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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

## Asia-Pacific

What's New in the  
Largest Business Travel  
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Harbor Nights, an event at Loews  
Portofino Bay Hotel's Harbor Piazza,  
takes place four to five times per year.

eRFP Solutions ● Destinations to Watch ● Rethinking Sustainability

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The living walls in the lobby of Atlanta's Westin Peachtree Plaza  
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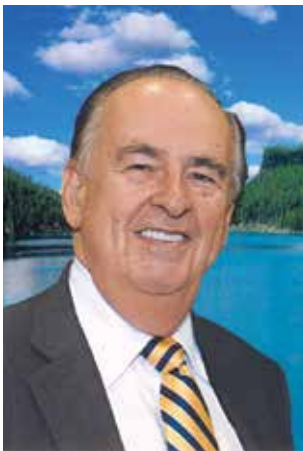
A happy group of attendees at the Forever Living Products  
International's Global Rally at the Marina Bay Sands in  
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# Publisher's Message

## The 'Positive Domino Effect'

Orlando, as our headline in this issue describes, is a phenomenal place where change and predictability happily coexist. What better environment is there to create and maintain a loyal, willing partnership among corporations, vendors, suppliers and some of the best hotels and resorts in the world? After all, Orlando consistently is No. 1 not only in most professional meeting planner's notebooks, but last fall Orlando also was named the No. 1 meetings destination in the U.S. according to Cvent.



Jon Osing, the group operations manager for UBM LLC, has staged his annual conference for more than a decade in Orlando, because he says Orlando provides a predictable environment. "Our conference has continued to grow ever since we moved to Orlando."

He is loyal to Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center because they, like most Orlando properties, are "corporate-focused" and Gaylord Palms has also been loyal to him. "In 2008-2009, much of the industry was under a lot of pressure, and...having partners willing to work with you is really valuable, and maintaining and keeping those partnerships

alive is really important. We were able to come to the Gaylord and say we need some help here; they took a long-term view and helped us keep the event solid, and we've managed to survive because of partnerships like that," says Osing.

Osing advises planners to create a "positive domino effect" by being organized and communicative with vendors and partners. "Your partner is only as good as you are; they can't read your mind. Real advantage is gained in making the little things easy — if you've already laid the groundwork, by the time you have to ask for a favor, you're putting the person in a spot where they can say yes. If you don't, you're not partnering, you're taking and taking."

Orlando has many more valuable attributes for meeting planners and attendees (and their families) including tremendous value, extraordinary magical venues, and superior entertainment and recreation options such as the new Orlando Eye observation wheel at the I-Drive 360 entertainment complex; Harbor Nights, an exciting event that takes place a few times per year at Loews Portofino Bay Hotel's authentic Harbor Piazza (cover photo) at Universal Orlando Resort; Disney's Magic Kingdom Fireworks Dessert Party; or a group tour of SeaWorld Orlando.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## News & Notes

### Hilton West Palm Beach Celebrates Grand Opening



WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA — David Middlebrook (center), vice president of operations for Corporate & Incentive Travel magazine, is flanked by Hilton West Palm Beach's Edd Karlan, director of sales and marketing, and Sasha Azqueta, PR and marketing manager. The Hilton West Palm Beach celebrated its grand opening on March 3. Connected to the Palm Beach County Convention Center, it is the only hotel in South Florida to be connected to a convention center.

### The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village Plans New Conference Center

CAPE CORAL, FLORIDA — The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village, located in a prime waterfront location within the Tarpon Point community overlooking the Gulf of Mexico, the Caloosahatchee River and San Carlos Bay, announced the



The Westin Cape Coral Conference Center.

expansion of its meetings and events capabilities with the addition of a \$15 million, 35,000-sf conference center. The new space will feature a 13,000-sf Grand Ballroom and add to the Southwest Florida waterfront resort's existing 15,000 sf of function space. The conference center will begin accommodating groups of up to 1,250 guests in late 2017. The new conference center brings the resort's function space to 28,000 sf. The Grand Ballroom can be divided into multiple spaces and accommodate up to six smaller banquet rooms. Additionally, groups can take advantage of a spacious 4,754-sf prefunction area, a multifunction room for board meetings or office space and an expansive 1,728-sf terrace overlooking the Caloosahatchee River estuary. The resort also plans to convert 30 two-bedroom suites into traditional and one-bedroom units to better accommodate groups. [www.westincapecoral.com](http://www.westincapecoral.com)

### Aruba Tourism Authority Reports 2015 Tourism Results

ORANJESTAD, ARUBA — Following a record-setting year of 1.07 million stay-over visitors in 2014, the Aruba Tourism Authority (ATA) reported total arrivals in 2015 increased by an additional 14.3 percent, totaling 1.22 annual stay-over visitors. This global growth included a 7.7 percent increase in arrivals from the U.S. market and 0.9 percent increase in arrivals from Canada, as well as notable increases from Venezuela, United Kingdom, Argentina, Germany and Italy.

Most Caribbean islands saw a three to 10 percent increase in annual stay-over arrivals from 2014 to 2015.

"2015 was a monumental year for Aruba, not only in tourism performance but also in innovation and creativity," said Ronella Tjin Asjoe-Croes, CEO of ATA. "The launch of our award-winning Happiness Builder, a content-rich planning experience on [aruba.com](http://aruba.com) where travelers can build and share a custom video itinerary from 100+ video vignettes, paired with airport and island-wide hotel/product renovations and our famous Aruban hospitality, all contributed to the continued success of our beautiful destination."

Aruba's hotel sector also showed growth last year. Total visitor nights grew by 8.3 percent in 2015, while ADR increased by 2.7 percent to \$237.39 and RevPAR increased by 1 percent to \$185.20. Aruba remains one of the most revisited destinations in the Caribbean, with half of all visitors returning year after year. [www.aruba.com](http://www.aruba.com)

### Sawgrass Marriott Expands Amenities With Property Refresh

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, FLORIDA — The Sawgrass Marriott is nearing the completion of a resort-wide \$25 million refresh. Enhancements will be seen throughout its 511 guest rooms/villas, resort pool area, modernized front desk area, hotel façade and the Sawgrass Spa and Cabana Beach Club. Other facets of the project are a new "Butler Serviced" guest wing, and The American Gator Club restaurant, which will debut soon. The pool renovation includes new surfacing, lighting, built-in fire pits and more, plus the addition of a modular cabana for daily rental. Landscaping enhancements include 4,700 indigenous plants adorning both pools as well as up and down lighting installed to dramatize the many 200-year-old oak and palm trees. The American Gator Club has an innovative new menu including lighter, more healthful options and local flavors, as well as Gator Club events and activities for adults and kids. And by May, the hotel façade will boast fresh color, while guest rooms will have expanded, with Juliette balconies replaced by oversized



sliding windows, complementing the sleeker hotel façade.

By summer's end, the Sawgrass Spa will have added two couples treatment rooms and three new hair and makeup stations (new fitness center equipment was added in February). The new SurfStream wave simulator was added adjacent to the primary resort pool. The oceanfront Cabana Club renovations

will be finished in summer, too — including a more elegant entrance and fresh landscaping; a new roof; resurfaced brick-paved walkways leading to the existing boardwalk to the beach; and resurfacing of both pools and adjacent patios. In September, the guest rooms will be completed, with 30 additional sf per room, new bedding, linens, carpet, lighting and bathrooms. [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)

### U.S. Airlines Seeking New Cuba Routes

U.S. airlines applied for new Cuba routes that are now available due to the February aviation deal between the United States and Cuba, according to various published reports. The arrangement allows 110 daily flights between the nations, and just 20 are earmarked for service to Havana. Ten daily flights will be allowed on routes to each of Cuba's nine other international airports.

The competition is keen for flights to Jose Marti International Airport in Havana — Cuba's most popular destination. Bids for routes to Cuba's other nine airports appear to be less competitive. Following are some of the airlines and the flights they are pursuing: American Airlines requested 14 daily flights to Havana plus two additional weekend-only flights; JetBlue proposed 12; and Southwest Airlines proposed nine. Delta Air Lines and regional carrier Silver Airways each requested the equivalent of five daily round-trip flights to Havana. Alaska Airlines proposed two daily round-trip flights between Havana and Los Angeles. Spirit Airlines also is expected to request flights to Havana.

Frontier Airlines, based in Denver, requested rights to fly three daily round-trip flights to Havana from Miami and one from Denver. The route applications were made to the U.S. Transportation Department, which said it will try to maximize public benefit in assigning the flights.

### Marriott-Starwood Merger Gets Go-Ahead From the DOJ and FTC

The U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Federal Trade Commission will not challenge the proposed merger between Marriott International and Starwood Hotels & Resorts, as reported by *Business Travel News*. The waiting period for Marriott's filing with the FTC under the Hart-Scott-Rodino Antitrust Improvements Act of 1976, the merger's first regulatory hurdle, recently expired, therefore the deal is cleared to proceed. The Competition Bureau of Canada also will not challenge the transaction. According to Marriott, the companies are cooperating with competition authorities in other parts of the world to obtain approval of the deal. Marriott and Starwood will hold separate stockholder meetings on March 28 to vote on the merger.



## News & Notes

### Disney Cruise Line Announces Two New Ships

LAKE BUENA VISTA, FLORIDA — The Walt Disney Company announced plans to build two additional cruise ships, each of them showcasing the immersive family entertainment, enchanting storytelling and unparalleled service that only Disney can deliver. The company has entered into a memorandum of agreement with the Meyer Werft shipyard in Germany. The schedule calls for the new ships to be completed in 2021 and 2023.

"We pride ourselves on the un-

forgettable vacation experiences we deliver to our guests each and every day, and the expansion of our Disney fleet will allow us to create even more magical memories for families at sea and in incredible cruise destinations around the world," said Robert A. Iger, chairman and CEO, The Walt Disney Company. Each new ship will be approximately 135,000 gross tons — slightly larger than the newest Disney Cruise Line ships, the Disney Dream and Disney Fantasy — and each is currently

planned to include about 1,250 guest staterooms. "The expansion of Disney Cruise Line only adds to our excitement for the unprecedented growth taking place across our vacation destinations, from new Star Wars experiences coming to the Walt Disney World and Disneyland resorts to the 25th anniversary of Disneyland Paris and the grand opening of our newest park, Shanghai Disney Resort," said Bob Chapek, chairman, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts.

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

### Meeting Space Renovation Debuts at Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort



The Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort Executive Boardroom.

BONITA SPRINGS, FLORIDA — The Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort and Spa announced the completion of a large-scale renovation of all indoor meeting spaces encompassing more than 37,600 sf.

New technology highlights include Wi-Fi, automated digital signage for every meeting room and the installation of four interactive touch-screen monitors providing information on scheduled meetings, resort amenities and activities, local weather and flight information at Southwest Florida International Airport. Energy-saving fea-

tures include computer-controlled LED lighting, cove lighting, wall sconces and dramatic new chandeliers. Sustainable materials including bamboo and American walnut flooring were used in the meeting space entrance foyer and prefunction areas.

Brand new spaces include two technology nooks with large-screen TVs, comfort seating and multiple charging stations, and an expansive meeting planner office with multiple computer workstations, flexible workspace, storage and private refrigerator. [www.coconutpoint.hyatt.com](http://www.coconutpoint.hyatt.com)

### Top Destinations for Incentives and Conferences

LONDON, ENGLAND — Results from the Annual Global Destination Index, compiled by Pacific World and Access Destination Services, have identified the top destinations for meetings, incentives and events in the last 12 months.

In the U.S., Texas is the top destination for incentives and conferences, followed by Florida and Las Vegas. The Index also revealed Italy, UAE and France as the top destinations for the EMEA region, and Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore for Asia.

Patricia Silvio, global marketing manager of Pacific World, says: "When we analyze the international top destinations, we find that improved transport links and investment in infrastructure resulting in the opening of a number of new hotels and venues were factors accountable for Italy and France's rise in popularity. Accessible flight routes, new hotels, and an investment of time and resources in the latest technology and setups to facilitate large-scale events have pushed the UAE to the top of the list." [www.pacificworld.com](http://www.pacificworld.com), [www.accessdmc.com](http://www.accessdmc.com)

## Snapshots



1



2



3



4



5



6



7

Credits: 1-3 Chuck Fazio, 4 Sarawak Convention Bureau, 5 ADMEI, 6 ESPA, 7 MPI

**1-3** Now in its 29th year, DMAI's Destinations Showcase, which powers partnerships between meeting planners and destination marketing organizations (DMOs), was held February 9 in Washington, DC, and convened nearly 900 industry professionals with experts from more than 120 destinations. The 2016 Annual Foundation Gala at the Ronald Reagan Building celebrated the National Park Service — the 2016 Spirit of Hospitality Honoree. **1** (L to r) U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow, Director of the United States National Park Service Jonathan B. Jarvis, Brand USA President & CEO Christopher L. Thompson, and DMAI President Don Welsh. **2** A Teddy Roosevelt lookalike. **3** (L) Managing Director, empowerMINT.com and Event Impact Calculator Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP with meeting-goers. **4** General Manager of Marketing and Sales, Sarawak Convention Bureau, Amelia Roziman (3rd from right) with guests at the "7 Wonders of Borneo," at the Sydney Hilton, which showcased the best of Sarawak as the region's freshest destinations for international business events. **5** The 2016 board of directors at the 2016 Association of Destination Management Executives International Conference recently held in Oklahoma City. **6** ESPA Past President Denise Suttle, CMP, Albuquerque CVB, and Rick Blaney (r), senior business development manager at Freeman, who sponsors ESPA's Donald S. Freeman Jr. Annual Conference Scholarship, present the scholarship to Mahesh Halker, a student at Centennial College, Toronto. **7** Attendees at MPI's 2016 European Meetings & Events Conference held recently in Copenhagen.



By Jeannie Power, CMP

## Are You Battling Post-Event Depression? Here's How to Cope

The question “What am I going to do after this?” came from a seasoned event planner friend I was assisting during an international conference. She had spent years on this project that was now wrapping up.

The conference was moving on to a different country the next year and had a new event planner in that country as was its tradition. Over the course of planning the event she met many new people, learned about an interesting industry and pushed herself to the limit to create a great conference. She had other events and clients to focus on after this event, but life as she knew it would be different. Her routine, sense of purpose and relationships would change.

### Changing Routine

Perhaps you've felt it yourself. The feelings of joy and excitement are mixed with stress, uncertainty and sadness. What is happening? As the event draws nearer, the days get longer and the stress gets higher. Your family and friends hardly have any quality time with you. You have no time for yourself. Life has been taken over by the event, and you can't wait until it's over... but then it's done and you can't shake feeling low.

At the close of an event, your focus and daily schedule instantly become different. The hours that have been growing longer and longer come to a halt. The lengths that you have been pushing yourself further and further each day suddenly stop. Your life has changed. The event was a success. You love your job and could not think of doing anything else. The client and/or your boss were extremely happy. You are proud of yourself and know that you did an amazing job, but still can't seem to shake this nagging feeling of emptiness.

### Sense of Purpose

Through my research and discussions on the topic, I've found that this feeling is very common in our industry as well as other fields that focus on creating and producing something and having that purpose end. It's commonly referred to as Post Project Depression or PPD. After the extreme “high” and adrenaline rush of finishing a major project that has been an obsession, comes a low or sadness of lacking that sense of purpose. It could be a writer completing a novel, a runner after completing a marathon, but whatever the task, the project owner is left feeling empty after the storm has passed.

### Relationships

As you work longer on a project, you begin to make friends with the vendors, sponsors and staff you speak with on a regular basis, usually through phone calls or email. Once onsite, you put a face to the voice and continue building the bonding experience. This bond intensifies the longer you work on the same event. The long hours and stressful situations bond people together. You become a team. You are “in it together.” Being part of a team is something that most humans enjoy. I've known some people to be overwhelmed and cry at leaving their “event friends” behind. Once the event is over, everyone goes their separate ways. Sometimes forever or sometimes until next year. You've met some really great people, and you swear you'll stay in touch, either through LinkedIn, Facebook or email. However, at the end of the day, everyone you have been working with for months goes home and back to his or her “normal lives.” Sometimes you may feel alone.

