. Guest room renovations are underway and will be complete by March 2016. In addition, the current conference center will be updated with state-of-the-art laser projector technology this year.

The 100-room **Chauncey Hotel and Conference Center**, a lakeside property located minutes from downtown Princeton, New Jersey, recently opened a brand new state of the art fitness center, indoor heated saltwater swimming pool and spacious event space with an outdoor gas fireplace. The property offers 10,500 sf of indoor and outdoor function space, including 23 high-tech meeting rooms designed for learning by ETS, a leader in educational research.

Silverwest Hotels, a Denver-based hotel investment and

management company, has acquired **The Inverness Hotel and Conference Center**, Englewood, Colorado. Silverwest will begin a multimillion-dollar, property-wide renovation this year;

the upgrade of the 302 guest rooms is scheduled to begin in November and is expected to take three to four months to complete. Destination Hotels will continue to operate and manage the IACC-accredited property, which offers 60,000 sf of flexible indoor and outdoor meeting space.

The 348-room **Hilton Chicago/Oak Brook Hills Resort & Conference Center**, located 30 minutes west of downtown



Hilton Chicago/Oak Brook Hills Resort & Conference Center.

Chicago, has completed phase one of its renovation and expects to complete phase two this spring. The first phase's numerous improvements included the lower level meeting space and 145-seat tiered

UCLA Meyer & Renee Luskin Conference Center.



amphitheater, part of the IACC-certified property's 42,500 sf of function space. The second phase is a complete redesign of all main floor public spaces, including the lobby/rotunda, café and bar, grand ballroom, and signature restaurant.

**Lansdowne Resort, a Destination Hotel** in Virginia is undergoing a multimillion-dollar renovation, just in time to commemorate its 25th anniversary. Inspired by the resort's natural

surroundings, the renovation will feature a complete redesign of the resort's 296 guest rooms, to be completed this spring. Lansdowne offers 55,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including 37 meeting rooms, a 9,525-sf Grand Ballroom, a 3,293-sf Terrace Ballroom and a 126-seat amphitheater.

Opening August 1, the **UCLA Meyer & Renee Luskin Conference Center** features 254 guest rooms and 25,000 sf of meeting space complemented by the latest AV equipment. Facilities include a large multipurpose event hall with seating for up to 750 attendees, 24 breakout rooms, a tiered classroom with fixed seating for 80, and an outdoor event terrace.

Last May, Wyndham Hotel Group announced it has entered into an agreement to manage a new-build hotel and conference center less than 10 miles from downtown Cincinnati, Ohio, under its **Dolce Hotels & Resorts** flag. The 217-room hotel in Madisonville, Ohio, is scheduled to open in 2017 and will become the centerpiece of a \$124 million mixed-use development project known as Madison Center. The hotel will offer 22,000 sf of function space, including 16 individual meeting areas.

C&IT

## Dolce Devotée

Among the clients who respect the Dolce brand is Roshan Bharwaney, associate director for worldwide training at WPP, a major advertising and marketing services group with agencies in 112 countries. His team runs training programs for WPP's leaders and high potentials globally. "I've been working with Dolce since I started in my role a little over 10 years ago," says Bharwaney, "and where possible we do try to use Dolce properties in the U.S. and in Europe."

In the U.S., for example, WPP has brought groups of 20–70 participants to properties such as Dolce Norwalk, Dolce Basking Ridge, Silverado Resort & Spa, Dolce Hayes Mansion, Q Center and IBM Learning Center. Dolce is the pioneer of the CMP (complete meeting package), and Bharwaney finds that it "simplifies things so much for me when I know how many people are attending and how much the total cost is going to be just by multiplying it with the CMP. And then if there's anything we need to add on to the program, it's just easier to reconcile that with the total budget. We have almost never had unanticipated extra charges."

But the real conference center difference, as Bharwaney describes it, is a stronger focus on the meetings aspect.

That includes the nature of the other events in-house, not just the facility and its staff. "When we go to these kinds of mixed (use) hotels, we tend to get a lot more distractions, more noise, parties and weddings going on," he relates. "When we're at Dolce it's quieter, and we can focus on what we're there to do. (Other groups) are also there to work, to discuss ideas, to learn if it's a training program, so it's all a similar kind of sensibility."

In addition, the meeting rooms lend themselves to the training style of his groups, which is very display-oriented. "One of the things I really appreciate is that all of our breakout rooms are very well equipped; they're very close to the main meeting room, and they're very versatile. You can write on the walls or stick things up on the walls; it's very easy to work there," Bharwaney explains. "But when we're at a regular hotel, usually they don't have enough breakout rooms for us, so we have to convert guest rooms, and it's more limited. There are not as many wall surfaces you can work on because of the guest room furniture."

## Meetings Focused

Such advantages result from the fact that "conference centers put a lot of focus on the place where you spend

most of your day, which is in a meeting," notes Randy Turner, director, marketing communications with Walker and Associates Inc., a national distributor of network products. The company has utilized the 86-room Graylyn International Conference Center for more than 15 years for product training and sales meetings. "The meeting rooms are much more comfortable; more thought is put into the seating and positioning of AV, which is normally installed permanently so nothing has to be brought in," Turner observes. "And stations for cell phones and laptops are everywhere in a conference center, whereas in a non-conference center, you're often going to struggle to have them in convenient locations or without significant additional costs." Thought is also put into breaks that will support productivity: Graylyn "constructs breaks so that they are conducive to effective meetings rather than distracting from the meetings," Turner observes, and offers F&B that is light and nutritional "to keep attendees more alert and engaged."

## Customer Focused

In terms of customer service, Turner finds that "it's much more seamless" at conference centers than at the typical hotel. "There tend to be fewer people to

deal with, one or two contacts vs. four or five."

Glynnis Judy, corporate meeting event specialist at Touchpoint Energized Communications, also has observed a high level of customer service at these facilities, specifically Lansdowne Resort, a Destination Hotel, in Leesburg, Virginia. Last year, Judy staged two client-facing meetings at Lansdowne for a multinational developer and marketer of networking products. The staff at Lansdowne, Judy recalls, has the motto, "We don't do customer service, we are customer service," and that attitude came across in their performance.

"When you work with a large client there are always going to be last-minute changes. For example, we planned an event offsite and Lansdowne was wonderful in taking care of the transportation for the group. And you always have people at the last minute who have changes in their travel arrangements. Then you wonder if the bus is big enough, and when you call (your contact) they don't send you over to the transportation person; they just say, 'Tell me what you need and I'll take care of it.'"

The best staff not only take requests,



*"We planned an event offsite and Lansdowne was wonderful in taking care of the transportation for the group. ...They just say, 'Tell me what you need and I'll take care of it.'"*

Glynnis Judy, Corporate Meeting Event Specialist  
Touchpoint Energized Communications, Greenville, SC

of course, but fulfill needs without being asked, when possible. Johns gives a case in point from his experience at The Chattanooga: "I made an offhand remark at a session that I had lost my nametag, and within 30 minutes (the CSM) had a heavy-duty vinyl Chattanooga-branded nametag for me. Without my asking for it, she just heard that and (responded). That shows that not only are they listening when you know they're listening, but they're listening all the time."

## Seamless Event

That staff proficiency transferred to WordSouth's offsite reception and Mediterranean buffet at the nearby Tennessee Aquarium, which has a partnership with The Chattanooga. "It was like they were a part of the aquarium staff and really made the whole event seamless for us," Johns recalls. "An event like that makes a strong impression on folks coming in

from the rural areas we serve." It also illustrates that conference centers are not just meeting facilities; they are destinations with a variety of dining and recreational resources, both onsite and off. Graylyn, for example, offers more than 25 teambuilding opportunities on its expansive grounds, from a scavenger hunt to a chili cookoff. The Lansdowne boasts 45 holes of championship golf and lies at the gateway to Virginia wine country.

