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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PROFESSIONALS



The Art of Branding

Lessons From the Trump
Organization **PAGE 10**

The Trump Organization.
(L to r) Executive Vice
President Donald Trump
Jr., Chairman and
President Donald J.
Trump, Executive Vice
President Ivanka Trump
and Executive Vice
President Eric Trump.

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Credit: Talking Stick Resort

Attendees build relationships on the golf course at resorts such as Talking Stick Resort near Scottsdale. **PAGE 14**



Credit: The Ritz-Carlton, Naples

Corporate get-togethers are better at a beach resort such as The Ritz-Carlton, Naples, on the West Coast of Florida. **PAGE 24**



Credit: Universal Orlando Resort

Group events are spectacular at The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Diagon Alley at Universal Studios Florida. **PAGE 30**

Publisher's Message

Branding Lessons

No matter what your opinion is of Donald J. Trump, he is no doubt a masterful marketer. There has been so much written about the successful branding techniques and strategies employed by the Trump Organization, I wanted to explore how these Trump-style “branding lessons” may impact the meetings and hospitality industries.



According to a widely circulated report in *Skift*, branding was one of the hottest topics among a gathering of hospitality CEOs in early June at the NYU International Hospitality Industry Investment Conference in New York City. For example, Geoff Ballotti, CEO of the Wyndham Hotel Group, said, “Brands have never mattered more.” And David Kong, CEO of Best Western Hotels & Resorts, said, “Why do a lot of people like Coca-Cola? Why do people go out of their way to buy it? That’s the value of a brand. People go out of their way to get it.”

Gray Shealy, executive director for Georgetown’s Hospitality Management master’s program, describes in the *Skift* article why branding is important: “This is where the future of hospitality is head-

ed. Branding is where it all comes together. The challenge for hospitality companies is in maintaining the value of their brands and establishing this engagement, this emotional connection to their customers.”

In our cover story on page 10, “Donald Trump and the Art of Branding: Bold (& Brash) Lessons for the Meetings and Hotel Industries From the Boss of Bravado,” Robert A. Gilbert, CHME, CHBA, president and CEO of HSMAI, advises, “Branding is important when hotel customers of any type — leisure, corporate or meetings — are searching for a purpose-appropriate hotel type. Branding helps align product type, price tier and service scope within a reasonable range of expectations.”

Eric Danziger, CEO, Trump Hotels, suggests attention to detail “is what makes a meeting planner or hotel brand great, rather than just good.”

And, finally, in Trump’s own words from his 1987 best-selling book *Trump: The Art of the Deal* comes this caveat: “You can’t con people, at least not for long. You can create excitement, you can do wonderful promotion and get all kinds of press, and you can throw in a little hyperbole. But if you don’t deliver the goods, people will eventually catch on.”

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

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

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

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

Susan S. Gregg
sue.gregg@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Ron Bernthal
Karen Brost
John Buchanan
Sara Churchville
Cynthia Dial
Maura Keller
Christine Loomis
Diana Lambdin Meyer
Derek Reveron
Mark Rowh
Patrick Simms

PRESIDENT & CEO
Harvey Grotsky

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS
David Middlebrook
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

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

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

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News & Notes

Orlando Marks New All-Time Visitor Record



Visit Orlando President & CEO George Aguel (left) and Peter Kacheris, Visit Orlando's chairman of the board and managing director of the Waldorf Astoria Orlando & Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek, celebrate visitation milestone.

ORLANDO, FL — Visit Orlando announced a new all-time record for the destination. In 2015, 66.1 million people visited Orlando, growing 5.5 percent from 2014 and solidifying Orlando's position as the most visited destination in the nation. Visitation to Orlando more than doubled over the past 20 years, growing from 32.4 million in 1995.

"Reaching more than 66 million visitors to Orlando is an amazing accomplishment for our tourism community," said Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel. "This new milestone and rapid growth over the past two decades is a result of having a tourism industry and community partners that are focused on growth and investment, dedication to the needs of our visitors and the global marketing and sales efforts of our Visit Orlando team and member companies."