### Tips to Battle Post-Event Depression

One positive thing to note is that since we know when the event will end, we can predict when these feelings of depression may strike and take action to prevent them. Here are some of the ways you can minimize or eliminate your feelings of post-event depression:

1. **Reorganize.** It helps to get yourself reorganized. Don't forget to wrap up the event you have been working on. Have a wrap-up celebration, do your wrap-up calls/meetings. Gather and analyze event data. Take some notes or maybe translate your previous notes so you can understand them later. Set some new goals. Enjoy the process of preparing for that next event.
2. **Relax and recover.** As event planners, we tend to consider ourselves last. Make sure to give yourself time to rest and recover from the long, stressful hours. Get in touch with nature. Go for a hike. Go camping. If possible, consider an “epic win reward” and take a vacation or go to the spa.
3. **Reward yourself.** You did it! You deserve a reward! What should you choose? These rewards should be very personalized and can be anything that makes you happy.
4. **Reconnect with family.** Remember those family and friends who took a back seat as your days got

progressively busier? Reintroduce yourself to your family — they probably have not heard from you in a while. Unless they are in the industry, your family and friends may not understand why you feel low about being done with something that seemed to cause you so much stress. Talk with them and share your thoughts.

5. **Rediscover yourself.** Think about the things you used to enjoy doing that you did not have time for while your event planning ramped up. I always go back to a knitting project that was put down as my days became busier. When I pick it back up, the purpose of my crocheting project returns and I feel better. Maybe you like gardening, running, playing scrabble or going to concerts. Whatever it is, get back to doing it.

### In Conclusion

Each year, event planning is consistently rated as one of the most stressful jobs. Even if you absolutely love your job like I do, you have to find a way to manage the stress that comes with it, which could be contributing to the occasional post-event depression feelings. The topic of depression is widespread and has a tremendous amount of variations. If this feeling does happen to persist or worsen, please seek professional assistance.

One of my favorite aspects of meeting and event plan-

ning is how we have the opportunity to be a part of the lives of so many different people and get a small peek into their different worlds. Don't forget to be thankful for those opportunities. Don't lose the understanding that the next meeting or event will bring even more connections, bonds and new experiences. Though our jobs can be stressful, focusing on the positive parts and remembering to take care of ourselves makes all the difference.

C&IT

*Note: This column originally appeared on [www.EventMB.com](http://www.EventMB.com).*

“I've known some people to be overwhelmed and cry at leaving their ‘event friends’ behind.”



### Jeannie Power, CMP

is Cofounder & Event Technologist of the Power Event Group. Jeannie is a leading expert and speaker in the event technology field and enjoys the challenge of creating a customized and engaging attendee experience by thoughtfully integrating event technology. She has more than 10 years of experience in on-line event registration management using a variety of software systems as well as extensive experience integrating mobile apps and gamification into meetings and event design. A social media fan, Jeannie is addicted to sharing information to improve the hospitality industry. Jeannie is a past president of Meeting Professionals International - Virginia Chapter and continues to play a key role in the organization.







ShowStoppers at Wynn Las Vegas is a grand example of the built-in entertainment at hand at gaming resorts.

# Gaming Resorts

## From Coast to Coast, Appealing Options Await at Casino Hotels and Resorts

By Mark Rowh

Gaming, one of the planet's oldest forms of entertainment, appears to be more popular than ever. According to the online statistics portal Statista, the gaming industry makes a direct contribution of more than \$100 billion annually to the U.S. economy and employs more than 700,000 people. Much of this activ-

ity takes place in casinos, which once were legal in only a few states but are now found across the country. As many casinos are located in luxurious as well as rustic hotels and resorts, these destinations have evolved as an appealing option not only for private outings, but also for corporate meetings and incentive programs.

Most casino hotels and resorts offer built-in entertainment onsite and at all hours, which is a big plus for meeting planners. Conference participants can complete all their business and go on to enjoy a welcome change of pace by going to a first-class show, playing the slots or even relaxing during a round of golf with clients and fellow meeting-

goers. All this without even leaving the property or the immediate area.

Jim Wood, president and CEO of Meet AC, the tourism economic development agency for Atlantic City, New Jersey, says that gaming resorts offer both value and strong entertainment options.

"Gaming destinations are becoming very bullish on the meetings market," he says. "There is some tremendous value to be had, especially if your corporate meeting is over midweek days and stays away from Friday and Saturdays." He notes that Sunday through Thursday patterns can receive all the benefits of

a world-class casino resort, but without paying the higher room rates over traditionally heavy weekends for the gaming destination.

At the same time, the readily available entertainment can be a real plus.

"A destination that offers gaming usually has a built-in entertainment component, which is a major benefit to any corporate meeting," Wood says.

"Companies can enjoy headliner entertainment that the casino is already providing so there can be savings to a company from that aspect alone." He adds that should a corporate planner look to hire entertainment for an event, casinos have strong relationships with entertainers that can be useful in booking talent.

Wood says that meeting planners and event participants alike may be surprised at the variety of attractions available, making gaming resorts attractive to non-gamblers as well as those who enjoy gaming.

"They can enjoy brand name retail stores and restaurants owned and operated by renowned chefs such as Gordon Ramsay, Guy Fieri, Bobby Flay and Wolfgang Puck, just to name a few," he says. "Other features include spas, health clubs, pools and nightclubs. Too, those resorts located on the water may offer the extra benefits of a beach setting."

### Popular Choices

From coast to coast, a variety of resorts offer attractive options for corporate meetings.

Deb Hammond, a vice president at Kent, Washington-based Worldwide Distributors whose duties include meeting planning, has found the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa in Reno, Nevada, a favored choice among meeting attendees. The company holds two trade shows a year at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center, with about half of the attendees staying at the Atlantis during the event. Par-

ticipants are buyers or owners of retail stores or sales representatives in the sporting goods industry. Each meeting draws about 1,000 to 1,200 attendees.

Hammond says gaming offers an enjoyable option.

"Many of our attendees come from smaller communities and enjoy having the opportunity to gamble

***"Gaming destinations are becoming very bullish on the meetings market. There is some tremendous value to be had, especially if your corporate meeting...stays away from Friday and Saturdays."***



**Jim Wood**  
President and CEO  
Meet AC  
Atlantic City, NJ

in the evenings after work," she says.

And both the city and the resort offer highly appealing features.

"Reno is a comfortable-sized city for our group," she says. "It's easy to get around and offers a variety of food and entertainment." She adds that the Atlantis is convenient for attendees to access the convention center.

"The Atlantis also gives us a convenient option for holding events in their ballrooms," she says. "They have an excellent catering staff and always exceed our expectations."

Hammond also lauds the relationship with the Atlantis sales staff.

"They always work to meet our needs while we're there," she says. "They have also worked as an advocate for us with the convention center."

An additional consideration is that there are no unions to deal with in Reno.

"This allows a lot of flexibility for our exhibitors and cuts the expense of attending," Hammond says. "We work on a tight budget as do most of our attendees, so it is a great value for us."

With 824 guest rooms, the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa offers 50,000 sf of meeting space, all located on the same



level. It has direct access via a sky-bridge to the Reno-Sparks Convention Center, which features an additional 500,000 sf of event space. Along with eight restaurants, guests can enjoy the facility's more than 60,000 sf of casino space. With slot machines and a variety of gaming tables, it also has a race and sports book, a poker room and several non-smoking gaming areas.

Because of optics, a casino resort may not be at the top of every planner's site selection list, however, there are countless alternative options for meeting at-

as appreciation gifts, the lively environment was seen as a plus.

"The gaming and nightlife atmosphere provided our conference attendees with greater opportunities for networking and casual, face-to-face meet-ups," she says. "We also liked the variety of dining options, and the availability of several intriguing venues for partner parties and formal networking receptions."

While the main meeting was being held at the Atlantis, several related events also were held at the convention center during the same time frame.

"When planning an event, there needs to be trust and confidence in the team you're working with to plan, prepare and successfully execute the event when arriving onsite," she says. "The Atlantis staff was fantastic to work with during our planning process, and they were very quick to respond to our requests onsite."

Lampert's group also found the large meeting spaces a plus.

"The meeting space was most definitely adequate for a large group," she says. "We hold several site visits a year to prepare for future events, and meeting space within a hotel is not always guaranteed. We appreciated having all of our attendees sitting in sessions within the same location during our annual event."

If nothing else, the gaming option expands possibilities for planners who seek some variety and attendance building.

"It's nice to offer options to customers," says Janine West, operations manager for Ferguson HVAC - EastWest Air, a wholesaler based in Louisville, Kentucky. "The more attractive the venue, the higher number of attendees. Gaming offers that."

She has held meetings at Indiana's French Lick Resort and Casino in both fall and winter, with attendance varying from 50 to 100 business owners.

"The facility is wonderful," she says. "It has so much to offer." She says that along with the gaming options, feedback from customers shows they enjoy taking in the hotels' history and listening to live music.

Two hotels offer a combined 686 guest rooms. The meeting and event center totals 105,000 sf of space, including a 22,000-sf adjustable ballroom. Groups ranging from 10 to 2,000 attendees can be accommodated.

### New and Noteworthy

Already known for its spacious rooms, **The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino** in Las Vegas has recently renovated 3,000 suites with new paint, wall coverings and carpet, along with enhanced technology including larger televisions and updated connections for electronic devices. Its meeting options continue

In 2015, the final phase of the multi-year renovation of The Venetian and The Palazzo Congress Center and Sands Expo was completed.



Credit: Las Vegas Sands Corp.

tendees who are not interested in gambling per se. In fact, many casino hotels locate their guest rooms and meeting spaces apart from the gambling areas.

### More a Plus Than a Minus

Janet Lampert, president and COO of Dynamic Communities Inc., an IT support organization in Tampa, Florida, acknowledges that a gaming resort might be viewed by some as a less desirable location for a conference since the nightlife and other activity could be a distraction to the event. But she and her team found the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa an ideal venue for an October 2015 summit attended by 4,200 participants. Along with a large room block and substantial number of room upgrades used

"Our event's expo and meal hall were located in the convention center, so it was a huge plus that the Atlantis had enough meeting space to accommodate the summit and was connected to the convention center for easy flow of traffic between sessions," she says.

Reno's proximity to Lake Tahoe was another draw.

"Oftentimes, we hear of attendees extending their trip to meet with family and friends to explore the city," Lampert says. "We knew our attendees would be eager to explore Lake Tahoe and would appreciate being only a short drive away from exploring."

She adds that quality of service provided by the resort's staff was a major consideration.



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to accommodate the largest of groups thanks to the huge amount of convention space available within the entire complex, which includes The Palazzo and the Sands Expo. In 2015, the final phase of the multi-year renovation of **The Venetian**

**and The Palazzo Congress Center**

*“Many of our attendees come from smaller communities and enjoy having the opportunity to gamble in the evenings after work.”*



**Deb Hammond**  
Vice President  
Worldwide Distributors  
Kent, Washington

**and Sands Expo** was completed. Recent improvements at Sands Expo included a new \$6 million, 12,000-sf kitchen designed to provide higher quality food for trade show attendees, support show growth and increase energy efficiency by 35 percent. This is in addition to the recent total remodel and redesign of all lobbies and common spaces; construction of a 60-foot central atrium with a 30,000-sf, 3-D articulated ceiling; reconstruction of meeting rooms and business center; renovation of the building facade and porte cochere; and upgrades to the exhibition halls.

Another large resort, the **Mohegan Sun** in Uncasville, Connecticut, continues to grow. Currently it combines three casinos offering more than 300,000 sf of gaming activities with a 34-story hotel tower featuring 1,200 guest rooms—and another tower now under construction. Other features include a large retail shopping area, spa and a 10,000-seat arena. Along with big-name performers, it hosts championship boxing and the home games of the Connecticut Sun WNBA basketball team. Among the many options offered by the three casinos are 5,000 slot machines and more than 300 table games.

The more than 100,000 sf of meeting and function space includes a 38,000-sf ballroom, 14,000 sf of prefunction space and a number of meeting rooms.

As if this isn't enough to satisfy virtually any meeting needs, the new hotel tower is slated to open in the fall of 2016. Featuring 400 guest rooms, an indoor pool and fitness center, the new facilities also will provide expanded meeting space.

Also offering impressive facilities is **Foxwoods Resort Casino** in Mashantucket, Connecticut, which bills itself as the largest resort casino in North America. Along with more than 150,000 sf of meeting and convention space, the huge complex features six different casinos, four hotels and other attractions including spas, theaters, golf courses, nightclubs, a bowling alley and retail outlets. Event space, which accommodates up to 2,000 guests, includes a 50,000-sf column-free ballroom.

Owned and operated by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, the resort has more than 2,230 guest rooms and suites at four onsite hotels: the Grand Pequot Tower Hotel, Great Cedar Hotel, the Fox Tower and Two Trees Inn.

For a different type of setting, Arizona's **We-Ko-Pa Resort & Confer-**

**ence Center** offers a desert location combining the attractions of the Fort McDowell Casino with golf and other activities. Along with 246 guest rooms and suites, there is indoor and outdoor meeting space totaling 55,000 sf. The 25,000-sf Wassaja Conference Center, featuring traditional motifs of the Yavapai Nation, includes an 18,000-sf ballroom divisible into smaller event areas ranging from 1,500 sf to 3,000 sf each. A 3,600-sf executive meeting facility has a 640-sf conference room and five similar-sized meeting rooms. The Fort McDowell Casino offers 866 slot machines, a variety of card games and a 1,200-seat bingo hall.

At the **MGM Grand Detroit**, some 30,000 sf of event space accommodates about 800 people. A 14,000-sf ballroom can be divided into four salons, and three 1,600-sf meeting rooms handle up to 86 people each. There are 400 guest rooms.

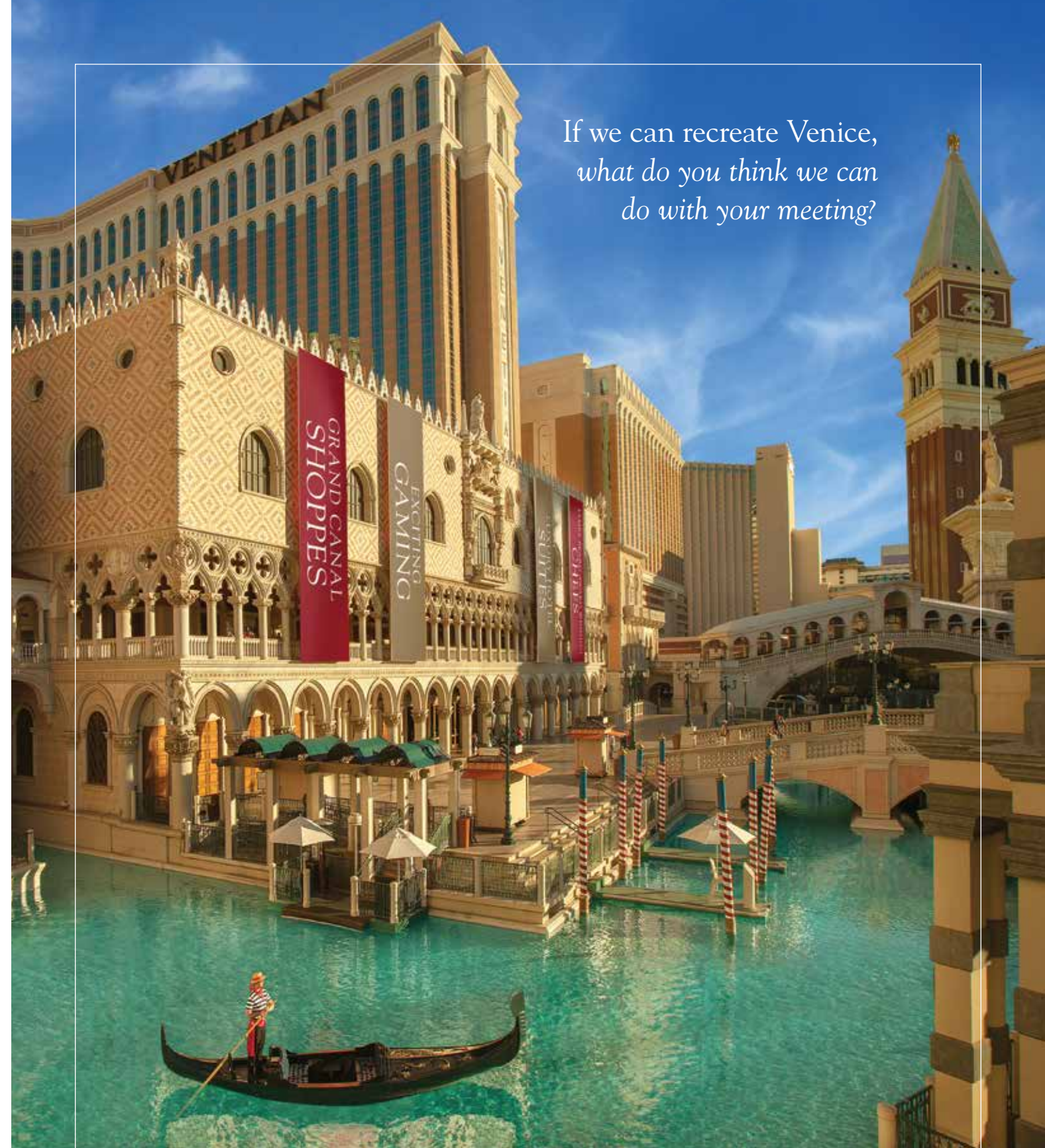
In Las Vegas, as the 50th anniversary of **Caesars Palace** approaches, the evolution continues with the reimagining of the iconic hotel's original tower, the Roman Tower, which was reborn as the new Julius Tower. The new 587-room tower features new design-savvy, modern rooms and suites.