Speaking of wine, Bharwaney recalls a very distinctive offsite event WPP held as part of its meeting at the Dolce Frégate Provence, a 133-room, IACC-certified property located in the South of France. "We had a very nice group tour and dinner at a nearby vineyard. That part of the world produces some of the best rosette in the world." While the conference center difference lies in optimizing business meetings, those meetings need not be all business.

C&IT



# The Building Blocks of a Successful Event

## Exceptional Meetings Are Created From the Ground Up, Starting With a Well-Defined Goal

By John Buchanan

Perhaps no topic of debate in the meeting industry today is more important than how, precisely, an organization and its meeting planners create what will ultimately become recognized as a successful event.

And, of course, not all meeting hosts or planners will agree on just what constitutes a successful meeting.



But there does appear to be a reasonable consensus about the practical considerations that are involved in the process of addressing key issues.

“Building a meeting or an event is like building a house,” says Gregorio Palomino, CDMP, CEP, CMP, the CEO of the San Antonio, Texas-based meeting and event planning firm Cre8ad8. “The first thing you need is a great foundation, because no matter what the finished house is going to look like, the foundation is what will support it.”

When it comes to a meeting, Palomino says, the basic building blocks of the foundation are pretty obvious — your budget, the purpose of your meeting, your dates, your destination, your hotel and all of the other ‘practical’ things that go into planning the meeting. But those are only the things that frame the house, he notes. “Once you have those things as your foundation and framing, then you have to build the actual house,” Palomino says. “And every house — and meeting — is different.”

After the most fundamental decisions about basic building blocks are made, “that’s when you start looking at all the various choices that really go into determining whether you have a successful event,” Palomino says. “Those decisions involve your content, your speakers, the informational materials you need. Those are the things that are most important. Everything else is really just decoration.”

Most important in the era of ubiquitous strategic meetings management programs and ever-increasing scrutiny of meeting budgets is a clear purpose or objective for the meeting, Palomino says.

But given such broad consensus about the critical importance of a precise goal and strategy, it’s surprising that Palomino sees so many companies fall short of successfully defining those elements. “I’d say that based on my observations, only about 60 to 70 percent of companies really have a clear goal for their meetings,” Palomino

says. “And that surprises me, because there is nothing more important than that in terms of building a foundation for your house.”

### A Broader Perspective

While she agrees that a clear business purpose for a meeting is a critical factor in its success, Kelly Burns-Gaoiran, the San Francisco-based director of business development at CWT Meetings & Events, a specialized division of global corporate travel management company Carlson Wagonlit, has a broader perspective.

A simple formula for a well-planned event is in keeping with Palomino’s “foundation for the house” analogy.



**Kelly Burns-Gaoiran**, Director of Business Development  
CWT Meetings & Events, San Francisco

For Burns-Gaoiran, the essential elements of that foundation are destination

*“I want to make sure I have defined the meeting properly — its purpose, the business goal, how success will be measured. I want to know whether we’re judging it based on ROI or ROE...and what are the real drivers of the event.”*

and hotel selection; an effective social media platform; the use of mobile technology and apps onsite for an optimal attendee experience; attendee engagement before, during and after the meeting; and stakeholder engagement to ensure consensus that the meeting was indeed successful.

Like most of her peers, she also places enormous value on relevant and effective meeting content.

And her practical considerations apply to all meetings and events, regardless of type or size, she says. “The thing I always say is that an event is never too big or too small to warrant not looking at all of those kinds of details, because it’s all about execution,” she says. “And execution comes down to those basic components of what a successful meeting means. So all of those building blocks have to be in place. Everything has to be right.”

Burns-Gaoiran also views the planning process as an exercise with three distinct phases — pre-event, the onsite experience and post-event follow-up.

But she considers the pre-planning process the most important element of a successful meeting. For her, it is careful pre-planning that serves as her foundation.

“In the pre-event phase, I want to make sure I have defined the meeting properly — its purpose, the business goal, how success will be measured,” Burns-Gaoiran says. “And when it comes to measuring events, I want to know whether we’re judging it based on ROI or ROE. I want to know, in terms of the business goal, what are the real drivers of the event.”

The weakness she often sees in the execution of meetings can be traced

back to an inadequately detailed pre-planning process that leads to a faulty foundation for even a modest house. “And a big part of that weakness sometimes,” Burns-Gaoiran says, “is having a weak engagement strategy for attendees or stakeholders, or having the wrong engagement strategy.”

### Engaging Attendees

It’s well known and widely accepted today that attendee engagement is arguably the single most important factor in the success of a meeting, after a clear business goal. And the two are very much related.

After the goal of a meeting and the nature of the audience are assessed, an attendee engagement strategy specific to that meeting can be created, Burns-Gaoiran says. “Then you can determine a communication strategy,” she says. “And that strategy and the execution of



it will vary from meeting to meeting. It needs to be very precisely planned based on the initial assessments you've done."

A foundational element of the communication strategy that promotes effective attendee engagement includes a technology platform. "And to develop that, you have to address questions such as how is your content going to be presented?" Burns-Gaoiran says. "How is the attendee onsite experience going to be managed? Are you going to have mobile apps? How and why will they be used? Those kinds of considerations and decisions are a very important, because there are so many options out there."

### A Very Simple Formula for Success

Jacqueline Bidanec, CMP, the Tampa, Florida-based global account director for independent meeting planning firm HPN Global, has a simple formula for the creation of successful events.

***"I always tell my clients to feed their attendees well. Hungry stomachs make for unhappy people. ...Spend the money to give people good meals if you want an attentive and happy attendee."***

Jacqueline Bidanec, CMP, Global Account Director  
HPN Global, Tampa, FL

"The way my clients define a meeting as successful is if they can stay within their budget, and that their attendees walk away happy," Bidanec says.

And as a result of that simple guideline, Bidanec practices some time-tested and equally simple rules, particularly with respect to happy attendees.

"One thing is food and beverage," she says. "I always tell my clients to feed their attendees well. Hungry stomachs make for unhappy people. And F&B budgets are one of the things many companies look to cut in their budgets, because they have so little control over room rates. But I tell them to spend the money to give people good meals if you want an attentive and happy attendee."

For Bidanec, the other most important consideration is carefully crafted and hyperfocused content. "Content is important because an attendee needs

to be able to walk away having learned something new, because when they learn something new, they are able to do their jobs better," she says. "It's really that simple. And for the kinds of meetings I do, such as sales meetings, learning to do something better means attendees will be putting more money in their wallets as a result of the meeting. So to me, from the perspective of attendees, I can't think of a better definition of a successful meeting than people learning to do something that will make them more money. And making money always makes for a happy attendee."

### The Stakeholder Challenge

While attendee engagement is typically a fairly straightforward undertaking, stakeholder engagement is considerably more challenging, simply because it is a more complex process.

As a result, Burns-Gaoiran says, a consistent shortcoming in the arena of

corporate meetings is weak or nonexistent stakeholder engagement, primarily because it is so complex and often such a daunting process because different groups of stakeholders have entirely different perceptions of what they want and what they expect.

"I see that all the time, Burns-Gaoiran says.

How does she explain that? "It's more of a problem in bigger companies, because it's so hard to get people on the same page," she says. "Marketing sees things one way. Sales sees them another way. Procurement sees them another way. And they all want what they want from their own point of view. That is a consistent issue and challenge when you really are trying to engage all the key stakeholders. So as part of identifying the business purpose of the meeting, you also need to understand whose ini-

tiative it is. Is it a marketing initiative? A customer service initiative? An internal communication initiative? Then once you figure that out, you can do a better job of identifying the most important stakeholders and engaging them. But that is always a struggle. It's not easy. But it's also critical to a successful meeting."

### Service Excellence

Not surprisingly, another factor that is extremely important to the success of a meeting is excellent service. In fact, it is the little details of a meeting as it unfolds that often help determine the perception of whether an event has been successful. "And the reason those details are so important is that in large part, it's the service you get onsite that will determine whether your attendees think the meeting has been successful," Palomino says. "And that's one of the areas where meeting planners sometimes drop the ball. They don't pay enough attention to the minute-to-minute level of service their people are getting until something goes wrong."