A record 33 million room nights were sold in Orlando in 2015, resulting in record tourist development tax collections topping \$230 million in Orange County, Florida, home to the Central Florida tourism district. www.visitorlando.com, www.orlandomeeting.com

Hard Rock Hotel New York to Break Ground This Year

NEW YORK, NY — Hard Rock Hotel New York is slated to open in late spring 2019. The new-build, 445-room Hard Rock Hotel New York will soon rise on 48th street between 7th Ave. and Avenue of the Americas in Manhattan.

Bringing a reinvented, music-focused hotel experience to New York, the upcoming Hard Rock Hotel will honor the city's musical and cultural heritage with live music events and artist-inspired design elements. With Hard Rock International's standing as curators of the world's largest and most priceless music memorabilia collection, the hotel's design will feature museum-like displays adorning the walls.

In addition to musical experiences at every turn, Hard Rock Hotel New York will feature ballroom space, a vibrant welcoming lobby, complete with signature restaurant and lounge, as well as lobby bar. The upcoming Hard Rock Hotel New York's rooftop oasis soon will be a local hotspot, as guests soak up the sun or dance the night away while enjoying views of Times Square's bright lights. Programming for the hotel's rooftop also calls for day



Hamish Dodds, president and CEO of Hard Rock International, in Times Square.

and evening activities, ranging from artist sessions and DJ sets, to events featuring some of the most influential artists and celebrities. Plans for Hard Rock Hotel New York call for a stylish and upscale underground speakeasy that will capture the essence of New York City's music subculture. www.hardrockhotels.com

Atlantic City's Claridge Hotel to Open New Conference Space

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Atlantic City's historic Claridge Hotel launches the summer season with the new Conference Center at The Claridge, adding 15,000 sf of new conference space to meet the growing demand for meeting venues in the seaside resort. The opening of the new Conference Center in July will bring the hotel's meeting space to 100,000 sf, including a 6,400-sf room ideal for general sessions or small trade shows, and four smaller conference and boardrooms.

In addition to the new space, The Claridge boasts an elegantly renovated ballroom, and 480 recently refurbished rooms. The Atlantic City Convention Center is just four blocks away.

The hotel is opening two new leisure venues — Atlantic City's only rooftop bar and a charming new Beer and Wine Garden in Brighton Park at The Claridge. www.claridge.com

MPI WEC News

MPI Introduces Three Different Levels of Membership

DALLAS, TX — MPI restructured its membership model to offer three different levels for both planners and suppliers. "We have been working to grow and evolve our association over the past few years in order to better serve the global community, and this new membership model is a significant component of our overall transformation," said Paul Van Deventer, president and CEO of MPI.

Essential Membership provides access to MPI's online tools and resources, including free education webinars, recorded event sessions, membership directory, job board, MyMPI Online Community, industry research, member discounts, e-newsletters, the magazine and more.

Preferred Membership includes all



Paul Van Deventer, MPI president and CEO, at MPI WEC in Atlantic City.

of the Essential Membership benefits plus chapter affiliation, special member

rates to chapter events and CMP application assistance.

Premier Membership is designed for highly active members and provides all of the benefits offered with the Essential and Preferred memberships as well as direct marketing lists, VIP passes to MPI global signature events, advanced previews of MPI's Meetings Outlook quarterly research report, one-on-one career and academic counseling, and the Concierge Line, which provides immediate access to MPI Member Services

Through July 31, MPI is offering new members the opportunity to receive a complimentary membership upgrade. For more information on MPI's new membership levels and pricing and to join, visit www.mpiweb.org/join.

MPI Celebrates 2016 RISE Awards Recipients at World Education Congress

DALLAS, TX — Meeting Professionals International (MPI) honored the recipients of this year's RISE (Recognizing Industry Success and Excellence) Awards at the annual MPI RISE Awards Presentation and Luncheon during the 2016 World Education Congress (WEC) in Atlantic City.

"Congratulations to the 2016 RISE Awards recipients," said Paul Van Deventer, president and CEO of MPI. "We salute each of these leaders who were nominated by their peers for outstanding contributions and performance. Their achievements will be recognized within our global community for years to come."

The RISE Award for Young Professional was presented to Lydia Blanchard of the MPI Ottawa Chapter. Blanchard, a business development sales manager for NAV Centre, helped raise more than \$90,000 towards the

Ottawa Network for Education School Breakfast Program as part of the annual charity auction dinner, and she developed a sport tourism events partnership for the region.