The guest room amenities include 55-inch TVs equipped with Sonifi system, luxurious Beauty Rest Bouvet Island

From atop the Linq Hotel & Casino, a view of the New Year's Eve celebration marking the beginning of 2016—the 50th anniversary year of Caesars Palace Las Vegas.



Credit: Caesars Entertainment/Erik Kabik



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**Caesars Entertainment** also has three properties in Atlantic City. **Bally's** offers 1,760 guest rooms, many with ocean views, and 147 guest rooms in Bally's Tower have recently been renovated. The hotel provides 80,000 sf of meeting space, all located on one level, with 23 meeting rooms, from a 20-person boardroom to a ballroom for 1,900. There also is the Bally's Legends in Concert Theater, with 450 seats and plenty of technological capabilities.

Another Caesars Entertainment property in Atlantic City, the 1,144-

Harrah's \$125 million **Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center** made a big splash when it opened in September of last year, and it is now gearing up for the 2016 World Education Congress (WEC), hosted by Meeting Professionals International (MPI) in June 2016. The WEC will attract more than 2,500 attendees, including corporate, third-party and association planners, suppliers, industry faculty and students, and it will be the first time that MPI has hosted a congress in Atlantic City. The Waterfront Conference Center offers 100,000 sf of meeting space and state-of-the-art technology throughout the venue. The huge amount of meet-

ference Center, a 1,200-seat theater and an indoor pool covered by a 90-foot glass dome.

Atlantic City's 2,000-room **Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa** provides 70,000 sf of event space, accommodating 10 to 3,500 people, including a 12,000-sf meeting room. All meeting spaces at Borgata have built-in lighting systems, extensive video and sound technology, with additional meeting venues at **The Water Club**, the 800-room upscale hotel adjoining the Borgata. The 18,000 sf of meeting space at The Water Club includes 13 venues accommodating 20 to 200 people, with its own banquet and catering department, signature in-room dining and banquet menus by noted chef Geoffrey Zakarian, and access to Immersion, the 32nd-floor, 36,000-sf spa and lap pool.

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."

**Encore Resort** and Encore Tower Suites at **Wynn Las Vegas** began a refresh in summer 2015, including updated furnishings, floor coverings, technology, aesthetics and custom bed linens. Also of note is that the Wynn Fairway Villas and Encore three-bedroom duplex are now available for guests to rent. The 5,829-sf Encore duplex features a billiard room and private massage and exercise room with floor-to-ceiling views of the city. The dining area seats 16. The Fairway Villas overlook Wynn Golf Course.

The Buffet at Wynn Las Vegas has unveiled the restaurant's new concept, which elevates the traditional buffet to that of a more sophisticated dining experience. **C&IT**



room **Caesars Atlantic City**, has 28,000 sf of meeting space, including the 17,135-sf Palladium Ballroom, with its generous prefunction space and elegant atmosphere. Ten meeting rooms range from 490 sf to 1,262 sf, and can be combined to create a larger space. The renovated Circus Maximus Theater at Caesars has comfortable seating for more than 1,500 guests for special events, and renovations of 286 guest rooms in Temple Tower will be completed by May. And, of course, for planners booked into Bally's and/or Caesars, meeting options can be extended at sister property **Harrah's Resort Atlantic City** and its new Waterfront Conference Center.

ing space can be easily reconfigured into as many as 63 individual meeting rooms, including two 50,000-sf pillarless ballrooms that can accommodate up to 5,000 guests.

"We are happy to be partnering with Caesars Entertainment in hosting MPI's WEC in 2016," says Meet AC's Jim Wood. "This is a strategic direction for Meet AC and for Atlantic City as we continue to diversify our mix of business. Showcasing Atlantic City to over 1,000 meeting planners and over 2,500 total attendees will definitely help us grow the meetings and conventions market."

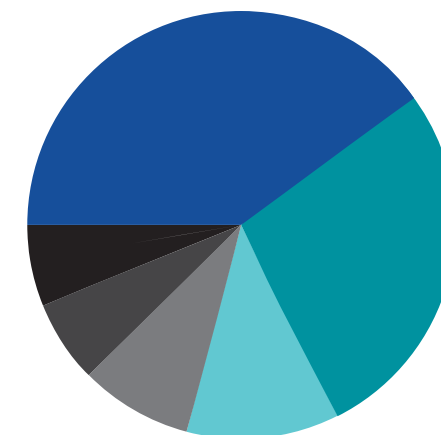
Harrah's Resort's other features include 2,590 hotel rooms, directly accessible from the Waterfront Con-

# BORGATA.

## MORE THAN MEETINGS.

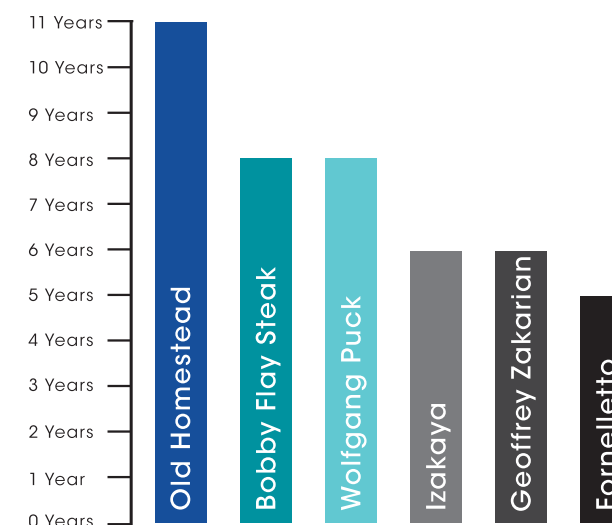


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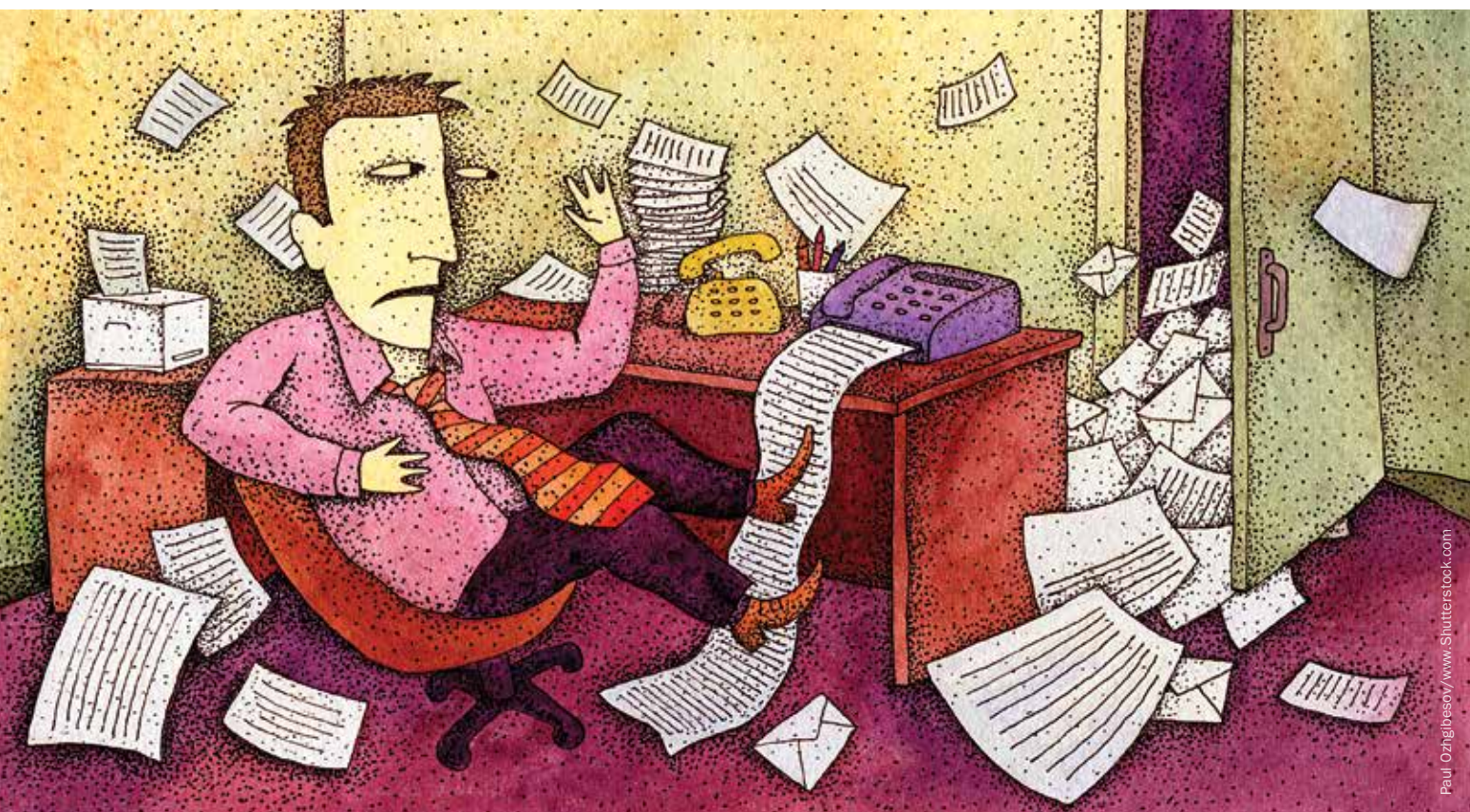
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## Surviving the eRFP Avalanche

### Don't eBlast Your Way Out of Contention — Stand Out From the Crowd

By Derek Reveron

Once upon a time, planners submitted requests for proposal (RFPs) to hotels via snail mail and fax. Planners were selective about the number of properties they contacted because it took so much time to prepare the proposals and several days or more to get a response. As a result, hotels were confident that most eRFPs were good for business. But not anymore.

After eRFP technologies came into play in the late 1990s, planners began to bombard properties with proposals at the touch of a button. The overload, combined with limited hotel staff, prevents properties from reading most eRFPs, forcing them to triage responses and answer only quality leads. And those responses can be late or incomplete — often in a formatted reply instead of a competitive proposal.

Add to that to a seller's market, with properties knowing they can fill rooms without responding to most eRFPs, and it's clear that rampant distribution is self-defeating. Yet, the e-blasting continues, causing eRFPs to fall far short of their potential to make planners more efficient and productive.

There is a heightened awareness that eRFPs are becoming counterproductive for planners. "We haven't had that perspective because the thinking has been that any eRFP is a good eRFP," says Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP, chair of the Convention Industry Council's APEX Workgroup on eRFP and managing director of DMAI's *empowermint.com*. "However, the current market conditions of limited hotel supply and great demand make hotels much more selective. While it might have seemed like a good thing to send out a bunch of eRFPs, the potential business opportunities they represent aren't as welcomed by hotels."

The lack of responses is vexing for planners. "What I hear from them in

Following are recommendations from experts and planners for preparing eRFPs that are more likely to get a response.

#### Limit the List

First of all, don't scattershot eRFPs to see which hotels respond and then decide which properties fit best. Instead, first cull the list of hotels to three to five that are the best



***"Narrowing the field initially demonstrates the value of your meeting to properties, and you get a better response."***

**Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP**  
Managing Director, *empowermint.com*

match. "People think if they check lots of boxes they will save time because they won't have to go back and forth," says Shimasaki. "But it may add time to the workload. The more boxes checked, potentially the more responses you get, which means more time to consolidate and present them to stakeholders. Narrowing the field initially demonstrates the value of your meeting to properties, and you get a better response."

#### Details, Details

Provide detailed information about each group including its needs and goals. Send a profile of attendees, including demographic information. Also provide at least three years of meeting history that includes the number of attendees, the properties used, size of room blocks

***"The hotel needs to consider how setup impacts its bottom line before answering the eRFP."***

**Kathy Miller, President and Chief Creative Officer**  
Total Event Resources, Schaumburg, IL



seminars and other education settings is their frustration about not getting complete, competitive, timely responses," says Shimasaki. "They feel like the hotels aren't paying attention to their needs, and it's all about the properties' needs."

and spending on food and beverage. Such information is crucial because it allows properties to estimate the revenue they can generate from a meeting, and that increases the likelihood of a response. Hotels are more

like to respond to detailed eRFPs that generate revenue.

Make eRFPs detailed but not long-winded. Experts advise using bullet points that cover the following areas: agenda; sleeping rooms, including suites, corner rooms and ocean rooms; offices; meeting rooms, including breakouts, configurations and rooms for pop-up meetings; AV and technology requirements; concessions needed;

date flexibility; food and beverage; room pickup; and setup time.

#### Setup Requirements

The setup time requirement is a detail that planners often leave out of eRFPs. "If you have a tight turnaround time, include it and ask if the hotel can handle it," says Kathy Miller president and chief creative officer of Total Event Resources, a Schaumburg Illinois-based meeting planning company. "I had a situation where a session ended at five and the reception started at six," says Miller. "The hotel said it could turn the room around within an hour, but all hands on deck were needed at the last minute, and we barely made it."

In addition, Miller advises planners to include whether they need pre-setup time before the meeting starts.

"Tell the hotel if you need, say, two days of pre-setup because you have a 40 x 60 stage or extensive AV and you have to rig into the ceiling," says Miller. "The hotel needs to consider how setup impacts its bottom line before answering the eRFP."

When it comes to meeting space dimensions and capabilities, planners can't be too specific. "We have to be very clear with them on the actual size we need, including the quantity and quality of AV that can be accommodat-



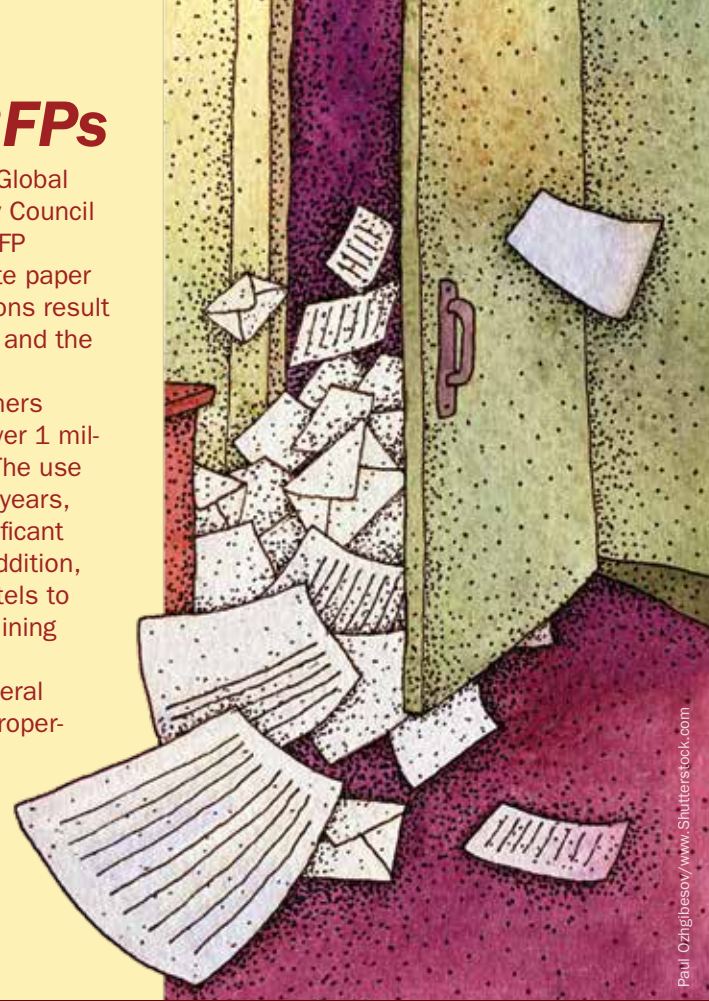
# Effective and Efficient eRFPs

In an effort to help planners write more effective eRFPs, the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) and the Convention Industry Council (CIC) APEX Workgroup recently released a joint white paper, “eRFP Efficiency and Effectiveness for the Meetings Industry.” The white paper outlines best practices for preparing eRFPs. The recommendations result from the CIC’s 20 interviews with a variety of meeting planners, and the GBTA’s online survey of buyers, third parties and suppliers.