Among the things that most often go wrong and impact how a meeting is perceived, Palomino says, is audio-visual services, which are critical to the effective presentation of content. "If something goes wrong during one of your most important presentations, that is obviously going to have an impact on the event," Palomino says. "So the kinds of things that are directly related to the presentation and distribution of your content at the meeting or after it are very, very important. So that is another place on the 'roadmap where you have to make sure nothing can go wrong.'"

### Snooze Fest or Fun?

While a large majority of meeting planners are well aware of the practical factors that go into the creation of a successful meeting, one that many of them do not want to talk about is the fact that their meetings are boring, Palomino says.

Therefore, he says, no other practical consideration is more important than the excitement level surrounding the meeting beforehand and the level

of enthusiasm expressed at the meeting. Somewhat surprisingly, he uses the infamous formula multilevel marketing companies notoriously invoke for their events as a good example of how to generate excitement at a meeting. "Their meetings are fun," Palomino says. "They're exciting. They generate a tremendous amount of enthusiasm for their attendees. They get you pumped up. And I think that's a model that more

***"Building a meeting...is like building a house. The first thing you need is a great foundation, because no matter what the finished house is going to look like, the foundation is what will support it."***

Gregorio Palomino, CDMP, CEP, CMP, CEO  
Cre8ad8, San Antonio, TX

companies should follow in terms of how they think about their meetings. I hate to say it, but a lot of corporate meetings today are just boring. I'd say more than 90 percent of them are just a snooze fest. There's nothing exciting about them. But you're stuck there for six or eight hours a day. To me, there is just no excuse for that in today's world — not if you want your meetings to be successful and memorable."

Bidanec concurs wholeheartedly that a successful meeting should be fun. "I stress to clients that they should have a fun agenda," she says. "We can all sit in a classroom and take notes and then go home with some takeaways. But if the agenda has some fun in it, if there is some humor in the presentations, like a few jokes here and there, that makes the meeting fun and enjoyable. And that contributes to people feeling like it was successful. In other words, to be successful, a meeting has to be memorable. And to be memorable, there has to be some fun in it."

For her events, such as sales meetings, Bidanec also agrees with Palomino that many companies can learn something valuable from organizations such as multilevel marketers.

"Many of my meetings are also 'rah rah' sessions," Bidanec says. "And if people go away from those meet-

ings pumped up and ready to take on the world and make more sales, the company thinks of that as a successful meeting."

As for Palomino, one of the reasons so many meetings are boring is that the content is boring. "It's unfortunate but true that the content at so many meetings is just not exciting," he says. "Everybody talks about how important content is, but then the content they actually present at their meetings is

just not compelling. It's not exciting. It doesn't motivate people. So again, many companies could learn a positive lesson from MLM companies, because they're experts at presenting content that gets people excited and motivated."

In reality, Palomino says, there is some content that by definition is not going to be very exciting. "That's just the way it is," he says. "But you can still make the presentation of that content, the delivery of that content, exciting. That's what so many companies fail to understand and act on. And I really don't know why that is. It's not that hard to figure out once you're aware of the challenge."

Even if your content is compelling and it addresses the business purpose of your meeting effectively, it should be brief and pointed, Palomino says. The time-honored 60–90 minute keynote speech or CEO presentation is a dino-

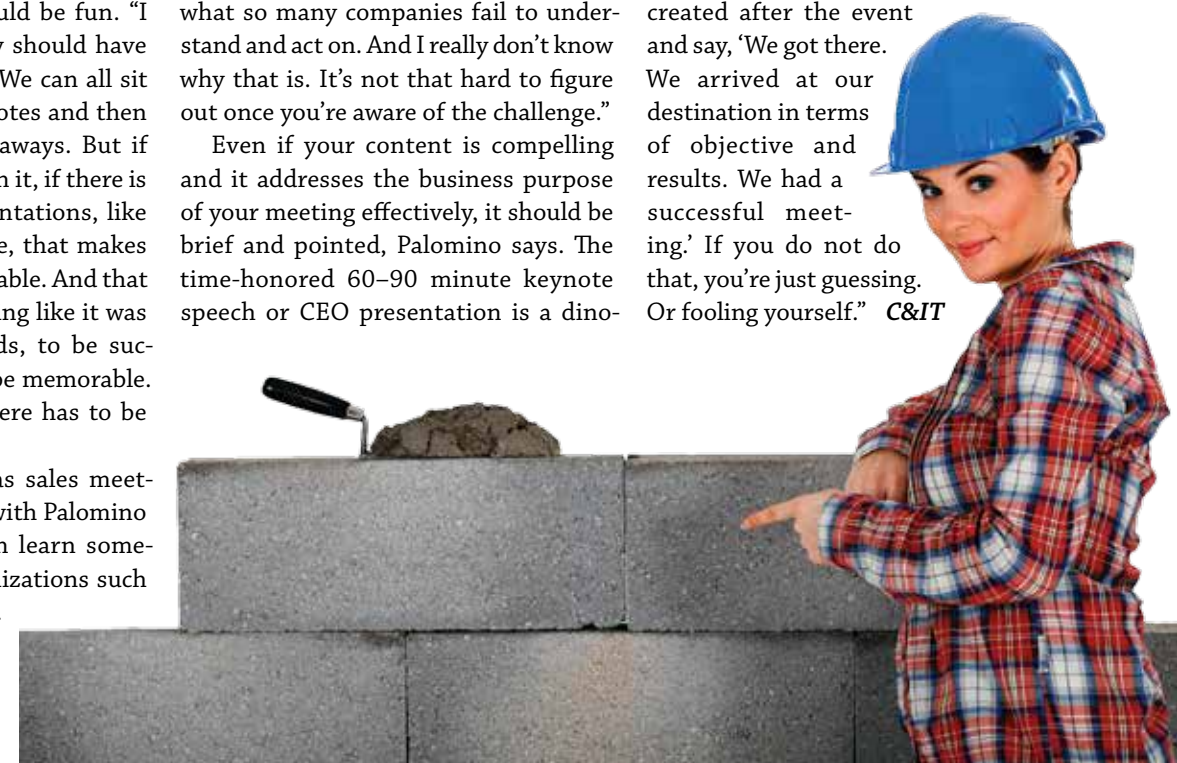
saur headed toward final extinction, he notes. Today, the TED talk model is becoming more and more universal — presentations that are short and crisp, and which allow for spirited interaction between presenters and attendees.

In the end, Palomino says — and Burns-Gaoiran and Bidanec agree — a meeting only can be deemed a success if the attendees consider it a success.

And the only way to find out if attendees truly consider the meeting a success is to ask — clearly and courageously — in a post-event survey.

"There are a number of technologies available now that allow you to do that and get the answer to that question," Burns-Gaoiran says. "But to get that answer, you have to do more than just poll your attendees. You really have to listen to what they have to say."

Palomino corroborates that view. "With the technologies we have today, it's possible to know with certainty whether your content was absorbed, whether the goal of your meeting was met, what your ROI will be," he says. "And a growing number of companies now make those efforts. But many still do not. Or they do a very poor job of it. If you really want a roadmap to a successful meeting, you have to be able to look at the map you created after the event and say, 'We got there. We arrived at our destination in terms of objective and results. We had a successful meeting.' If you do not do that, you're just guessing. Or fooling yourself." **C&IT**





# Destination

Credit: Meet AC

Originally built in the late 1800s, Atlantic City's famous Boardwalk stretches for more than four miles.

## Atlantic City

### New Development Is Building New Meetings Business

Atlantic City is making waves these days with a host of new expansion projects and developments that are attracting meeting groups not just regionally, but nationwide

The projects primarily responsible for boosting business include Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center, Resorts Casino Hotel's new conference center, The Playground entertainment venue, Borgata Festival Park, Gardner's Basin marina district and a renovated and revitalized Steel Pier.