The RISE Award for Meeting Industry Leadership was presented to Kevin Iwamoto, GLP, GTP, of the MPI Northern California Chapter. Iwamoto is considered one of the original founders of Strategic Meetings Management (SMM), is acknowledged globally as a leading subject matter expert in the discipline and continues to work with key influencers across industries to raise awareness of SMM benefits. He currently serves on the MPI Foundation U.S. Council and is a senior consultant with GoldSpring Consulting LLC.

The RISE Award for Member of the Year was presented to Carol Norfleet, MBA, CMP, DMCP, of the MPI Tennessee Chapter. Norfleet, the



RISE Award winners (l to r) include Lydia Blanchard of the MPI Ottawa Chapter, Kevin Iwamoto, GLP, GTP of the MPI Northern California Chapter and Carol Norfleet, MBA, CMP, DMCP, of the MPI Tennessee Chapter.

executive vice president and COO of Destination Nashville, has served as co-presenter for the CMP Boot Camp/Master Class at WEC since 2004 and has consistently given back to the profession through multiple leadership roles and continued involvement with the CMP program.

For more details and a complete list of RISE award recipients, visit www.mpiweb.org/RISE.

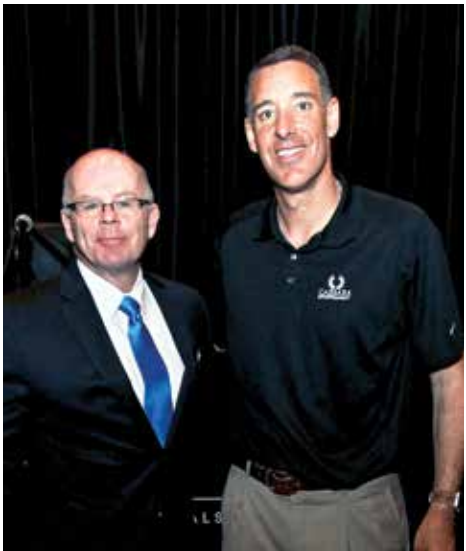
MPI WEC Snapshots



Meeting Professionals International's 2016 World Education Congress was deemed an overwhelming success. Held in Atlantic City for the first time ever at the new Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center, more than 2,000 registered attendees enjoyed fabulous New Jersey shore weather and all the iconic resort city has to offer meeting groups. WEC 2017 will be held in Las Vegas, July 9–12, marking the fourth time Las Vegas has hosted the annual conference.



Credit: Orange Photography





Donald Trump and the Art of Branding

Bold (& Brash) Lessons for the Meetings and Hotel Industries From the Boss of Bravado

By Cynthia Dial

Premier hotelier, popular reality star, new-to-the-stage political contender and now the presumptive Republican nominee who could possibly become the next president of the United States. Is there any doubt to whom I refer? No guesswork required. The answer is Donald J. Trump.

Though certainly not perceived as a behind-the-scenes kind of guy, it is not by happenstance that Trump's visibility is now and for years has been high. It's called branding and in the art of this discipline, The Donald (as he has been affectionately dubbed) is a maestro.

Credit: Douglas Gorenstein

"You can have the most wonderful product in the world, but if people don't know about it, it's not going to be worth much. You need to generate interest, and you need to create excitement," says the business magnate in his 1987 book, *Trump: The Art of the Deal*. The best-selling book, co-written with journalist Tony Schwartz, is described as a business advice book and memoir.

Whether promoting his personal persona or one of his many Trump-named products with his moniker always appearing in gold — from hotels and real estate to restaurants and beauty pageants — marketing the Donald Trump brand is a strategic science.

Branding Lessons

An article appearing in Fortune Marketing Company's blog entitled "3 Surprising Branding Lessons We Can Learn from Donald Trump" simplifies the titan's trifecta approach:

- Connect emotionally with your audience.
- Be genuine.
- Toot your own horn.

Further embellishment of these "Branding Lessons" underscores the importance of identifying and targeting a precise populace. "Do you know exactly who and what you are, and do you stick to that with every customer, sale, project, tweet, post and ad? Or do you waver to try to please everyone and get every penny of business that's offered? Knowing who you are as a business — and owning it — creates an invincible brand."