According to the executive summary of the white paper, planners worldwide use eRFPs to source hotels and meeting space for over 1 million meetings each year. The executive summary reports that “The use of eRFPs to source hotels and venues has burgeoned in recent years, bringing many benefits to the meetings industry, and a few significant challenges due to the high volume of eRFPs being issued.” In addition, the summary says, “These challenges include difficulties for hotels to respond to leads in a timely and complete manner, and the declining probability of business materializing from those leads.”

To address the problem, the white paper suggests taking several steps, including educating buyers on the impact of inundating properties with eRFPs. “It starts with education,” says Shimasaki. “If you aren’t educated as a meeting professional about how the eRFP landscape has shifted, then you won’t be in a position to be highly valued to stakeholders.”

According to the white paper, “Some buyers and many customers do not fully understand how hoteliers evaluate their



ed within a given setup,” says Jay Klein, CMP and COO of A-Plus Meetings and Incentives in Coral Gables, Florida. “We also include the types and number of tables and chairs available, the ability to split and combine rooms as well as change setups between sessions.”

## F&B

Planners also must be as detailed as possible about another factor that heavily impacts eRFP responses — food and beverage requirements. “We give as much information as we can about food and beverage,” says Miller. “That’s how hotels evaluate whether a meeting is a good piece of business, because most of their revenue comes from food and beverage.”

## Date Flexibility

Being flexible about meeting dates when possible is another key to encouraging timely eRFP responses. Some planners feel that flexibility weakens negotiating ability and encourages

hotels to slot meetings into dates that best benefit the property.

Klein disagrees. “Let them know whatever flexibility you have upfront so you are not going back and forth on it,” he says. “I’m a tough negotiator, but I don’t want any surprises from a room-block standpoint. For example, I may tell them my preferred dates, whether I can move plus or minus two weeks, and if the pattern must be Sunday through Wednesday or Monday through Thursday. I ask if they have a better deal on those different dates or patterns.”

Before sending an eRFP, Miller may ask the group if date flexibility should be included, or she may include it on her own, depending on the group. “I don’t see the downside to being flexible,” says Miller. “What usually happens is that planners send dates they want, and hotels respond saying they can’t meet those times and ask if there is flexibility. So why not be flexible upfront? It saves time and you show hotels you are willing to work with them.”

Miller cites an example: “A hotel might say that, for your preferred date, the rate is \$229 a night,” she says. “But if I say upfront I can go plus or minus two weeks and can shift the pattern by a day, they may say that if you can shift by a week, you can get \$199. That means I’ve found value for my group and provided an option. I’m also helping the hotel because they can fill room holes by offering me a lower rate.”

Shimasaki offers the following advice on meeting-date flexibility: “What we say in the industry is that planners aren’t flexible until you tell them what you can’t give them,” she says. “If not being flexible works, that’s great. But if not, having some forethought about flexibility is important. It’s one of many levers that planners can use. Giving the hotel the ability to propose alternatives and give in on others is good communication. But if the planner holds all the cards close to the vest, it doesn’t develop trust.”

business and mistakenly believe that issuing more eRFPs will somehow help them identify the best venue at the best price with more options.”

The white paper advises sourcing professionals (buyers, meeting management companies and CVBs) to inform planners of the impact of over-issuing eRFPs, and do research to ensure that the hotels sourced are appropriate for a meeting’s objectives.

In addition, the white paper suggests the following tips to write effective eRFPs and provide information that hotels need to evaluate the business impact of meetings.

- Improve the eRFP process by adopting standardized templates and better communications with hotels and venues.
- Understand the objectives of the event and selecting venues and destinations that are best suited to achieving those objectives.
- Spend more time qualifying the event and advising clients to be more strategic with questions.
- Narrow the list of destinations under consideration prior to issuing the eRFP.
- Use filters within the eRFP system to help narrow the list of potential venues.
- Send the meeting profile – name of the event, company, dates, purpose, objective of the meeting and attendee profile.
- Include room blocks by day, date flexibility and meeting space flexibility.
- Provide at least two years of history for the event, including items such as total event cost (breaking out food and beverage, audio-visual and Internet usage), day-by-day hotel guest room pick up and total number of attendees.
- Indicate the date by which you will decide on a short list of venues for final consideration, which should be within days of issuing the eRFP.
- Prioritize concessions requested.
- Understand existing room demand, such as citywide conventions and other events before sending the eRFP.

— DR

## Conciseness Counts

Selectively sending concise eRFPs helps establish good relationships with properties — a key to getting good responses over the long term. Klein finds that using an eRFP format helps conciseness. “It’s typically two or three pages,” says Klein. “They respond to us more quickly because we send something that’s well thought out and doesn’t get lost in the mishmash of eRFPs,” he says. “They know that we don’t randomly send it to 25 properties and are a serious contender for the business, so they pay a bit more attention to us.”

## Ask Questions

Finally, ask simple questions that can determine whether a property is right for a meeting. “Say you are running a tech meeting and the hotel absolutely must have a certain bandwidth

in the ballroom. Asking in the eRFP if the company has that capability can rule the hotel in or out,” he says.

Shimasaki agrees. “Reviewing an eRFP is especially important when it comes to the number of questions planners ask and conditions they want to include,” she says. “I’ve



***“They respond to us more quickly because we send something that’s well thought out and doesn’t get lost in the mishmash of eRFPs.”***

**Jay Klein, CMP, COO**  
A-Plus Meetings and Incentives, Coral Gables, FL

seen eRFPs with 38 questions, which takes a hotelier more than an hour to complete. Take a hard look at what is critical that you need to know.”

Even when planners do everything right, the timeliness and quantity of eRFP responses vary depending on several factors. “The responses are property-dependent and seasonal,” says Klein. “If I send it to 10 properties,

maybe in one to three days I’ll have six or seven responses. If a property that I really want to hear from doesn’t respond, then I follow up with an email or phone call. If I don’t get any response, then I assume it’s because of how busy they are or how they are managed.”

Planners don’t want to waste time

sending eRFPs that get no responses. Likewise, hotels don’t want to spin their wheels reading eRFPs that are incomplete or don’t match the property. Culling the number of properties beforehand helps reduce the eRFP overload and makes it easier for hoteliers to review requests. In the process, planners will go a long way in improving relationships with properties. **C&IT**



## Site Selection

# Destinations to Watch



## Why Planners Are Keeping an Eye on These Cities

By Derek Reveron

When stakeholders call a meeting to discuss site selection, planners better come to the table prepared with more than a random wish list. Being able to identify destinations with the best meetings infrastructures is the key, of course, and the most meaningful are those with peer-to-peer recommendations.

For example, surveys conducted by Watkins Research Group to find “The Best,” the “Most Improved” and the “Highly Recommended” asked planners to rate destinations based on eight “key attributes,” including hotels, accessibil-

ity, convention services and facilities, and having a “superior” CVB or DMO. Preferred meeting destinations often have several characteristics in common. For example, they are renovating and/or expanding their convention centers, building new hotels and renovating existing ones, and offering more unique venues that celebrate the local culture. They are expanding airport terminals and runways as well as enhancing the airport services and amenities. In addition, they offer their own destination-specific unique attractions. And lastly, they compete fiercely for meeting and conven-

tion business and are posting increased meeting and convention business and hotel occupancy.

Here are some cities that rank high on some planner preferred lists.

### Austin

Austin offers much more than one of the nation’s most diverse and liveliest music scenes — a huge draw for groups including National Instruments, a test, measurement and control solutions company in Austin, which held its annual customer and sales conference attracting about 6,000 attendees from



Austin

the United States and abroad. The conference was held in the Austin Convention Center (ACC).

Rod Siebels, senior group event manager – Americas, National Instruments, says that Austin’s music scene makes it an attractive meeting destination without being a resort city. “We have an evening allotted for conference parties, which last year used several downtown 6th Street music venues to create a music experience for all attendees,” says Siebels. “We have also done a local band at a single venue in the past at locations like the ACL Moody Theater, Palmer Event Center, The Long Center, Brazos Hall and others.”

Siebels also touts the capacity and service of the ACC, where the group held most of its events. “We chose the ACC due to our size requirements,” says Siebels. “We have an extensive number of speakers and 18-content track rooms, and they go above and beyond in helping my team plan and execute. As Austin has grown, the ACC has kept up its level of dedication and professionalism. The working relationship among the ACC, ACVB and hoteliers is world class. They come together to meet the challenges that a group like mine present.”

Siebels also cites Austin’s properties. “The new and renovated hotels are fantastic additions,” he says. “The proximity of the ACC to the hotel inventory is fantastic.”

New properties include the 1,012-room, 34-story JW Marriott Downtown, the largest hotel in Austin, and the 366-room, 20-story Westin Austin Downtown Hotel. The Westin features 15,000 sf of meeting and event space and is located a few blocks from the Austin Convention Center. A dual-brand, 33-story Aloft and Element project is



Boston

under construction and scheduled for completion in mid-2017.

### Boston

Boston, already a popular meeting and convention destination, is broadening business by attracting major sporting events. The international sporting events that Beantown will host over the next few years include the ISU World Figure Skating Championships, the IndyCar series Grand Prix of Boston, the NCAA Division I Men’s Basketball East Regional and the Tall Ships Festival as part of the Canada 150 Tall Ships Regatta.

New projects include the Loews Boston Hotel’s \$10 million renovation, which includes upgrades of all 225 guest rooms and suites, free Wi-Fi, six meeting rooms and a mini-ballroom with a 100-person capacity for receptions.

The 418-room Boston Marriott Burlington finished a multimillion-dollar renovation that expanded meeting space to 14,570 sf and includes a new restaurant.

The Hotel Commonwealth completed a \$50 million renovation, adding 96 rooms and 7,500 sf of meeting space, doubling total meeting and event space to 14,000 sf, including an outdoor terrace overlooking Fenway Park.

The Boston Park Plaza completed a \$100 million upgrade of its 1,054 guest rooms, six restaurants and 50,000 sf of meeting space.

### Chicago

Chicago offers a range of unique venues and meeting facilities, headlined by McCormick Place, one of the nation’s foremost meetings and conventions facilities. McCormick Place, which offers 1.2 million sf of meeting space and 2.6 million sf of exhibit space, is located



Chicago

within a five-mile radius of more than 33,000 downtown Chicago hotel rooms.

Looking to attract even more meetings and conventions, McCormick Place has made several improvements that include faster Wi-Fi, a rooftop garden and a 10,000-seat event facility. A new 1,200-room Marriott Marquis is under construction next to McCormick Place. The property joins the onsite Hyatt Regency McCormick Place with 1,260 guest rooms and a 25,000-sf conference center.

In other hotel news, the Chicago Hilton is undergoing a \$16 million restoration of 658 guest rooms and 10 meeting rooms. The Renaissance Chicago Downtown is undergoing phase two of its renovation, which includes 4,000 sf of additional meeting space and a new ballroom overlooking the Chicago River.

### Cleveland

Cleveland, once an afterthought when it came to meetings and conventions, has transformed itself into a competitive destination with expanded meeting space, nightlife, arts and increasing hotel capacity.

Cleveland plans to increase the number of available hotel rooms by 15 percent before 2017. More than 20 hotel projects representing more than 3,400 rooms are either under construction or are scheduled to break ground this year.

The projects include a 280-story, 600-room Hilton that will be connected to the 225,000-sf FirstMerit Convention Center of Cleveland, which opened last year and will host the 2016 Republican National Convention. Properties that have opened over the past two years include the 494-room Westin Cleveland, a conversion of a former Crowne Plaza; and the 135-room Aloft Hotel.





Cleveland



Columbus



Denver



Indianapolis



Milwaukee



Nashville

## Columbus

Twenty years ago, Columbus was not among the nation's most popular meeting destinations. In recent years, however, Columbus has gradually ramped up its meetings infrastructure and is an up-and-coming meeting destination.

Numbers tell the story. During the last quarter of 2015, Columbus hosted 126 groups, citywide events, conventions and sporting events. In 2014 (the latest year available), hotel occupancy overall increased 3 percent, the average daily rate (ADR) grew 5.5 percent and RevPAR rose 8.7 percent, according to Smith Travel Research.

The rising number of groups meeting in Columbus includes a company that recently held a meeting for 200 members of its nationwide corporate leadership team.

The company chose Columbus because of all the improvements in the city's meetings-related infrastructure. "New hotels have really added to the attractiveness of the destination," says the company's planner, a CMP who wished to remain anonymous. "Downtown Columbus has really been revitalized over the last few years, everywhere from the outdoor event space at the Columbus Commons and Scioto Mile — a riverfront park system featuring interactive fountains, a 3-D installation and a cultural arts center — to the restaurants and shopping at Short North and Easton Town Center."

The planner, who says Columbus now offers a better selection of meeting hotels, has held meetings at the Hilton Polaris, Northpointe Hotel and Conference Center, and Embassy Suites Dublin.

The meeting for 200 attendees took place at the Sheraton on Capitol Square (403 rooms, 16,500 sf of meeting space) for several practical reasons. "We were able to take over most of the meeting

space," says the planner. "The ballroom could accommodate the entire group in rounds, plus we needed seven additional breakout spaces for five days. They could offer separate meeting space for lunches with nice outdoor views. Also, the downtown location was great for guests since it is close to both our office and restaurants for guests."

New projects in the city include a \$125 million renovation and expansion of the Greater Columbus Convention Center (GCCC). The project, which began in September, will result in 373,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space and a new 800-car parking garage that will connect to GCCC by skywalk.

New properties include a new Courtyard by Marriott with an accompanying 13,000-sf Grand Event Center that offers three meeting rooms and a ballroom that accommodates up to 400 people. The 135-room hotel will open by summer 2016.

A new dual-branded Marriott and Renaissance Inn will open with a 240-room, full-service Marriott and a 114-room Residence Inn, and include 12,000 sf of meeting and event space.

## Denver

Denver offers much more for meetings than views of the Rocky Mountains and a pristine natural environment. The mile-high city provides everything a planner needs for successful meetings including several neighborhoods popular among visitors.

LoDo (Lower Downtown) is a 26-square-block area offering more than 90 restaurants, rooftop cafés, breweries, music clubs and sports bars. LoDo also features the nation's largest concentration of restored turn-of-the-century Victorian brick warehouses.

Meeting and convention venues are

headlined by the Colorado Convention Center (CCC). In November, Denver voters passed a special initiative that approves expansion of the CCC. The expansion will add up to 85,000 sf of new flexible meeting space, 120,000 sf of new prefunction space and increased capacity for Wi-Fi and streaming video.

Like many top destinations, Denver is attracting more meetings. The number of people visiting Denver for conventions and business travel in 2014 (the latest figures available) increased 5 percent, or 2.4 million, over 2013, according to a report commissioned by Visit Denver, the city's CVB.

Denver offers roughly 44,000 hotel rooms citywide and almost 10,000 rooms within walking distance of the CCC. These properties include the Hyatt Place/Hyatt House hotel, which opened in November two blocks from the CCC. Other new downtown properties include the 221-room Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center, and the 150-room Aloft Hotel Denver, downtown.

In addition, the 519-room Westin Denver International Airport opened in November with 27,500 sf of meeting space. The hotel is one of only four in the nation directly attached to an airport terminal. The Westin Denver will have its own station on the 23-mile electric commuter rail that will open April 2016 and run from the airport to Union Station downtown. Properties under construction include the dual-branded AC Hotels by Marriott and Le Meridien Hotel, scheduled to open downtown in early 2017.

## Indianapolis

Indianapolis boasts one of the best collections of meeting spaces in the nation, led by the Indiana Convention Center

(ICC), which was almost doubled in size and is now the 17th largest in the nation.

The ICC offers 566,600 sf of exhibit space, 71 meeting rooms and three ballrooms. The ICC is connected via walkway to Lucas Oil Stadium, a multiuse facility with 12 meeting rooms named "Best Stadium of the Year" three consecutive years by *Stadium Journey Magazine*. Together, the two facilities offer 749,000 sf of exhibit space and connect via enclosed skywalks to 4,500 hotel rooms and 12 hotels. More than 300 restaurants, shops and attractions are within walking distance of the facilities.