By  
Derek Reveron

"We increased booked business by 39 percent year over year," says Jim Wood, president and CEO of Meet AC. "Our objective is to increase future booked business by an additional 15 percent this year. Our goal is also to grow the group market while continuing to build on improving Atlantic City's perception nationally. The casino resorts have a strong commitment to growing the group market by the addition of meeting space."

Under Wood, Meet AC also is expanding its online presence to aid in marketing to groups. The organization launched three new websites in 2015, and is introducing three more this year. The three new available websites are [www.meetiniac.com](http://www.meetiniac.com), [www.atlanticcitysports.org](http://www.atlanticcitysports.org) and [photos.meetiniac.com](http://photos.meetiniac.com).

[meetiniac.com](http://meetiniac.com). This year, Meet AC will introduce three more sites for group motor coaches, the Atlantic City Film Commission and one that focuses on market research.

Atlantic City could possibly have some in-state competition in the future. New Jersey may expand casinos beyond Atlantic City. In November, the state will vote on whether to approve construction of new casinos in northern New Jersey.

Meanwhile, Wood is pleased with the progress that Atlantic City is making in transforming itself into an increasingly popular convention and meeting destination. "I am very pleased with the accomplishments that Meet AC and the Atlantic City Sports Commission have achieved in a short amount of time," says Wood. "The meeting and convention industry is vital and helps support the overall tourism industry in Atlantic City."

#### Value and Service

While Atlantic City seeks to boost the number of groups from outside the Northeast, the city still has plenty of room to grow its market from the region. A company based in Philadelphia recently held an incentive sales meeting in Atlantic City for the first time. The meeting for 250 attendees took place at the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa.

Location and cost were two prime reasons for choosing the hotel and the destination. "The group found that the location

*"Our goal is also to grow the group market while continuing to build on improving Atlantic City's perception nationally. The casino resorts have a strong commitment to growing the group market by the addition of meeting space."*

Jim Wood, CEO  
Meet AC  
Atlantic City, NJ



was ideal since it was near its headquarters in Philadelphia, and the overall rates for rooms and food and beverage were low," says Larry Huttinger, CMP, owner of D. Lawrence Planners and Destination Philly A.C., a DMC with operations in Atlantic City and Philadelphia. "The group did receive concessions that involved suites and upgrades, and also received access to areas in the hotel that added diversity to their program. This included restaurants and other unique spaces inside the hotel."

The group enjoyed many activities within the Borgata and at offsite venues. "The activities included after-dinner gaming (poker, blackjack and craps using funny money with dealers and legal tables) for fun in meeting space at the hotel, along with a private dinner booking offsite at the Landshark Bar & Grill Restaurant," says Huttinger. "They also used the hotel's Mixx nightclub for an event. They enhanced the space with décor and branding with the company logo for signage."

The group raved about the Borgata's service. "The company believed the hotel offered the best amenities for their employees," says Huttinger. "The group felt they received top level services and were able to host this event during a great time of year that included activities during the weekend."

The group would consider returning, partly because of value, says Huttinger. "One of the significant gems about Atlantic City is that its price point is as much as 25 percent to 35 percent lower than other convention destination locations in the Northeast including rooms, food and beverage."

#### All-Inclusive Surprise

Value is a big reason that one corporate group found Resorts Casino Hotel's combination of a new conference center and all-inclusive package to be very attractive. The company held a two-day meeting in January this year for 21 area managers and sales representatives. The group met at Resorts Casino Hotel for the first time after having met at other Atlantic City properties three times over the last four years.

The meeting's corporate planner began her search for a

property online, looking at several hotels. "When I found Resorts' meeting page, I was shocked to see that they offer an all-inclusive package," says the planner. "I kept reading through everything the package included and was blown away by the overall price. I immediately requested more information and received a call shortly after from the senior sales manager. I gave her the (meeting) logistics, and we picked a date that I could come down and check everything out."

The site visit was impressive. "The meeting rooms are newly renovated and high-tech," says the planner. "The overnight rooms have also been renovated and are bigger than any rooms in Atlantic City. The package included all meals throughout the day as well as things like valet parking, early check-in and free Wi-Fi."

The group held all of its functions, entertainment and activities on the property. The planner wanted it that way. "As a group, we don't have to worry about going out, getting a taxi and meeting up somewhere for dinner," she says. "It makes more sense to run upstairs after a meeting, freshen up and meet downstairs at a restaurant. Then the group can break up



Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa is currently undergoing a year-long \$50 million improvement project. As part of the renovation, Borgata Festival Park will be transformed into an outdoor pool area (inset).



Credit: Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa





*“One of the significant gems about Atlantic City is that its price point is as much as 25 percent to 35 percent lower than other convention destination locations in the Northeast including rooms, food and beverage.”*

**Larry Huttinger**, CMP, Director of Business, Owner  
D. Lawrence Planners and Destination Philly A.C.  
Atlantic City, NJ

and go have fun within the same property. As the planner for my team, I like to keep it fun and always have something to do instead of staying at any hotel just because they have a conference center.”

The group’s experiences at Resorts Casino Hotel’s restaurants were memorable. The first night, the group ate dinner at Gallagher’s Steakhouse. “Since the dinner was included in our all-inclusive price, any additional items we purchased like drinks were billed to my master account. This was another small perk that made a great impact (in value and convenience.)”

Attendees raved about Gallagher’s service. “With a large group, sometimes you have to wait for food,” says the planner. “But they were waiting for us when we arrived. The waiter was unbelievable. He was quick and got everything just right. The food melted in your mouth. Many people in our group came to me after dinner and praised Gallagher’s.”

The attendees received similar service when they dined onsite at Capriccio’s restaurant. The planner also was pleasantly surprised during breakfast each day at Breadsticks. “I assumed it was a grab-and-go type of restaurant but, to my surprise, I was completely wrong,” she says. “They had a table waiting for us each morning, and we were able to order whatever we wanted. Our team really enjoyed that since breakfast is usually served buffet style or grab-and-go.”

The planner was impressed by the several ways that Resorts’ staffers went out of their way to provide excellent service. “It’s a very important area for me,” says the planner. “They made us feel special. When we needed a refrigerator on hand for a new mother, our request was answered immediately. When we needed a bellhop, one was there within two minutes. Each night at dinner, the senior sales manager checked to make sure everything was running smoothly. We had a personal catering assistant checking every 15 minutes during meetings to refresh our snacks and beverages.”

The excellent service and all-inclusive package combined to provide great value. “I let the hotel know that the all-inclusive package and pricing is such a great idea,” she says. “Not only does it make things easier for someone like me who has to plan several events throughout the year, but also the price point cannot be beat.”

Attendees had a memorable experience at Resorts Casino Hotel. “Many have already said, ‘We know where we want to have our next meeting,’” says the planner. “I have no desire to look anywhere else.”

### Convention Center Success

Many planners feel the same way about Atlantic City in general. A planner for a private manufacturer has held several meetings at various Atlantic City hotels over the last seven years because it offers so much for attendees. “The availability of first-class restaurants within walking distance of hotels and the convention center contribute significantly to after-hours activities,” says the planner. “It’s easy to get to whether you drive, fly, or take a train. Atlantic City provides a destination that allows (drive-in attendees) to park their car and not have to use it again until they head home.”



Opened last September, Harrah’s Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center has expanded the property’s meeting space from 20,000 to 170,000 sf.

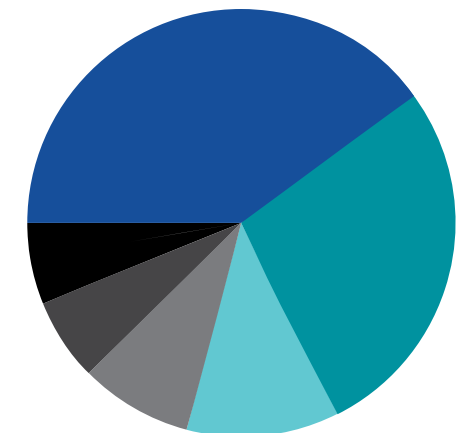
In February, the manufacturer held a meeting and conference for about 2,000 managers, salespeople and contractors at the 600,000-sf Atlantic City Convention Center (ACCC), the largest facility of its kind in New Jersey.

The ACCC was the perfect choice for the meeting. “The state-of-the-art facility along with the ease of working with the staff is a combination for success,” says the planner. “The ACCC provided for every need, from the amount of meeting space and easily accessible exhibit halls to the extensive service and attention to details. Department managers were visible

# BORGATA. MORE THAN MEETINGS.

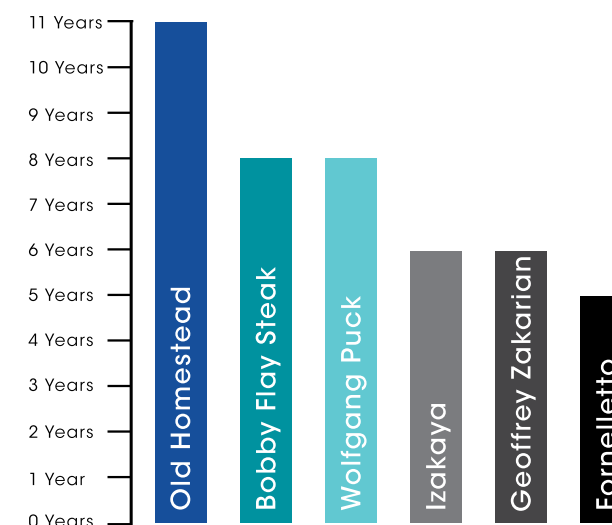


NEVER A DULL MOMENT AT ATLANTIC CITY’S  
PREMIER MEETING DESTINATION



- GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS
- NAILING THE PRESENTATION
- CELEBRATING AT A NIGHTCLUB
- NETWORKING AT DINNER
- RELAXING IN THE SPA
- CATCHING A GREAT NIGHT’S SLEEP

### A CULINARY LINEUP THAT’S YEARS IN THE MAKING



SUCCESS IS A NUMBERS GAME

**88,000** square feet of  
**SPACE**  
**2,800** ROOMS  
**1,000**-seat theater  
**ONE ROOF**

Learn how to receive a **\$1,000 credit**  
by calling **609.489.5428**.

For more information, visit [theborgata.com/meetings](http://theborgata.com/meetings)

**Borgata**<sup>®</sup>  
HOTEL CASINO & SPA  
ATLANTIC CITY

Rates are non-commissionable. Special offer is for new bookings only with a minimum of 100 room nights. Special offer does not apply to existing bookings. Cannot be combined with any other offer or promotion. Valid until 12/31/16. Based on availability. ©2016 Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa. All rights reserved.





A recent expansion of meeting and conference space at Resorts Casino Hotel added 12,000 sf of meeting space and 12 meeting rooms.

and became a part of our team. They reported in regularly to make sure that our needs were met."

Facilities at the ACCC were a good match for the meeting's needs. "They offer an area called the Tree House (a meeting room with gorgeous views of Atlantic City) where smaller receptions were held," says the planner. "This area offers a fabulous view of the city at night and the ocean during the day, and the receptions were always popular events."

### New and Noteworthy

Atlantic City's eight major casino hotels are upping their game to appeal to the East Coast meetings market and beyond.

Harrah's Resort's new **Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center** expanded the property's meeting space from 20,000 sf to 170,000 sf while adding two 50,000-sf ballrooms and a 25,000-sf ballroom. The expansion made Harrah's, a Caesars property, the largest hotel conference center complex from Baltimore to Boston and paid immediate returns. The facility's opening last September generated 90,000 additional guest room bookings for Harrah's for the ensuing 12 months.

**Bally's**, another Caesar's Entertainment Atlantic City property, offers 1,760 guest rooms, many with ocean views, and 147 guest rooms in Bally's Tower have recently been renovated.

The 1,144-room **Caesars Atlantic City**, which has 28,000 sf of meeting space, will complete renovation of 286 guest rooms in the Temple Tower in May.

Debuting in summer 2015 was the multifaceted convention and event space at **Resorts Casino Hotel** that added 12,000 sf of meeting space and 12 more conference rooms all on one level. The 12 completed meeting spaces, named the Atlantic Rooms, include mobile partitions, modular lounge areas with outlets and USB ports, prefunction spaces with snack and coffee areas, and state-of-the-art AV and lighting controls. The showpiece of the conference center is the Atlantic Ballroom, a 6,500-sf function room with a multiuse prefunction area and views of the Atlantic Ocean. The new conference center brings the total offerings at Resorts to 24 meeting and function rooms with more than 64,000 sf of usable space.

**Tropicana Atlantic City** recently announced a \$25 million renovation that primarily will encompass upgrades to 500

guest rooms in the Havana Tower. Completed last year was a \$50 million renovation that included Boardwalk façade improvements, hotel room upgrades and property-wide expansion. The property recently opened the multimillion-dollar AtlantiCare LiveCenter, which the Tropicana touts as the most advanced gym facility in Atlantic City.

The **Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa** recently announced plans to invest more than \$50 million into the improvement of its property throughout 2016: Borgata Festival Park will be transformed into an outdoor pool beginning this summer, featuring more than 400 chaise lounges, daybeds and cabanas, a full-service canopied bar, entertainment stage, and a variety

of lawn games and activities, all centered on a 3,200-sf Roman-style pool. Debuting this spring is Premier, an 18,000-sf nightclub offering "a theatrical experience for partygoers." Also coming are a casual dining area and a new fine-dining concept by chef/partner Michael Symon. The hotel also will add 25,000 sf of conference space by the end of 2016. Still in the planning phase, the space will include two levels, with a 7,000-sf ballroom, four meeting rooms, one boardroom, one office and a prefunction area on each level.

The **Golden Nugget Atlantic City** added 78 new slot machines that join four blackjack tables, a roulette table, bar and eight TVs. The property also introduced a new menu and head chef, Carmine Favuzzi, for Grotto Ristorante, an Italian restaurant.

The iconic **Steel Pier** will reopen March 26 after a \$14 million restoration. The amusement park will feature a 220-foot-high observation wheel offering riders views of Atlantic City and the ocean from inside climate-controlled gondolas.

**Gardner's Basin**, located in the marina district, will launch an expansion and redevelopment project by the end of this summer. The project will include additional restaurants, shops and entertainment venues. In addition, the Boardwalk between Gardner's Basin and Revel will be reconstructed.

**The Playground**, a 464,000-sf entertainment venue featuring eight live entertainment clubs and restaurants, plans to add more amenities including a bowling alley, sports bar and outside pool on the beach with cabanas.

In addition, **Boardwalk Hall**, a multipurpose facility located on The Boardwalk, features a 14,770-seat arena and the 23,000-sf Adrian Phillips Ballroom with 3,200-person capacity.

Atlantic City continues to offer even more of everything that planners need for the perfect meeting or incentive. Planners can expect more meeting space, entertainment, meeting venues and attractions as Atlantic City continues to strengthen its reputation as a top meetings destination. **C&IT**



Credits: Resorts Casino Hotel



14,000  
HOTEL ROOMS



45  
MEETING ROOMS



1,000,000  
WAYS TO UNWIND



MEET  
AC

Business Planners, Atlantic City Means Business and we've got the numbers to prove it.

MEET SPACE, MEET STYLE, MEET AC.

To Learn About Our Incentive Plans and Book Your Convention call 1-609-449-7100 or visit [meetinac.com](http://meetinac.com) today!