Unique venues include the Grand Hall & Conference Center at Historic Union Station, built in 1888. The facility now offers more than 55,000 sf of space covering 30 breakout rooms and five ballrooms, including the Grand Hall seating 850 people and the 300-seat capacity Illinois Street Ballroom. Another venue, the European-styled Indiana Roof Ballroom, is a 15,700-sf facility that includes a 3,000-sf bar and 8,700-sf ballroom encircled by a 2,500-sf promenade area.

## Milwaukee

Planners are attracted to Milwaukee's convention and meeting "campus," which consists of the Wisconsin Center (WC), the Milwaukee Theatre and the UW-Milwaukee Panther Arena. The WC offers 188,695 sf of contiguous exhibit space and the 37,506-sf Grand Ballroom. Meeting space includes 39,640 sf that can be divided into 28 meeting and breakout rooms. The Milwaukee Theatre accommodates up to 4,086 people.

There are more than 16,000 hotel rooms in the Greater Milwaukee area that offer more than 120 meeting rooms. Properties include the renovated 729-room Hilton Milwaukee, 481-room Hyatt

Regency Milwaukee and the upcoming Springhill Suites Milwaukee Downtown Marriott, which collectively offer 1,200 guest rooms and are connected via skywalk to the WC.

## Nashville

The city's meeting business received a big boost since the opening of the downtown Music City Center (MCC), which includes 60 meeting rooms totaling 90,000 sf, a 57,500-sf Grand Ballroom and a 350,000-sf exhibit hall. So far during fiscal 2016, MCC has hosted 164 events with 324,167 attendees, according to Nashville's Convention Center Authority.

Nashville's hospitality industry has achieved an unprecedented milestone: 60 straight months of year-over-year record number of hotel rooms sold and hotel taxes collected. No other Top 50 destination city in the United States has ever reached 60 consecutive months of record growth, according to the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp. and based on research by STR.

Helping set the record was Ingram Micro Inc., which held their first-ever Nashville event — a conference for 1,900 sales and marketing employees as well as customers — at the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center, which offers 600,000 sf of meeting space.

Jennifer Pace, senior manager, event services, of the Williamsville, New York-based Ingram Micro, says the company chose Nashville for several reasons. Most important, Nashville has expanded its downtown meetings infrastructure, says Pace. "Nashville has focused on the meeting and event industry, and by that I mean continuously building hotels with large numbers of rooms and meeting space to capture business for big

meetings and conventions. The MCC is a great example. Other cities are looking at Nashville's success and thinking they can make changes and have the same kind of success."

Pace cites Nashville's top-notch meeting space and value. "We chose the Gaylord because of its vast amount of meeting space, which allowed us to keep the entire group under one roof," says Pace. "The value was also a driving factor as Nashville is still a great bang for your buck. We see it slightly changing with the popularity. As a planner that sees budgets staying stagnant, I hope that Nashville doesn't price itself so that repeat business can't afford it for their future meetings."

No other destination offers Nashville's unique musical culture. "It was a major focus during our meeting," says Pace. "We hired a local songwriter to write and perform a custom song about our event. It was a huge hit. We also hired a lot of local bands to entertain at our evening functions. We rented out the Wildhorse Saloon located downtown and brought our attendees there for the last night celebration."

Pace notes that Nashville also has a good selection of meeting hotels, including the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center. "The Gaylord Opryland provides exceptional service no matter what, but the hotel went above and beyond with their overall flexibility and managed our last-minute requests with success," says Pace. "They also took wonderful care of the event planning team, helping us to keep sane during the program operation. Gaylord also worked closely with us on budget and was able to get us discounted pricing for the offsite evening event at Wildhorse Saloon."

This may not be the last time that the





New York



San Francisco



San Diego

Ingram Micro group meets in Nashville. “We will absolutely consider Nashville as a meeting destination again,” says Pace. “We will also consider the Gaylord for future business as well as some downtown hotels for smaller events.”

### New York

The Big Apple, a prime international destination, is in a class by itself when it comes to offering everything that a meeting needs to be successful. No other city in the world offers New York’s immense range of hotels, unique venues, restaurants, attractions, entertainment and shopping.

New York added about 6,000 new sleeping rooms to its hotel inventory last year, bringing the total to approximately 107,000 rooms.

Hotel inventory is a big reason why New York City welcomed a record number of meeting and convention attendees, 6.1 million, in 2015, according to NYC & Company, the city’s CVB. Overall, New York welcomed an estimated 58.3 visitors in 2015, up 1.8 million visitors from 2014.

Fred Dixon, president of NYC & Company, stated, “We are pleased to see a sixth year of tourism growth in New York City as we welcomed 58.3 million visitors last year. The city continues to evolve, always offering fresh reasons to visit again and again, with more new developments on the horizon. However, with the continuing pressure on the global economy and the strengthening dollar, we will all need to work even harder in 2016 to sustain our competitive edge.”

### San Francisco

Ask planners to name the top meeting cities in the U.S. and San Francisco is often at the top of the list.

San Francisco attracts a range of meetings from small to citywides to some extent because of its diversity. The city offers several unique neighborhoods, art and cultural venues and one of the nation’s best dining scenes.

Meeting space is headlined by the Moscone Center, one of the nation’s premier convention facilities. The center is scheduled to complete its expansion in 2018, adding more than 170,000 sf of meeting space, including a 50,000-sf ballroom. An enclosed pedestrian bridge will connect the center’s North and South building.

The San Francisco Travel Association hopes to draw more meetings with the recent introduction of its “Meeting Neighborhoods” concept. Hotels and venues in unique neighborhoods will cooperate to provide more meeting spaces and guest rooms than a single property can provide.

No wonder visitors continue to flock to San Francisco, giving it one of the highest hotel occupancy levels in the nation — about 84 percent. The city continues to add new rooms and improve existing ones.

New and improved San Francisco hotels include the 1,195-room Westin St. Francis, which opened in 1904 and has renovated 50,000 sf of meeting and special event space in the Landmark and Tower buildings. Improvements include art deco architecture, fresh paint, new carpeting, crafted chandeliers and energy-efficient LED lighting.

Hyatt and San Francisco International Airport have agreed to co-brand and co-manage the 350-room Grand Hyatt San Francisco International Airport, which is scheduled to open in mid-2019.

The Palace Hotel has completed a \$40 million renovation, which includes

redesigned guest rooms and public space, including the Garden Court.

### San Diego

This West Coast gem offers perfect year-round weather for meetings accompanied by an expanding infrastructure of hotels and meeting space. As a result, San Diego is booming with hotel and meeting growth.

Citywide hotel occupancy was 74.6 percent in 2014 and was projected to increase to 77.7 percent in 2015 and surpass 78 percent in 2016 and 2017, according to a San Diego study by Tourism Economics. Downtown hotel occupancy exceeded 80 percent. ADR was estimated to increase 6.1 percent in 2015 and REVpar was projected to rise 10.5 percent.

According to reports published in February 2016, more than 2,000 hotel rooms are under construction in San Diego after years of drought, with roughly 7,400 more in the pipeline.

Two midrise properties within Liberty Station are under construction, as is a 300-room luxury hotel downtown, and a highrise on Lane Field is nearing completion. In Oceanside, there are multiple mid-sized projects in various planning stages, and Legoland proposed a second themed hotel.

Other projects include a new 400-room InterContinental Hotel on the waterfront at the site of a former ballpark. The project is expected to debut in early 2018. Kimpton’s 235-room Hotel Solamar plans to update all guest rooms, the event center and lobby space in a “high-end Mediterranean style.” The completion date is set for spring 2016. Meeting rooms and the ballroom also will get new carpeting and new lighting.

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Paul Salinger (l), vice president of marketing for Oracle, and Jeff Chase, vice president, sustainability for Freeman, at the 2014 Oracle OpenWorld conference in San Francisco. Oracle's mission is to hold "the most sustainable conference in the world."

# Rethinking Sustainability

## Encouraging Green Initiatives at Events Is Good Business, Too

For Rebecca Schnitzler, event operations manager at Aimia in Minneapolis, sustainable meetings are a key way for her company to promote good corporate social responsibility across the meetings and events they hold.

"In our daily lives, we don't mind taking a couple of extra steps to place something in the recycling bin," Schnitzler says. "We should adopt the same habits when we are attending a meeting in another community."

Aimia is not alone in its efforts to incorporate sustainability components into meetings and events. Today's corporations recognize that "green" business means good business, especially when a more holistic notion of sustainability is embraced.

Kerry Bannigan, co-founder of Nolcha, an award-winning events and meeting agency based in New York City, integrates a number of sustainable components into events. Examples include recycling of luncheon materials and food waste along with paper used throughout the day as well as donating to need-based groups.

"The conferences we host at the United Nations are all about positive world social impact, booking green locations and venues, while providing sustainable elements such as tote bags as the event goodie bag."

"We are in a society that is slowly becoming more educated on the importance of sustainability and how to integrate it into our personal and professional lives. It is important that meetings and events continue to introduce and encourage sustainable components as the impact can be vast due to the amount of people attending events," Bannigan says. "The more people actively participating in 'green' practices makes for a better place to live for us all and positively impacts others."

According to Bonnie Boisner, vice president of event management at Aimia, organizations have become increasingly scrutinized for their impact on the environment.

"We all have a footprint on this earth with a duty to protect and sustain it," Boisner says. "The greater the organization or event, the bigger the impact, whether that be positive or negative. Recent crises such as the water shortage in California have forced every industry to rethink sustainability initiatives. This issue particularly hits close to our industry as many of the largest business conferences and events domestically are held in California."

By Maura Keller

Credits: Shawna McKinley



Additionally, increased global travel has generated a greater awareness for other sustainability issues uncommon in the U.S., creating increased awareness and thoughtfulness in planning.

“Sustainability is extremely important for meeting/event planners to consider when orchestrating an event,” Boisner says. “The sheer impact large groups of people can have on the environment, social issues and economic impact must be considered. When you are planning events for thousands, sometimes tens of thousands of people, it is imperative that we are cognizant of the impact and try to maximize our positive impact and minimize harm.”

Jeff Chase, vice president of sustainability at Freeman in Dallas, says that a common misconception on the part of corporate and incentive meeting and event planners is many saying, “I would love for my event to be more sustainable, but I do not have time to focus on this.”

“However,” Chase says, “Over the past few years, our event industry has been transforming to help the event organizer with methods and procedures to track and measure their event’s footprint on the environment. All you need to do today is ask for it from your vendors, and

most of them have the ability to generate a good impact report for their event.”

### Promoting Zero Waste

An outstanding example of how far meetings and events have advanced in the sustainability arena is to review what Oracle has accomplished at their



*“Sustainability is extremely important for...planners to consider. The sheer impact large groups of people can have on the environment, social issues and economic impact must be considered.”*

**Bonnie Boisner**, Vice President of Event Management  
Aimia, Minneapolis, MN

OpenWorld annual conference in San Francisco with the help of MeetGreen, which provides sustainability consulting services for Oracle. In 2014, there were 50,327 participants at the Moscone Center, and according to Oracle, the waste footprint of each OpenWorld participant is equal to the weight of eight baseballs. In 2014, they managed three baseballs fewer than in 2012. The company’s aim is to “pick up the pace of reduction and recycling to reach zero waste to landfill by 2018.”

In addition, they say their onsite carbon emissions have dropped by 41 percent since 2011 due to reduced shuttle

fuel use and energy efficiency upgrades at venues, which “puts us on track to achieve a 50 percent reduction in onsite emissions by 2018.” Oracle offsets 100 percent of these emissions and compliments their attendees for also choosing to offset their travel footprint — more than 6,161 metric tons of carbon emis-

sions were offset in 2014.

Other ways in which Oracle sets a fine example for the rest of the industry includes donating meals such as the 9,390 meals donated in 2014 to local charities.

### Debunking the Myths

Misperceptions about sustainable events and meetings abound within the meeting industry. Here are a few that industry experts often experience:

**Myth.** Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is just a trend. It will not last.

**Reality.** According to Boisner, corporate social responsibility is a motivating factor for attracting, retaining and rewarding employees. In fact, 87 percent of companies with CSR programs have employees who exhibit strong company loyalty. (Source: *Incentive Marketing Association’s Performance Improvement Council*.)

What’s more, according to the 2014 SITE Index, CSR components of programs are here to stay and are part of budgets.

“These stats support the fact that CSR is a necessary component to the success of an organization,” Boisner says. “It isn’t a ‘nice to have.’ Your employees and buyers are both interested and invested in the impact you are making on the world. Meetings and events can be a great opportunity to show these audiences your commitment to sustainability.”

**Myth.** Only millennials want to par-

## In the Numbers

Sustainability and “going green” was top of mind as Waste Management and Casa Marina, a Waldorf Astoria Resort, teamed up to make the Seventh Annual Southeast Florida Regional Climate Leadership Summit a successful, first-ever zero waste event in Florida.

At the Summit, which concluded December 3, 2015, Waste Management and Casa Marina worked together to recycle 90.3 percent (1,713 pounds) of all waste generated by the more than 400 attendees. The remaining 9.7 percent of waste was processed at a waste-to-energy facility and produced renewable energy in the form of electricity.

Traditional recyclables (431 pounds), including cardboard, paper and plastic items, and aluminum and steel cans, were processed at Waste Management’s Reuter Recycling Facility in Pembroke Pines. Organic material, or food scraps (1,282 pounds), were recycled at the company’s Okeechobee Organics Recycling Facility and turned into compost.

“This was the first time in Florida that Waste Management was able to partner with a hotel customer and achieve a zero waste conference event,” says Greg Sullivan, senior district manager of Waste Management of the Florida Keys. “Our combined teams worked dili-



Florida’s first-ever zero waste event concluded with 90.3 percent of waste recycled and the remaining 9.7 percent produced into renewable energy.

gently together, both front- and back-of-house, to educate attendees and staff to ensure all waste was diverted to the proper containers for collection and processing.”

Operating in a responsible and sustainable manner is a Hilton Worldwide priority and a central part of their Meet with Purpose concept, designed to make it easier for meeting professionals to reduce waste and incorporate health and wellness into meetings and events.

— MK

ticipate in sustainability initiatives during meetings and events.

**Reality.** This is completely false. For example, Aimia incorporates CSR initiatives in many of their programs.

“Whether our participants are tagging sharks in Miami to learn more about the decreasing shark populations, making wheelchairs for the United Way or simply filling backpacks with school supplies for children in South Africa, we have noticed every generation wants to be involved,” Boisner says. “While the type of activity may vary based on your audience interests, one truth is apparent: People care. And, this is not limited or defined solely by generational nuances.”

**Myth.** “Sustainable” is a synonym for “green.”

**Reality.** Sustainability differs from the term “green” as it is more holistic in nature. Sustainability encompasses environmental, economic and social and/or behavioral issues, whereas green focuses on only two parts of the three — environmental conditions and economic strength. Meetings and events

have the ability to influence all sustainability initiatives — not just those that are coined green.

Chase adds that green relates more to the 4Rs — rethink, reduce, repurpose, recycle — and sustainability is broader in scope to bring a balance to the economic activities, environmental responsibility and the social/community programs together to be an overarching effort for an event.

**Myth.** “Green” is all about recycling.

**Reality.** Promoting good green practices goes beyond using the right bin — it’s all about learning a sustained behavior.

Angeline Holder, CMP, director of catering and events at Conrad Miami recently had a meeting where the planner wanted to ensure that their attendees reused their water bottles through the entire event, and beyond that, cultivate the practice of having a reusable bottle after the meeting ended. A vendor created the reusable water bottles, and Conrad Miami had water cooler stations through the meeting space with water infused with lemon and berries. “Attendees were

able to replenish their water bottles during and in between sessions,” Holder says.

**Myth.** Sustainability is too expensive.

**Reality.** “In reality, yes, back in 2006 it did cost more to do your signs on a recyclable material, but in the last 10 years, the world has changed and now the cost is the same or lower,” Chase says.

Jody-Ann Rowe, founder of Event Certificate in Ontario, Canada, says that as companies move toward integrating more sustainable practices within their events, they can pass on the higher cost if necessary for supporting these practices and using more efficient materials through a “green tax.” Or they can work with suppliers and vendors to communicate their needs and collaborate to gradually reduce cost.