## Destination

# New Orleans

## From Carnivals to the Culinary Scene, the Crescent City Has Everything a Planner Needs and Attendees Want

By  
Derek Reveron

There has never been a better time to meet in New Orleans, asserts Stephen Perry, the revered, longtime president and CEO of the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau (NOCVB). “New Orleans is and always has been one of the ultimate destinations for business and leisure travelers alike. With several billion dollars’ worth of economic development and construction underway, New Orleans has entered a new era of growth and prominence. The culinary scene is richer and more diverse than ever, the music world is thriving, and the culture of the Crescent City is beyond compare as we approach our tricentennial in 2018.”

Perry continues, “This authentic city continues to reinvent itself with the latest upgrades and enhancements at state-of-the-art venues and the overall infrastructure of the city, which ultimately provides a better business and cultural experience and a world-class business climate.”

Perry and his award-winning team encourage meeting planners and attendees to “come and immerse themselves in the passionate spirit of New Orleans and enjoy our truly one-of-a-kind visitor experience as they get immersed in one of the world’s most captivating destinations.”

Few would disagree with Perry that the Big Easy is, by far, one of the most popular meeting destinations. Another fan is Cindy Hayes, who was born and raised in New Orleans, and is the enthusiastic director of sales for AlliedPRA New Orleans. “New Orleans is on fire. It’s very appealing to corporate groups.



***“New Orleans is and always has been one of the ultimate destinations for business.”***

**Stephen Perry, President and CEO  
New Orleans CVB**

Revelers in Bourbon Street in the French Quarter during Mardi Gras — the annual Carnival celebration.





Credits: AlliedPRA New Orleans

About 600 attendees spruced up the Joe W. Brown Memorial Park for their CSR project.



It's affordable. Group rates vary by season, which makes it attractive to all types of budgets. The destination is centrally located and offers a warm climate without having to leave the U.S. We also have one of the fastest growing airports in the nation," says Hayes.

Statistics illustrate New Orleans' continuing resurgence since Katrina struck. During 2014, New Orleans hosted 9.5 million visitors, a 2.6 percent increase over 2013, according to the 2014 New Orleans Area Visitor Profile study by the University of New Orleans Hospitality Research Center for the NOCVB and New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation.

The 9.5 million visitors spent a record \$6.8 billion, a 5.3 percent increase over 2013. About 58 percent of business and convention visitors extended their stay an average of two nights, up from 55 percent in 2013. Many of the visitors were on return trips. According to the study, 62.6 percent of respondents who offered open-ended comments were repeat visitors."

### First-Time group

New Orleans is attracting its share of first-time meetings. A company based in Austin, Texas, held its first seven annual business summits in its headquarters city of Austin before deciding to hold the eighth one in another destination — New Orleans. "We wanted our first meeting outside of Austin to be in another city that was as unique as Austin, and New Orleans fit the bill," says the company's director of events. "It was our first and only choice."

The three-day summit, held at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside, attracted about 500 employees and clients from about 10 countries. The planner infused every event with New Or-

leans flavor, starting with a group of 50 European clients who arrived at the business summit a day early.

Many of the 50 clients had never been to New Orleans before and received an introduction to the city through tours. "We put together a bicycle tour of the French Quarter and downtown," he says. "We also took them on a gumbo tour by bus. They sampled different types of gumbos at several restaurants." Also, the client advisory board went to John Besh's August restaurant, which is located in a historic 19th century French-Creole building in the Central Business District. The group dined in a private room and had an opportunity to chat with chef John Besh.

Evening events included a party at the House of Blues where the group enjoyed music, food and "everything about New Orleans in the party," says the planner. "We had a zydeco band inside and another band outside in the House of Blues Voodoo Garden. As people were leaving, we had the iconic Lucky Dogs food carts — which are unique to New Orleans — in front of the House of Blues handing out hot dogs," he adds.

### Authentic Experiences

The meeting's general session featured "jazzed-up" décor. "We tried to make it feel like you were walking into a small jazz club," says the planner. "There was a stage in the round and small tables that seated four people. We had gobo lights on the tables with jazz music playing. The colors purple and gold were reflected in the lighting, décor and images projected onto the walls."

The planner applauded the Hilton New Orleans Riverside for its expertise in helping to provide an authentic New Orleans experience. "I've done a lot of events there over the last 30 years," he explains. "It's a unique property because they really understand customer service. They try to make sure you have a unique perspective on New Orleans with the food and service they provide."

Attendees of the business summit were happy with the group's first meeting outside of Austin. "The survey of our group rated the experience in New Orleans very, very high," he says. "More than 85 percent said they would want to come back to New Orleans again."

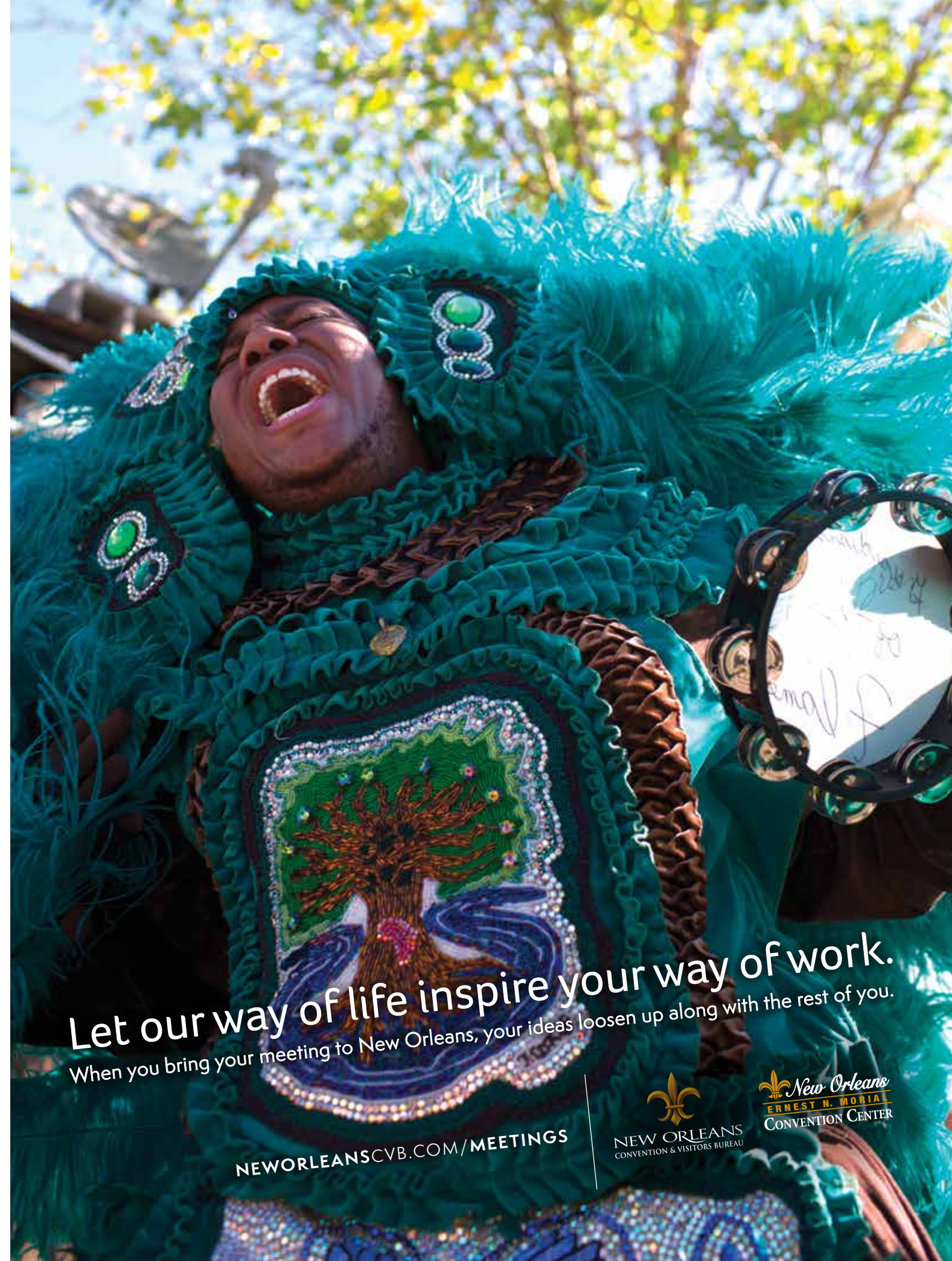
### CSR Programs Are Popular

Many groups visiting New Orleans, especially incentive programs, seek opportunities to contribute to the city's continuing recovery through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. "We get many requests for community service outreaches," says Hayes. "We adapt a company's mission to achieve some of our local community goals. We make sure the company spends its dollars to give attendees a customized experience while giving back to our city."

A group of 600 attendees recently spent a

***"We make sure the company spends its dollars to give attendees a customized experience while giving back to our city."***

**Cindy Hayes**, Director of Sales  
AlliedPRA New Orleans



**Let our way of life inspire your way of work.**  
When you bring your meeting to New Orleans, your ideas loosen up along with the rest of you.

[NEWORLEANSVCVB.COM/MEETINGS](http://NEWORLEANSVCVB.COM/MEETINGS)

**NEW ORLEANS**  
CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

**New Orleans**  
ERNEST N. MORIAL  
CONVENTION CENTER



half-day improving Joe W. Brown Memorial Park. “It was the first event of the first day of the incentive,” says Hayes. “They mulched and trimmed plants and spruced up the park, which was located in New Orleans East and rebuilt after Katrina. The park relies solely on private and corporate donations to keep it running. Attendees found it very rewarding.”

Groups mix rewarding experiences with a broad array of activities. “The activities and tours in New Orleans appeal to all ages,” says Hayes. “We offer museums, swamps, historic cemeteries and homes, jazz clubs, motor sports, restaurants and plantations. People also love to walk. We are known as one of the most walkable cities in the U.S.”

The popularity of New Orleans is reflected in the awards the city continues to accumulate, including *Condé Nast Traveler’s* top “U.S. City for Business Travelers” and one of *Tripadvisor.com’s* “2015 Traveler’s Choice Destinations.”

## Expansion Plans

New Orleans plans to boost its popularity even more by expanding the city’s meetings-related infrastructure.

The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is embarking on an ambitious new venture that will revitalize the city’s riverfront. The Convention Center District Development Project, situated on 47 acres upriver from the center, calls for construction of a new “headquarters” hotel needed to accommodate the current demands from meetings and conventions, and the projected increase in visitors to the city leading up to its 300th anniversary in 2018. Other key features under consideration include a linear park along Convention Center Boulevard, outdoor entertainment, fine dining and ca-



Credit: Orpheum Theater

The refurbished Orpheum Theater is a performance space that can be utilized for meetings and banquets such as receptions for 800 attendees or seated dinners for 300 guests.



Credit: National WW II Museum

From gala dinners to guided tours, the National WW II Museum in the historic Arts District is a very popular venue that will quadruple in size by 2017.

sual restaurants, arts and cultural venues, and new retail and housing options.

The project also includes a plan to ease traffic on Convention Center Boulevard by modernizing intersections and creating a linear park with a moving walkway for convention-goers. Meanwhile, the convention center — the sixth largest convention center in the world with 1.1 million sf of contiguous exhibit space — continues to make upgrades.

Another popular venue, the National World War II Museum, is undergoing a \$320 million expansion that will quadruple the facility’s size when completed in 2017.

## Getting Around

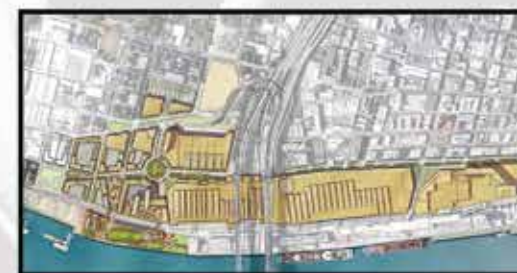
In transportation developments, Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport is undergoing an \$826 million expansion that includes construction of a new, state-of-the-art airport terminal, which will debut in 2018. The new terminal will feature 30 gates, a 2,000-car parking garage, a central utility plant and a ground transportation staging area. Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport served an all-time record-breaking 10,673,301 passengers in 2015, an increase in 9.1 percent over 2014. The airport is now served by 14 airlines with 52 non-stop destinations, the highest number of non-stop destinations in the airport’s history.

The Port of New Orleans handled a record 1,023,700 cruise passengers in 2015, topping the million-person mark for the second consecutive year. The Port is set for another robust cruise season in 2016, with a 34 percent expansion in cruise capacity when the Carnival Triumph replaces the Carnival Elation. American Cruise Lines will add a third riverboat, America, to its New Orleans home-ported fleet in 2016, accommodating 185 passengers on Mississippi River cruises.

In 2015, Viking announced that New Orleans would serve as the European river cruise line’s first North American homeport, with six new ships scheduled to set sail beginning in 2017.

Meanwhile, the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority is expanding the French Quarter streetcar route.

The Outlet Collection at the Riverwalk, just steps from the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, recently opened its doors with \$80 million in renovations and is the first outlet shopping center to be located in the heart of downtown.



## Convention Center District Development: Reimagining & Revitalizing

An exciting transformation is taking place which will revitalize the Convention Center District, bringing new entertainment, dining, arts and cultural opportunities to residents and visitors alike.

### Planned Elements:

- ✦ 47 acre mixed-use development.
- ✦ Four-Star headquarters hotel.
- ✦ Multi-modal transportation hub for shuttles and taxis.
- ✦ Pedestrian park along Convention Center Boulevard.
- ✦ Improved lighting and streetscape for shops, hotels, restaurants, museums and galleries.
- ✦ New premier retail shopping options.
- ✦ New fine and casual dining options.
- ✦ High-rise residences with beautiful vistas of the Mississippi River.
- ✦ Direct access to the river with outdoor entertainment and gathering places.

For more information, please visit [mccno.com](http://mccno.com), or call 504-582-3000. Like us on Facebook, at [facebook.com/MCCNODevProject](https://www.facebook.com/MCCNODevProject) and follow us on Twitter at @MCCNODevProject.





Credit: Royal Sonesta New Orleans

The balcony of a hospitality suite at the Royal Sonesta New Orleans provides a fabulous view of the French Quarter.

## New and Noteworthy

The historic **Orpheum Theater** has reopened for the first time since 2005 in the city's Central Business District following a \$13 million renovation that includes an expanded lobby, reconstructed acoustic shell, larger seats, and more bathrooms and bars. The theater, which opened in 1918, is on the National Register for Historic Places.

The Orpheum is an intimate concert and performance space with perfect sight lines and unparalleled acoustics from each of its seats, which range in number from 1,500 to 1,800 due to the customizable floor seating. Three levels of seating, private VIP boxes at the gallery level and six bars round out the audience space, while six green rooms and a full-service kitchen are available behind the scenes.

The new adjustable floor allows the space to be utilized for meetings and banquets. The floor plan can accommodate receptions for 800 guests or seated dinners for 300 guests. The theater is equipped with state-of-the-art sound and lighting, a projection screen and displays for presentations or branding, green rooms that can be used for small meeting breakouts and VIP spaces for a fully adaptable event experience. The space can accommodate live music, private parties, corporate meetings and events, comedy acts, Mardi Gras balls and more.

New Orleans hotels have been improving since Katrina hit. As Hayes noted, "Hotels have upped their games. They are renovating, repositioning and rebranding to keep up with each other."

Here is a rundown of recent hotel developments.

The renovation of the iconic **Royal Sonesta New Orleans**, long a favored hotel in the heart of the French Quarter, is complete as the 483 guest rooms are newly reimagined.

In addition to guest rooms, other public spaces also underwent renovation. Upon entrance to the hotel, guests will find that while it maintains the same grandeur as before, it is now adorned throughout with elegant furnishings, warm colors and delightful artwork. A new fitness center is well equipped with free weights and state-of-the-art equipment. The hotel's

R Club Level has been expanded from 29 to 58 rooms and features a new R Club lounge.