Aimia recently identified five simple, cost-effective practices they use to reduce their carbon footprint at events:

- Efficient transportation practices such as encouraging use of public transportation within a certain radius of the event.
- Biodegradable serviceware.



As displayed on the Green Tour, The Westin Peachtree Plaza and executive chef Russell Sleight offer compostable, biodegradable serveware made of pine, bamboo and compost leaves that highlight the hotel’s cuisine.



- Digital invitations and event communications, and mobile apps and event websites for onsite communications.
- Water cooler stations maintained throughout the event.
- Donation of leftover food and beverages to local charities.

According to Karen Kotowski, CEO of the Convention Industry Council (CIC), one of the biggest myths about sustainable events is that they come with major commitments of financial resources on the part of the event organizer.

“What sustainable meetings require is a commitment to thoughtful choices and informed purchasing,” Kotowski says. “Cost savings in some areas will offset others. In fact CIC’s APEX/ASTM standards include a “Level 1” outline specifically designed to be cost neutral to event organizers. This offers a great roadmap to planners.”

**Myth.** Once you understand the concept, hosting sustainable meetings or events is easy to figure out.

**Reality.** While the concept of sustainability is not difficult to grasp, oftentimes certain restrictions and event needs can make event logistics more challenging.

“For example, sourcing local and organic ingredients can be problematic due to seasonal offerings and quantities,” Boisner says. “It might require a greater time commitment and network to determine how to make this happen.”

Chase stresses that there is nothing in the event business that is a breeze. “We learn to use best practices and plan for every possible thing that might change, but as you incorporate sustainability practices and do your best to use all your resources in our industry that can help guide you like the Green Meetings Industry Council materials, you will be better equipped to reach some very cool goals for sustainability,” Chase says.

**Myth.** Sustainable events require compromises to the attendee experience.

**Reality.** Kotowski says that simply isn’t the case, and she’d argue that the commitment to thoughtful choices

and design puts greater holistic focus on the attendee.

“I think if we look at other consumer experiences, say automobiles or dining out, we can see analogous situations where sustainable products can successfully reach a range of customers from the budget conscious to the luxury buyer,” Kotowski says. “The same applies to meetings.”

**Myth.** Knowing how to plan a sustainable meeting is specialized knowledge for just a few.

**Reality.** In fact, CIC’s CMP International Standards include sustainable meetings as part of the essential body of knowledge for meeting professionals.

**Myth.** The event/hospitality industry is the second most wasteful industry behind construction.

**Reality.** “From all the indications that we have, we are a very environmen-

*“Our event industry has been transforming to help the event organizer with methods and procedures to track and measure their event’s footprint on the environment.”*

**Jeff Chase, Vice President of Sustainability  
Freeman, Dallas, TX**

tally focused industry, and we are working on many sides of the event industry to continue to reduce our waste and set higher waste/recycling diversion goals to keep more out of the landfills,” Chase says. “New recyclable materials and local farm-to-fork programs are all helping to reduce our waste and GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions as an industry. We are all working to do the right thing for the planet.”

**Myth.** Sustainability will happen organically as technology improves.

**Reality.** Technology has and will continue to create some of the biggest changes in this arena. For example, the industry has seen a giant shift in the amount of paper printed and provided at events.

However, according to Rowe, while it is true that advances in technology can reduce the need for certain practices such as the volume of printing for an event,

it’s only effective if the event organizer recognizes and uses these systems.

“Even with the advances in technology, I have still attended events in the past year that printed a 20+ page program with speakers’ information and biographies for attendees,” Rowe says.

### What the Future Holds

Experts agree that sustainable events are here to stay. Naturally, the way we address space, signage, recycling, food and beverage and other social and economic issues will continue to evolve over time.

“Technological advancements will allow us to be more creative and innovative in the way we address sustainable events,” Boisner says. “Event industry professionals are passionate about helping our clients support their initiatives and will continue to stand behind a common goal to reduce our carbon footprints and make our world a better place.”

Chase says that the concept of sustainability is reaching the point of becoming more expected at an event.

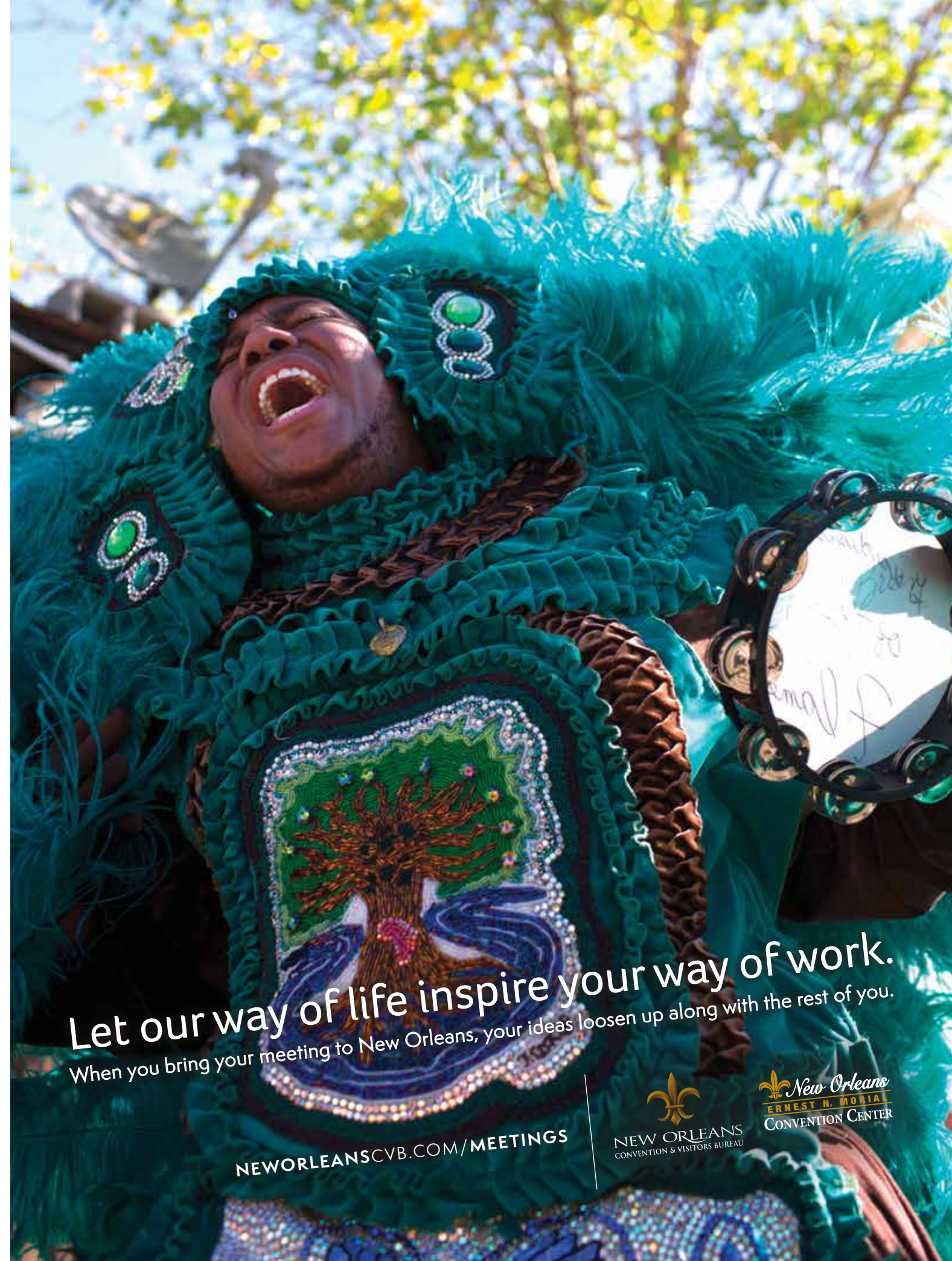
“From the supplier and venue side, we see that sustainability means being more efficient and being more cost-effective, so they

are doing it anyway because it makes good business sense and helps the bottom line,” Chase says. “The corporate planners need to show that their company cares, and the association planner has their membership that cares, so they need to align with the things they care about. Both need to show that they are doing the right thing for the planet and not just adding to the problem.”

As Chase explains, sustainability will become the standard way you do every event.

“Europe has already been operating with sustainable practices as their standard operating procedure (SOP) for several years, and the Americas are heading that way also,” Chase says. “Canada, Mexico and the U.S. are all embracing sustainable events; they are becoming more part of the SOP and will continue to be stronger every year.”

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# Asia-Pacific

## What's New in the Largest Business Travel Region in the World

Forever Living Products International's Global Rally at the Marina Bay Sands in Singapore included cultural entertainment.

By Ron Bernthal

**G**lobal business travel spending hit a record US\$1.2 trillion in 2015, with growth expected to remain strong through 2019, according to the Global Business Travel Association. GBTA reports that the Asia-Pacific region represents the lion's share of the spend, continuing to be the largest business travel region in the world. Although much of this growth will come from locally sourced businesses, American-based planners also are discovering the extraordinary (and often affordable) experiences that participants can enjoy during a meeting or incentive trip to this part of the world.

### -Australia-

When the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre successfully hosted more than 4,000 delegates and 2,500 media representatives for the G20 World Leaders Summit in 2014, the well-publicized meeting focused attention on Brisbane as an international business events destination. And since then, Australian DMCs, including Tourism and Events Queensland and Brisbane Marketing, have been expanding their presence in the MICE marketplace.

The G20 effect was a catalyst for many business, tourism and investment opportunities for Brisbane and the rest of the country. Australia has many cities, hotels and venues to choose from when planning a corporate meeting

or incentive event; it is a large country with diverse terrain and attractions, and all of these options make it easy to match your group's interest and budget to ensure that all objectives are met.

"In April, 2015, I worked with a top-level VIP incentive group of 60 participants from Amway North America," says Sonja Söderbom, AFMEA (Associate Fellow of Meetings Events Australia), director, destination management, for Ovation Australia. "The company was looking for that wow factor, a high-end, luxurious experience they couldn't plan or create themselves. The properties we used, qualia on Hamilton Island, on the Great Barrier Reef, and Shangri-La Hotel Sydney, were chosen for their location, high level of service and attention to detail. It was important we could create high-end, bespoke experiences capturing the best of each destination, be it chartering a vessel and snorkeling the Great Barrier Reef, or chartering a seaplane and landing at an exclusive lunch venue in a national park. Each component of the program needed to be executed seamlessly with a strong focus on brand presence at every turn, from branded gifts such as Uggs boots, Visa cards and golf carts on qualia, to name a few."

Throughout Australia, hotels, meeting venues and transportation options are being upgraded to appeal to international meeting planners.

In the heart of Sydney, the new International Convention Centre Sydney at Darling Harbour is scheduled to open in December 2016. Including the convention center, hotel and adjacent residential neighborhood, which is already open with vibrant cafés and shops available to visitors, the harbor is undergoing a \$2.5 billion overall revitalization. The final space will feature more than 430,000 sf of exhibition space, including a 54,000-sf event deck with views of both the city and harbor.

In Canberra, Australia's underestimated national capital city, the Canberra Convention Bureau has welcomed the Australian Capital Territory government's decision to provide AU\$5.4 million (US\$4.2 million) for the refurbishment of the National Convention Centre Canberra. The refurbishment, due for completion by the end June 2017, includes the upgrade of existing technologies and security systems, new seating and a makeover of bathroom facilities.

Qantas restarted flights between Sydney and San Francisco last December, four years since it shuttered the route in May 2011. This brings fresh competition to United Airlines, which is currently the only carrier offering direct flights between the two cities, and the competition certainly will help planners in their airfare negotiations. "San Francisco is now the most popular onward destination for Qantas' customers traveling to the U.S., and we're thrilled to be going back" said Qantas CEO Alan Joyce. American Airlines began daily direct flights between Los Angeles and Sydney as of December 17, 2015, the first time American Airlines has flown to Australia since 1992.

A quick look at some of the new properties that Starwood Hotels is opening in Australia in the near future demonstrates how important the continent is becoming for international hotel brands: Aloft Sydney (2016); The Westin Perth (2017); the Four Points by Sheraton Melbourne Docklands (2017); W Brisbane (2018); and Aloft Adelaide (2018).

### -China-

American meeting planners have been bypassing China's biggest cities, including Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing, for the smaller but more manageable cities in other areas of the country. With China's tremendous growth in American branded hotels, as well as expansion of the country's high-speed train lines and regional airports, it is no longer an imperative for planners to book corporate groups into the more costly, frenetic environment of China's biggest cities.

The Hilton Yuxi Fuxian Lake opened last spring, becoming the first Hilton-branded hotel in southwest China's interesting Yunnan Province. Yunnan is a growing area for tourism and manufacturing, and this new property is equipped with six meeting rooms (729 sf each), a 4,000-sf multipurpose room, and an 11,000-sf ballroom. The 346-room Hilton property sits on a private lakefront, white-sand beach, and guest rooms feature balconies with lake and garden views. In addition to an adjoining golf course and driving range, the property offers six bars and restaurants, and indoor and out-

door swimming pools, hotel-wide Wi-Fi and a fully equipped business center.

Xining, the capital of Qinghai province in western China, is the largest city on the Tibetan Plateau, with 2 million residents (small, by Chinese standards). The new Sofitel Xining, the city's first internationally branded hotel, has 494 guest rooms and suites, and is part of the Xining Xin Hua Lian City Complex, comprising the hotel, shopping center, office buildings and residential towers. There are multiple dining venues, swimming pool, fitness center, spa and 26,000 sf of function space.

Another area worth considering by planners is the idyllic island province of Hainan in south China, often referred to as the "Hawaii of China" for its sunshine and beaches. Hainan continues to grow as a meeting and incentive destination, with 48 luxury resorts and more than 20,700 rooms currently under development. The deluxe Sanya Beauty Crown Hotel complex offers more than 6,600 rooms and serviced apartments in its nine buildings that are designed to look like giant Lego trees. The complex includes the International Convention Centre, shopping and entertainment. Other top hotels coming to Hainan are the Hard Rock Hotel Haikou, the St. Regis Qingshui Bay Resort and Swissotel Sanya.

Conrad Hotels & Resorts continues its expansion in Asia-Pacific with the addition of the 300-room Conrad Ningbo, scheduled to open in 2020, adding to an existing pipeline of more than 10 Conrad properties in Asia-Pacific. The new Conrad Ningbo will take up the top floors of a 1,480-foot super structure, which will become the city's landmark building. Designed by Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects, known for the World Financial Center in New York and the Petronas Towers in Malaysia, the hotel will have 19,000 sf of event space, including a 10,000-sf ballroom.

Of course, incentive planners who want to provide their winners with the "highest" reward may want to look into the possibility of booking rooms in the world's second tallest structure, the Shanghai Tower, at 2,073 feet, which was completed in 2015 (but not yet open to the public as of press time) in the city's skyscraper-heavy Pudong district. The five-star Shanghai Tower J-Hotel, owned by Jin Jiang International Hotels, a major Chinese group, will occupy floors 84-110 of the tower, with the lobby on floor 101. The property will have 258 rooms, three restaurants and a spa, with high-tech bells and whistles everywhere.

Shanghai Disney Resort will host a multiday, grand opening celebration on June 16, 2016. Located in the Pudong District of Shanghai, it will be Disney's first destination resort in mainland China, featuring classic Disney storytelling and characters with all-new experiences tailored for the people of China.

### -Fiji-

Fiji continues to be one of the Pacific region's top choices for upscale incentives and corporate meetings. The recently reorganized Fiji Convention & Visitors Bureau and Tourism



Fiji has a new website and is aggressively marketing its islands to U.S. corporate meeting planners.

Despite Tropical Cyclone Winston's Category 5 impact on the island last month, hotels generally weathered the storm with most suffering little or no damage, according to Tourism Fiji.

Planners can organize events at one of Fiji's five-star resorts, including the Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort, Westin Denarau Island Resort, Shangri-La's Fijian Resort & Spa, and the InterContinental Fiji Golf Resort, or charter a yacht for a small, exclusive conference, stopping at some of Fiji's small, private islands, complete with white-sand beaches and palm trees.

Tourism Fiji, through the newly established Convention Bureau, understands the importance of MICE events, as visitors in this category have a higher average daily spend than most leisure visitors, and many planners don't mind taking advantage of lower rates for off-season visits. The Tourism

***"I highly recommend (Fiji) to corporate meeting and incentive planners as a destination with aura, romance and...it is more affordable than many other Pacific destinations."***



**Mark Faldmo, CTC, President**  
Columbus Travel, Bountiful, UT

Fiji Convention Bureau is an impartial organization that will coordinate bids for large-scale MICE events.

"In the past year we have done two incentive trips to Fiji, one had 86 participants, and the other 122, all flying from the U.S.," says Mark Faldmo, CTC, president of Columbus Travel in Bountiful, Utah. "Fiji is a destination with an aura of the South Pacific, and because of that it is very attractive to the people that many companies are trying to motivate with an incentive trip; people work hard to qualify to go to Fiji. We have had groups there previously, and we keep it on the radar as we present destination possibilities to our clients. Fiji has advantages of not being as costly as some other Pacific destinations, it offers many adventure activities, and it's a wonderful place to decompress and relax."

As for the reaction among incentive participants visiting Fiji for the first time, Faldmo says the feedback is always good. "People love it. We receive many very positive comments each time we take a group to Fiji. We like to use the InterContinental Fiji Golf Resort & Spa. It is a little removed from outside restaurants and urban activities, which is an advantage in many ways, but can be a disadvantage if a group is interested in lots of shopping excursions. The property also has a great beach, while other resorts in Fiji may not."

The InterContinental Fiji has a total of 266 guest rooms,

including 91 suites, and is located on the west coast of Fiji's largest island. "I highly recommend it to corporate meeting and incentive planners as a destination with aura, romance and, comparatively speaking, it is more affordable than many other Pacific destinations. It certainly is a destination people will work hard to earn a trip to," says Faldmo.

"There are also some wonderful resorts on the smaller islands of Fiji. These are more suitable for executive or top performer groups than larger incentive groups. The small island resorts are also more expensive, but do provide memorable Pacific island beach experiences," says Faldmo.

## Japan

The country continues to attract incentive groups, not only because of its five-star hotels, cuisine and service, but its off-site attractions for corporate groups have proven to be real winners. This is especially true for visitors to Kyoto, one of Japan's most beautiful and spiritual cities.

One of those attractions is the artistic Kou-An Glass Teahouse in the eastern mountains of Kyoto. Perched on the wooden observation deck of Seiryuden Temple, the transparent structure is made from thick glass panels and minimal metal supports, and is a visionary exploration of Japanese culture by artist Yoshioka Tokujin. Participants can enjoy not only the majestic displays of light that appear around the installation due to its beautiful curved form, but also the unhindered views of Kyoto from nearly 660 feet above sea level where the teahouse sits.

Meeting delegates or incentive participants now can visit a private temple located in the hills of Kyoto for a very unique and memorable experience. Designed to immerse groups in the traditions and unique cultural facets of life in Japan, the encounter introduces participants to activities such as sword fighting and sampling the traditional kimono. The first stop is at a private temple located in the hills of Kyoto, a former capital filled with thousands of temples and boasting a well-preserved heritage. After a guided tour through the temple and its manicured gardens, groups will have the opportunity to change into a Japanese yukata (summer kimono) and participate in a traditional sword combat lesson. Under the instruction of a master teacher, each delegate will learn the basic moves involved in defending and attacking. Afterward, the event ends in a more peaceful way, by attending a traditional Zen meditation class led by an English-speaking monk.

To attract corporate planners in Texas, the Japanese airline All Nippon Airways (ANA) has increased its flights from Texas to Japan. Added frequency from Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport to Tokyo has begun, offering daily service with Boeing 777-300ER aircraft equipped with 250 seats, including eight suites in first class and 52 lie-flat seats in business class.

Touring Japan's islands via cruise ship offers incentive participants a unique perspective of the destination. For ex-

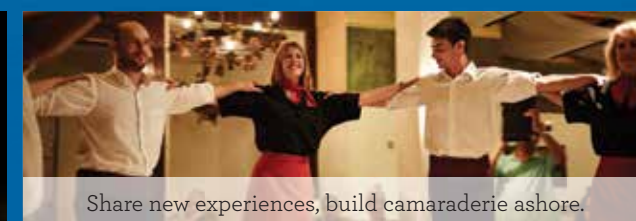
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ample, Princess Cruises' 2,670-passenger Diamond Princess offers 26 itineraries of four to 17 nights with departures out of the ports of Tokyo and Kobe from April to November 2017. Highlights include opportunities to explore UNESCO World Heritage Sites, experience cultural festivals and more.

## Macau

With casino revenues in Macau down due to Beijing's anti-corruption crackdown and a slowing Chinese economy, this gambling hub is reinventing itself into a family-friendly mass-market destination, while still attracting corporate meetings and incentive groups.

The former Portuguese colony, located a short ferry ride from Hong Kong, has resorts that offer everything from fine dining and malls to theme park rides and shows, alongside gaming. And, like Las Vegas, they are competing among themselves for the most over-the-top attraction. Melco Crown's Studio City, due to open later this year, will include Asia's highest Ferris wheel, while the recently opened Galaxy phase two has a sprawling rooftop waterpark complete with river rapids. Sands' Paris-themed resort, with a replica Eiffel

***"The beauty of New Zealand and the friendliness and hospitality of the people made this trip very memorable."***



**Karen Newberry, Senior Travel Buyer**  
Maritz Travel, Fenton, MO

Tower, is due to open next year, as will the Wynn Palace and a new casino-hotel from MGM.

Two newly opened five-star hotels in Macau that will be popular for business meetings and incentive groups are the JW Marriott Hotel Macau and The Ritz-Carlton, Macau. The properties are located within Galaxy Macau, a huge hotel, entertainment and gaming center in the Cotai district of Macau, just south of the historic center. There are four other hotel properties in the Galaxy Macau complex, each with their own atmosphere and price points.

Like Las Vegas, Macau is searching for more leisure and MICE travelers to fill all the new hotel rooms in Macau and stimulate spending across the non-gaming suppliers in the area. For meeting planners it's a good time to consider Macau for future international events.

## New Zealand

New Zealand's largest annual showcase for the business events industry took place last June in Auckland. Meetings NZ 2015, run by Conventions and Incentives New Zealand (CINZ) announced that 190 exhibitors from 18 regions

around New Zealand were present, a result of the country becoming extremely active in the meetings and incentives business.

Although Auckland is by far the largest city in the country, this two-island (North & South Island) nation has so many stunning locations and efficient tour operators that meeting and incentive planners have a choice of many second-tier cities and rural resort venues.

"(In 2014) we held multiwave incentive programs for an investment firm at the Hilton Queenstown for U.S. and Canadian guests," says Karen Newberry, senior travel buyer for Maritz Travel. "The total guest count was more than 700 people and six groups that included families with children. Each group was booked into a six-night stay in Queenstown. We will be using the same destination and property for our 2016 incentive program."

Newberry says the property itself, as well as the activities available at this specific destination, played a big role in choosing New Zealand. "Our client chose the Hilton Queenstown, which was a new property at the time of their first program in 2014, as Queenstown has always been a highly rated destination among our incentive winners. The Hilton Queenstown is in a particularly beautiful setting on the shores of Lake Wakatipu, on the South Island, which allows for unique transfers by jet boat from the airport and into the downtown area for shopping and touring. The location was awesome, with a great range of activities, including helicopter rides, Milford Sound, Dart River Jet Boating, Glenorchy Paradise and Skippers Canyon. The beauty of New Zealand and the friendliness and hospitality of the people made this trip very memorable," says Newberry.

Traveling long distances to Pacific outposts such as New Zealand may be off-putting for some meeting planners, but Newberry says that the rewards of these destinations outweigh the long plane ride. "Prepare your guests for the length of the journey from the U.S. to New Zealand. It is a sizeable distance to travel, but the reward of visiting such a unique country with countless options for touring and exploring the destination make the trip worthwhile."

A great offsite activity when visiting this area of New Zealand is the 120-passenger vessel Spirit of Queenstown. This state-of-the-art ship caters for offsite event options from breakfast meetings or sunset cruises with cocktails and canapés, to wine master-classes or product launches, all with the stunning backdrop of the idyllic alpine scenery.

Milford Sound is another location for group events, and the Spirit of Milford carries more than 200 passengers, while Milford Discovery is an intimate vessel for small groups of up to 10. The flagship vessel Pride of Milford is currently undergoing refurbishment to include a VIP lounge with catering for up to 50 guests. The travel supplier Southern Discoveries can organize these and other cruise options while in New Zealand.

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## Singapore

Singapore offers an excellent range of state-of-the-art convention centers, exhibition halls and meeting venues to suit a variety of requirements and budgets. The city's growing list of attractions also meet the growing demand for more interesting and nontraditional meeting venues and experiences outside of the conventional boardroom. Singapore has a multicultural heritage, which provides a colorful backdrop for exciting delegate and spouse experiences for both sightseeing activities and dining options. Some of the ethnic heritage districts in Singapore include Chinatown, Little India and Arab Street, which are great places for meeting or incentive participants to experience the traditions of colonial Singapore and the very modern city that has developed.

Singapore has many attractions, including the Gardens by the Bay, Night Safari, National Orchid Garden, Sentosa Island and the Singapore Flyer, as well as many amazing restaurants that offer unique settings for offsite culinary events.

"We held our annual incentive, Forever Global Rally, at

*"Our participants thoroughly enjoyed the luxury of the Marina Bay Sands, and the ambience of the hotel and Singapore as a whole."*



**Ashley Hower**, Director of Marketing  
Forever Living Products International, Scottsdale, AZ

the Marina Bay Sands from April 19-26, 2015, with over 7,000 participants from 105 countries," says Ashley Hower, director of marketing for Scottsdale-based Forever Living Products International. "We always seek to take our Forever business owners to exotic locations around the world that provide luxury destinations and engaging cultural experiences. The size of the Marina Bay Sands was a huge benefit as we were able to house all of our delegates in one hotel that also contained expo space for our event and meetings throughout the week. There were convenient locations near and in the hotel that were suitable for a variety of smaller meetings, dinners and recognition events that suited our group very well."

The Marina Bay Sands property is one of Singapore's most iconic structures, with the world's largest rooftop swimming pool spanning 450 feet across three 55-story towers, and with extensive meeting facilities, restaurants and more than 2,000 guest rooms. "Our participants thoroughly enjoyed the luxury of the Marina Bay Sands, and the ambience of the hotel and Singapore as a whole," says Hower. "The sheer magnitude and scale of the venue make it an impressive destination, and the amenities they provided

left our guests very impressed. They enjoyed the cultural experiences, food, ambience, weather and diversity of Singapore. The Marina Bay Sands provided the convenience of housing the entire event in one location; it was a tremendous luxury venue allowing our participants ample amenities right at the hotel."

Singapore continues to be among top destinations in Asia for business meetings and events. These include being named the "World's Easiest Place to do Business" nine times by the World Bank, as well as Asia's "Top Convention City" for the 12th consecutive time in ICCA's Global Rankings.

## South Korea

Seoul is where most corporate meetings and incentives take place. This capital city has such a business-friendly attitude that U.S. meeting planners cannot often pass up the financial and logistical benefits available for choosing this busy, modern, commercial and cultural hub of the country for business groups.

Excellent airlift from the United States to Seoul's Incheon International Airport is available from both coasts, and Incheon is often rated as the No. 1 airport in Asia. South Korea's national airline, Korean Air, has been recognized by the International Air Transport Association for its constant effort in minimizing passengers' waiting times at Incheon. The airport even prepares a warm welcome message for meeting delegates on the multiscreen LCD displays above the 23 baggage carousels at Incheon International Airport.

The Seoul Convention Bureau (SCB) assists meeting and incentive planners who are considering bringing group events to Seoul. Their services include assistance in the preparation of proposals, a one-on-one presentation workshop and consultation on a successful bidding strategy. For site inspection trips, hotel accommodations and transportation within Seoul may be provided by SCB for corporate board members or executives considering Seoul for an upcoming meeting. City tours, site inspections of convention facilities and unique venues, and information on tourist attractions also are offered as a courtesy gesture.

The SCB provides promotional videos and a "Meeting Planners Guide Book," and can offer financial assistance to meeting planners bringing groups to Seoul. According to the SCB website, "A certain amount of financial support is offered for corporate meetings and incentives that are attended by 50 or more international participants staying at least two nights in Seoul. The eligible event may receive support for both the bidding of the event and the actual hosting of the event."

With dozens of five-star hotel properties, several top-quality convention centers, a plethora of offsite dining and entertainment venues, museums, sporting facilities and recreational opportunities, the choices for non-meeting activities in Seoul — as in the other equally enticing Asia-Pacific destinations — are endless.

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# Destination



## Orlando Where Predictability and Change Happily Coexist

As the world without roils in turmoil, sometimes the well-trod path of the familiar beckons more forcefully. As corporate meeting planners can attest, one of the biggest draws of Orlando, the country's most alluring city for events, is that it remains the bedrock of the known unknown.

"Orlando provides a predictable environment," says Jon Osing, group operations manager for UBM LLC, which is why the annual Enterprise Connect conference has been held there for more than a decade. The March 2015 systems and software exposition drew 6,000 vendors, designers and buyers.

"Our conference has continued to grow ever since we moved to Orlando," Osing says, citing March in Orlando as "better than lots of parts of the country" with an "opportunity for the tacking on of vacation."

His preference is to create an all-inclusive event at the host hotel, with no offsite meetings or events. As such, the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center, which opened

By Sara Churchville

in neighboring Kissimmee in 2002 and currently has some 1,400 rooms and 400,000 sf of total meetings space, has met his needs. "It's the right mix of conference and expo space, fits the size event that we are, and has the right kind of facilities for seven or eight breakouts. Divided in half between the hotel and the conference center, once you make your way to the hotel, we can put signage as we need to on the various levels and areas. Once you do it once, it's pretty simple." Because the Gaylord room block sells out quickly, his team also uses "overflow" hotels — including the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress and the Sheraton Lake Buena Vista Resort — and runs shuttles between them and the Gaylord conference center.

"Sometimes we have to find ways to make it all work," he says, noting that he sometimes thinks "wouldn't it be great if we had 100,000 sf of ballroom space? But we haven't run into an issue we haven't been able to solve. Not something that's serious enough that we would consider moving for that one

feature." His loyalty to Gaylord Palms is based on how "corporate-focused" the venue is, which has two components for him: one, attendees and exhibitors like it; two, Gaylord Palms has also been loyal to him. To wit: "In 2008–2009, much of the industry was under a lot of pressure, and in a situation like that — the economy is down, travel is down — having partners willing to work with you is really valuable, and main-

*"Our conference has continued to grow ever since we moved to Orlando."*

Jon Osing, Group Operations Manager  
UBM LLC, Oak Brook, IL

taining and keeping those partnerships alive is really important. We were able to come to the Gaylord and say we need some help here; they took a long-term view and helped us keep the event solid, and we've managed to survive because of partnerships like that."

To foster and maintain such partnerships, he advises planners to create a "positive domino effect" by being organized and communicative with vendors and partners. "Your partner is only as good as you are; they can't read your mind. Real advantage is gained in making the little things easy — if you've already laid the groundwork, by the time you have to ask for a favor, you're putting the person in a spot where they can say yes. If you don't, you're not partnering, you're taking and taking."

### Partnerships and Pixie Dust

One planner who has created a partnership in Orlando is W. Scott Spohn, partner and chief of staff of DHG Healthcare, Dixon Hughes Goodman LLP.

He plans three "microevents" of 40 to 60 employees and one outside event for 200 to 300 clients and prospects each year, all at Disney properties: Boardwalk Inn, making use of the convention center, parks and overall boardwalk area; Contemporary Resort; Yacht and Beach Club Resort; and for clients, Grand Floridian Resort and Spa. "It keeps the experience fresh to go to different properties," Spohn says. On the other hand, "I don't have to go to different people to use the different resorts." On the contrary, Disney works with him to provide continuity. Even when, as happened last year, a convention services manager moves on to a different location, the manager "came with us so we could have a consistent experience."

For attendee attitude adjustment, too, Spohn has found Orlando invaluable: "When people come to Disney, they have a different mindset that they take on. It's like they get sprinkled with a little pixie dust. I've had cantankerous groups that have come down for micro experiences, maybe a little against their will, frankly. But it's like people come inside a bubble there, and they just open up."

Spohn says he appreciates the "palette that is Disney" and how customizable it is. He notes that he uses the full sweep of Disney's offerings, such as the Disney Institute and the Disney Event Group, including set design, production staff and creative media support. "This feeling that I always have with the Disney folks — they are an extension of our event planning team — so intertwined in what we're trying to accomplish. We got a chance to combine our show preferences with what we could do at Disney. Whenever the Disney folks are there taking pictures, we know we've done it right."