These hotel renovations are the culmination of enhancements that began with the re-imagining of Desire Oyster Bar, the hotel's casual restaurant on world-famous Bourbon Street. The hotel features other local venues all under its roof including Restaurant R'evolution, the award-winning innovative eatery and Irvin Mayfield's Jazz Playhouse — where legendary musicians jam daily.

The **Omni Riverfront Hotel**, formerly the Wyndham Riverfront New Orleans, has completed an \$8 million renovation. The property, located a short walk from the convention center, features 202 guest rooms and 4,000 sf of meeting space. It's Omni's third hotel in New Orleans.

The **Wyndham New Orleans French Quarter** has completed a multimillion-dollar renovation that included 374 guest rooms as well as the property's exterior and parking garage.

The 285-room **Loews New Orleans Hotel** has completed a \$4 million renovation that included guest rooms and suites, corridors and Café Adelaide.

**Le Meridien New Orleans**, a Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc. property, has completed a \$29 million renovation. The property features 410 redesigned guest rooms and suites; an additional 1,600 sf of meeting space bringing the total to 20,000; three new food options; and a refreshed front desk and valet entrance.

The **Omni Royal Orleans Hotel** has finished a \$15 million makeover, which includes refreshed guest rooms with custom furniture, 24 wrought-iron balconies and improved lighting. The project also included refurbished meeting rooms with new furniture, carpeting and window treatments. The 346-room AAA Four Diamond property includes 14,000 sf of flexible function space including the 5,284-sf Grand Salon and 17 meeting rooms.

The 188-room **Aloft New Orleans Downtown** opened earlier this year in the Central Business District with 2,500 sf of meeting space.

The **Homewood Suites by Hilton New Orleans Downtown** has renovated the property's 166 suites, meeting spaces and public areas. The project includes new furniture, a sleeper sofa and appliances in each guest room.

Historic French Quarter hotel **Chateau LeMoyne** has completed its eight-month renovation, with updates to the hotel's 171 guest rooms, lobby, event spaces, courtyard and pool.

Named for founder of New Orleans Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, the hotel features 30 rooms with balconies overlooking the French Quarter, 11 historic suites and 2,000 sf of versatile event space.

The **Hyatt House New Orleans/Downtown** debuted in the Central Business District in November 2015, bringing 194 extended-stay hotel rooms to the downtown area.

Situated along the expanding Loyola Avenue streetcar line, the hotel is at the heart of the Sports and Entertainment District and is also just steps away from the French Quarter and burgeoning BioDistrict.

C&IT

# INTRODUCING THE ALL NEW Royal Sonesta New Orleans



We've jazzed up Royal Sonesta New Orleans with a \$30 million renovation. This all new Four Diamond hotel located in the heart of the French Quarter, offers everything you need:

- Over 20,000 sq. ft. of flexible event space including a 5,000 sq. ft. Grand Ballroom and outdoor venues
- Complimentary WiFi in each guest room, meeting room and public spaces

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO BOOK YOUR NEXT MEETING:  
504.553.2205 | [RSNOSALES@SONESTA.COM](mailto:RSNOSALES@SONESTA.COM)

300 BOURBON STREET | NEW ORLEANS, LA | 504.586.0300 | [SONESTA.COM/ROYALNEWORLEANS](http://SONESTA.COM/ROYALNEWORLEANS)

 **ROYAL SONESTA**  
NEW ORLEANS

STAY. NEW. STAY. SONESTA.



# On The Move



Omni Hotels & Resorts has named **Peter Strebel** as chief marketing officer and senior vice president of sales. He was the senior vice president of operations for Omni. **Mark Wykes** was named vice president of hotel sales and marketing. He was regional director of sales and marketing as well as director of global sales for the company.

Pullman Miami Airport has named **Judith Garcia** as director of sales and marketing. Most recently, she was director of sales and marketing at Sonesta Coconut Grove in Miami, Florida.

Resorts Casino Hotel, Atlantic City, has appointed **Maribeth Grandpre** as manager of business development for

the new Resorts conference center. She was vice president of national sales for Conference Solutions Network.

**Denis Herron** was named international sales manager for The Westin Dawn Beach Resort & Spa, St. Maarten, based in West Palm Beach, Florida. Most recently, he worked with Radisson Aruba. Prior to his hotel career, Herron played in the National Hockey League for 14 years as goaltender for the Pittsburgh Penguins and Montreal Canadians.

**Nicole Beykirch** was named global sales director for Benchmark Hospitality International. She was Benchmark's regional accounts director focusing on the Midwest market.

**Shirley Dunn Hanks** was named director of sales and marketing for Auberge Resorts Collection's VieVage Los Cabos, opening late 2016. She was national leisure sales director for Auberge Resort Collection's Western region.

Hyatt has appointed **Nate Hardesty** and **Christopher Finelli** as regional vice presidents of sales. Hardesty, based in Washington, DC, will be responsible for the Eastern region of the U.S., while Finelli, based in Chicago, will be responsible for the West/Midwest region. Hardesty was director of sales and marketing of the Hyatt Regency Orlando. Finelli was director of sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Chicago.

C&IT

## READERSERVICES / ADINDEX

PAGE	ADVERTISER	PHONE NO.	WEB SITE	CONTACT	E-MAIL
39	Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa	609-317-1000	www.theborgata.com/meetings	Group Sales	meetings@theborgata.com
COV IV	Caesars Entertainment	855-meet-cet	www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com	Group Sales	meet@caesars.com
13	Carnival Cruise Line	877-278-0388	www.carnivalmeetings.com	Ann Sedgwick	corporatesales@carnival.com
15	Celebrity Cruises	800-722-5934 Option 1	www.celebritycorporatekit.com	Ron Gulaskey	rgulaskey@celebrity.com
41, COV III	Meet AC	609-449-7148	www.meetinac.com	Sandi Harvey	sharvey@meetinac.com
5	Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau	831-657-6416	www.meetinmonterey.com	Group Sales	sales@seemonterey.com
COV II	Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.	615-259-4739	www.visitmusiccity.com	Kay Witt	kayw@visitmusiccity.com
45, 47	New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau	800-672-6124	www.neworleanscvb.com	Cara Banasch	cbanasch@neworleanscvb.com
17	Norwegian Cruise Line	866-ncl-meet	www.events.ncl.com	Group Sales	events@ncl.com
19	Oceania Cruises	954-940-7315	www.oceaniacruises.com/incentives	Freddy I. Muller	fmuller@oceaniacruises.com
21	Princess Cruises	800-815-9288	www.princess.com	Elena Rodriguez	elrodriguez@princesscruises.com
23	Regent Seven Seas Cruises	305-514-4920	www.rssc.com/charter	Katina Athanasiou	kathanasiou@rssc.com
49	Royal Sonesta New Orleans	504-553-2205	www.sonesta.com/royalneworleans	Group Sales	rsnosales@sonesta.com

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

# WE'RE KNOWN BY THE COMPANIES WE KEEP

**Paul Van Deventer**  
President & CEO, MPI

Atlantic City is proud to host  
TEAMS & MPI's WEC in 2016

To book your meeting or convention  
call 1-844-855-6338 (MEET)  
or visit [meetinac.com](http://meetinac.com) today!



We are proud to host the  
**2016 MPI WEC at  
Harrah's Atlantic  
City Waterfront  
Conference Center**

# CAESARS MEANS BUSINESS

*in Atlantic City*



A meeting space is empty until we fill it with your vision. Our team of experts can transform the more than 230,000 square feet of meeting space at our three properties in Atlantic City into your next exceptional event.

Book your meeting at one of 40 venues in 20 destinations nationwide at **CaesarsMeansBusiness.com**

CAESARS

Harrah's

BALLY'S

THE CROWWELL

Flamingo

HARVEYS

THE LINQ

HORSESHOE