Another chief draw of Orlando for his company is the cost-effectiveness of meeting in a central hub. The company headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina, requires by his estimate \$575 average airfare to shuttle in attendees; to Orlando, it is about \$235. "When you think about the disparity in air cost, it's very economical to do it in Orlando." He also saves tremendously on rental cars since attendees use Disney's Magical Express transportation. "All that money we would have spent we can reinvest in the event and really make it more meaningful," he says.

But don't take Spohn's word for it. His event last year at the Grand Floridian elicited a net promoter score of 82 from attendees. "I would love to say that's due to me, but a big part of that is what Disney does for you," he says.

### Comfortably Familiar

Ed Chase, vice president of conferences for LRP Publications Inc., whose team coordinated this year's Future of Education Technology Conference in Orlando, also appreciates



A poolside event setup at The Villas of Grand Cypress.

the city's solid reputation. "Orlando has a sense of familiarity that helps us market it and helps us bring people in; it just seems comfortable to the vast majority of people." The conference, which convenes teachers, school administrators and school IT executives, has been held in Orlando for the last decade. With its 7,000,000 sf of total meeting space, Orange County Convention Center was, as in years past, the venue. This year, the January meeting came with a new twist: the



event needed both the North and South halls to accommodate the nearly 9,000 attendees and exhibitors.

“The layout of the facility made for a longer walk than our attendees were used to in the past,” Chase says, but the convention center helped him with advice on managing traffic and the best places to put signs to guide attendees. Attendees later indicated they were especially pleased with a wide, avenue-like aisle on the expo floor that provided a space for them to “meander and wander.” Chase was careful to walk the routes himself the weekend before the conference. “Everything on paper seems OK, but until you actually get your feet on the ground to be the shoes of the attendees, you’ll never know how it will be for them,” he advises.

Buses were rerouted to stop at the south end of the center and continue to the north end so attendees could maneuver

*“When people come to Disney, they have a different mindset that they take on. It’s like they get sprinkled with a little pixie dust.”*

W. Scott Spohn, Partner & Chief of Staff  
DGH Healthcare, Atlanta, GA



more easily. There also were shuttles throughout between the Hyatt Regency Orlando (where some of the workshops were held and which shares a walkway with the convention center) and half a dozen other nearby hotels.

Part of the convention center’s five-year improvement project includes two three-day trial runs of a minibus route connecting the West and North/South concourses for two March conventions. The buses can hold about 25 passengers. The renovation continues with Vision Gardens, a 2000-sf aeroponic space to be set up in the Westwood Lobby to grow herbs and vegetables — 81 towers will have 44 growing spaces per tower — and the South Building’s 7,300-sf Destination Lounge, which will be dedicated to high-tech networking.

“When we started to market outside Florida, we realized January-February was a draw in itself,” Chase notes. It’s warm, of course, but it also “just has a different attitude. It’s a little more relaxed than Chicago or Vegas,” he says. “As far as infrastructure, the airport is 15 minutes from the convention center and there are lots of direct flights. Once you’re there, there’s really not much reason to leave. It’s walkable, with restaurants up and down I-Drive and lots of things to do once the conference has closed.”

Attendees, he notes, are used to coming to Orlando, so they often know exactly where they want to go. Or they think they do at first. “Orlando changes so much from year to year; there’s going to be a lot that you haven’t seen before. There are other cities that don’t have that level of change from year to year, so we see that as a plus,” says Chase.

Another plus: present and attentive convention center

staff. “The convention center treated us like a hotel would treat us,” he says. “The event manager was there with us every step of the way. We had a lead person assigned to us — she was visible the 16 hours a day we were there.”

## New & Renovated Hotels

Planners who book a fall 2016 meeting at the new 1,000-room **Loews Sapphire Falls Resort**, opening this summer, can take advantage of special room rates. Universal Orlando’s fifth hotel will have more than 115,000 sf of meeting space, with a 41,000-sf ballroom, 31,000-sf hall, 16 meeting rooms, 11,000 sf of outdoor meeting space and three dedicated meeting planner offices of its own. It also will be connected by an air-conditioned walkway to the **Loews Royal Pacific Resort**. The combined space — The Loews Meetings Complex at Universal Orlando — will offer planners a total of 247,000 sf of meeting space and 2,000 rooms to work with. The Loews Sapphire Falls Resort will have an island feel, complete with a 16,000-sf resort-style pool and a white sand beach, and the full-service Amatista Cookhouse will echo the Caribbean theme with an open kitchen and outdoor dining.

The **Hyatt Regency Orlando** and the **Hilton Orlando** are pitching the “Orlando 3000” to meeting planners who need mega space: the two hotels, which are connected by covered walkway to the Orange County Convention Center, offer a combined 3,000 rooms and 490,000 sf of meeting space.

The 3,000-room, condo-style **Westgate Lakes Resort & Spa** also is offering incentives to early-bird planners as it wraps up its 20,000-sf meeting space expansion, for a total of 36,000 sf of meeting space, when finished this year. DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld’s 2016 renovation will culminate in a new 20,000-sf ballroom and 100,000 sf of upgraded meeting space.

**Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek** plans to have completed its upgrade, which will add 7,000 sf of meeting space, by this May.

Following the recent \$17 million renovation to its 146 guest rooms, the **Villas of Grand Cypress** has reconfigured its Mediterranean-style Executive Meeting Center, a stand-alone complex that houses 7,200 sf of flexible indoor/outdoor event space with four meeting rooms divisible into eight self-contained spaces. The four-star, four-diamond resort, which claims 1,500 acres in Lake Buena Vista, boasts 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature-designed golf; a golf academy; an equestrian center with options for equestrian-themed shows to entertain reception or banquet guests; and the Nine 18 Restaurant, which doubles as a fully equipped meeting space for small groups.

The **Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel** is undergoing the largest renovation in its history with a multi-phase, multiyear, \$125 million redesign project that will wrap up in 2017. Work on the Swan Hotel’s 758 guest rooms has been completed; and updates of the Dolphin Hotel’s 1,509



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guest rooms are underway. The hotel's meeting and convention space also recently was equipped with the latest advancements in high-density Wi-Fi technology.

### Places to Eat

Mango's Tropical Cafe, a South Beach mainstay since the early 1990s, is now open. It features 50,000 sf of nightclub space for cabaret-style shows and 12,000 sf of dining space. STK Orlando, billed as a "chic, modern" steak house, is opening this spring at Disney Springs, the erstwhile Downtown Disney dining and retail space. Disney Springs will have four different "neighborhoods" surrounding a water source when its expansion is complete midyear: The Landing, Marketplace, West Side and Town Center. The Landing recently welcomed The Boathouse and Morimoto, both with private dining rooms, as well as Fulton's Crab House.

The first-ever NBC Sports Grill & Brew opened at Universal Orlando Resort's CityWalk in October with great fanfare and a slew of NBC sports commentators in attendance. The restaurant features private dining spaces, nearly 100 HD screens so guests can be immersed in the sports experience no matter where they sit, an expansive menu of the best game-day food and more than 100 beer selections including craft and regional brews and the restaurant's own proprietary 862 Orlando, a draft you can find only here.

Former chef to Oprah, Art Smith will introduce his Homecoming: Florida Kitchen and Southern Shine this summer. As the restaurant's name suggests, the menu will be Southern specialties with Smith's own twist, such as blackstrap pork chops with sawmill gravy, along with comforting low country shrimp and grits.

Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurant features more than 6,000 bottles of wine in plain view, and for lovers of spirits, 42 different types of martinis are on order at Blue Martini in Pointe Orlando; the eponymous drink as served here is vodka, blue Curacao, sour mix and OJ on the rocks in a large snifter. Also at Pointe Orlando is the New Orleans-style restaurant and piano bar Itta Bena, focusing on steak and seafood.



Universal will open the water theme park Volcano Bay in 2017.



The Orlando Eye observation wheel at I-Drive 360.

### Places to Play

Top Golf, a state-of-the-art golf range facility, is slated to be built near International Drive in 2017. The three-level location will be 65,000 sf and offer 102 climate-controlled hitting bays for up to six players each. The venue also will include up to 3,000 sf of private event space.

Kung Fu Panda Po and Brazilian soccer player Neymar are two of the newest waxy recruits to join Madame Tussauds Orlando in the new I-Drive 360 shopping and dining complex on International Drive that also includes the Sea Life Orlando Aquarium and the Skeletons: Animals Unveiled! exhibit. The centerpiece of the complex is the 400-foot-tall Orlando Eye observation wheel. Event spaces include the I-Drive 360 courtyard, capacity 1,100; Orlando Eye terminal building (900) and hospitality room (100); Sea Life Orlando Aquarium (250); Madame Tussauds Orlando (400) and VIP room (120). All meetings and events can be booked via [Orlandosales@merlimentertainments.biz](mailto:Orlandosales@merlimentertainments.biz).

Opening this summer at SeaWorld Orlando is Orlando's fastest roller coaster, topping out at 73 mph along almost a mile of track. At 200 feet, Mako, named after a speedy type of shark, also will be Orlando's tallest.

Also debuting this summer is a new attraction at Universal Orlando's Islands of Adventure: "Skull Island: Reign of Kong," which will honor one of the most monumental figures in movie history, King Kong.

Orlando can never have too many water parks, and Universal does not disappoint with Volcano Bay, a full-blown water theme park coming in 2017. Volcano Bay will join Universal Studios Florida and Universal's Islands of Adventure as the resort's third immersive park.

Artegon Marketplace offers attendees the option to throw caution to the wind at a teambuilding event at indoor trampoline court emporium Sky Zone Trampoline Park or walk the talk on an indoor ropes course at Sky Trail. This spring will see the advent of NYZ at Orlando, a 45,000-sf indoor laser tag space that challenges attendees to survive a zombie apocalypse.

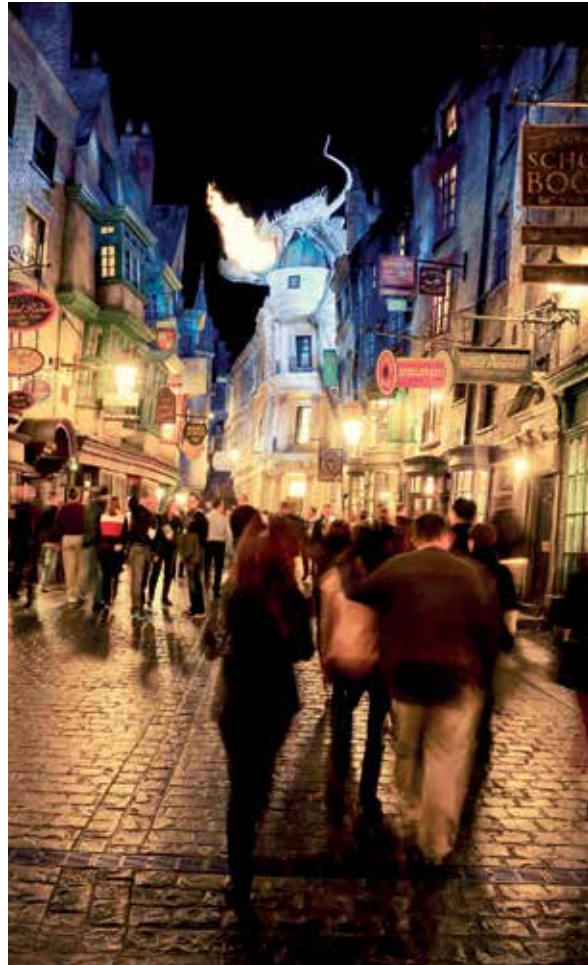
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Theresa S

July 30 at 12:45pm • iOS

Pinch me. Everything's going better than I ever could've imagined. Hosted an incredible private event at Universal Studios with a #FireBreathingDragon. Saw happy guests everywhere I went. Even ran into some handsome yellow movie stars. Thanks Orlando for a conference they will never forget! #MyMeetingRocks #OrlandoMeeting



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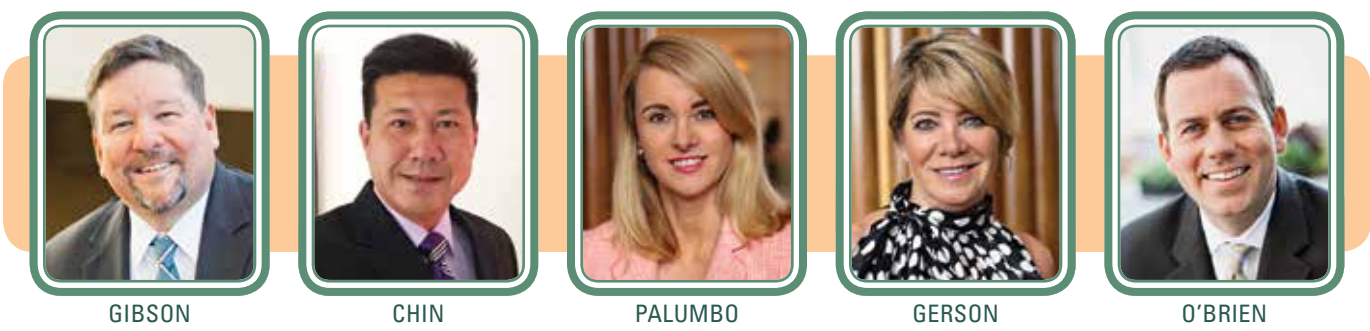
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# On The Move



Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego has named **John Yeadon** as director of sales and marketing. His most recent position was director of sales and marketing for Hyatt Regency Maui Resort and Spa.

The National Conference Center in Leesburg, Virginia, has promoted **Bill Gibson** to executive director of group sales, specializing in social, military, educational and government sales. Prior to his promotion, he was director of government markets.

Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Resort & Spa, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico, has named **Willie Chin** as director of sales

and marketing. He most recently served as regional director of sales and marketing for IHG's Caribbean hotels.

Nobu Hotel Eden Roc, Miami Beach, Florida, has named **Rachael Palumbo** as director of sales and marketing and **Tina Gerson** as director of sales. Palumbo was executive director of sales and marketing at One&Only Ocean Club in Nassau, Bahamas. Gerson was sales director at The Diplomat Resort & Spa in Hollywood, Florida.

**Eamon O'Brien** was named director of sales and marketing for the Omni Louisville Hotel in Louisville,

Kentucky. He was director of sales and marketing for the Louisville Marriott Downtown.

Trump International Hotel & Tower New York has named **Kelly Egan Merryfield** as director of sales and marketing. She previously served as director of sales and marketing at Trump Central Park.

Elbow Beach, Bermuda has named **Randolph Wilcott** as director of sales and marketing, under his sales and marketing consulting company RKW Group in Scottsdale, Arizona. He most recently worked with Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas. **C&IT**

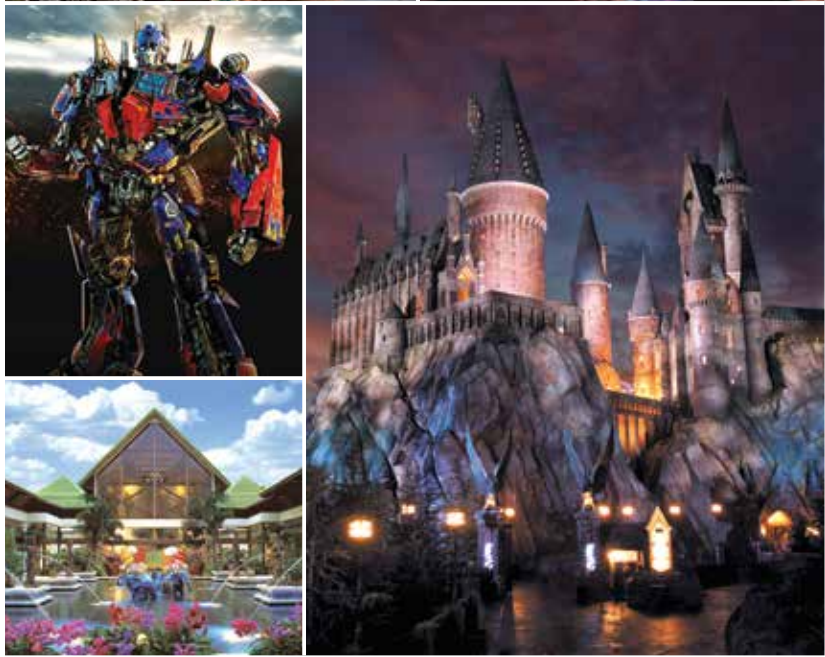
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