As opposed to tooting one's own horn, the Fortune Marketing Company article addresses business owners who are uncomfortable promoting their successes. "While extremes on either side may not be effective, learning how to promote your benefits and success stories is a must for building a brand."

Not shy about self-promotion, Trump is the boss of bravado. "I play to peoples' fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts," he shares in *Art of the Deal*. "People want to believe that something is the biggest and the

greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration — and a very effective form of promotion."

However, within the marketing maverick's book are words of caution: "You can't con people, at least not for long. You can create excitement, you can do wonderful promotion and get all kinds of press, and you can throw in a little hyperbole. But if you don't deliver the goods, people will eventually catch on."

Marketer of the Year?

Former P&G brand manager and contestant on "The Apprentice" (2006), Surya Yalamanchili, begins his *Advertising Age* article, "An Actual Marketing Lesson from Donald Trump's Success," with this declaration: "I hereby nominate Donald Trump for 2016 Ad Age Marketer of the Year." The author's reasons are many, not the least of which is the link he observes between the famed businessman and globally recognized Procter & Gamble. "I was surprised that a number of his keys to success were straight out of the playbook I learned as a brand manager at P&G."

Elaborating, Yalamanchili cites the principle that short-term promotions shouldn't come at the expense of long-term success. Of Trump's branding basics, "The Apprentice" participant says, "Instead of torturing himself to comply with marketing paradigms, as almost all marketers do, Trump intuitively knows when to break from script."

A part of Trump's success is discernment. "If I were to put Trump on everything that came my way — from potato chips to paper clips — the power of my name would be diluted. I'm very demanding and selective about where that name goes," says the businessman in his book.

Online entrepreneur Richard Bravo and author of *Brand Marketing Like Donald Trump: 7 Steps to Kick Ass Branding* states, "The Trump brand is aggressive and all about kicking ass in the marketplace. The word Trump has become syn-

The Old Post Office is set to open in September as the Trump International Hotel, Washington, DC, a luxury 263-room hotel with 38,000 sf of meeting and event space, including the 13,200-sf Presidential Ballroom.

onymous with success, luxury and being fearless." Bravo's assessment is confirmed by Trump himself: "I like thinking big. I always have. To me it's very simple: if you're going to be thinking anyway, you might as well think big."

Be Bold

Robert A. Gilbert, CHME, CHBA, president and CEO of Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International in McLean, Virginia, considers the significance of branding within the meetings and hospitality industries. "Branding is important when hotel customers of any type — leisure, corporate or meetings — are searching for a purpose-appropriate hotel type. Branding helps align product type, price tier and service scope within a reasonable range of expectations."

Though Gilbert has no firsthand experience with Trump Hotels, he describes the mogul's branding fundamentals when promoting his portfolio of properties (14 hotels, plus two manors within its Estate Collection) in a trio of terms: luxury, international gateway and leisure destinations.

With specificity to the meetings market, Gilbert encourages the industry to borrow a basic from the power-broker's playbook — be bold. In dissec-



Credit: Trump International Hotel, Washington, DC



“This attention to detail is what makes a meeting planner or hotel brand great, rather than just good.”

Eric Danziger
CEO
Trump Hotels
New York, NY

tion of Trump’s across-the-board brand, HSMAT’s CEO weighs in with his professional impressions of the man and his many hats: hotelier — secures great, unique real estate and delegates the operation to knowledgeable people; television personality — publicity works; and presumptive GOP presidential nominee — publicity works.

More Lessons

In “Six Personal Branding Lessons We Can Learn from Donald Trump” appearing in Forbes.com, author William Arruda’s advice is simple:

- **Be consistent.** Strong brands deliver on their promise with everything they do.
- **Be confident.** Convictions must be demonstrated and backed with the ability to follow through on one’s promises.
- **Take a stand.** The world’s strongest brands often repel as many people as they attract.
- **Create demand through intrigue.** A high level of interest must be sparked (being audacious is just one way to accomplish this goal).
- **Be recognizable.** Strong brands have a trademark; Trump’s trademark is his consistent use of superlatives, such as the biggest, the best, the most.
- **Build brand ambassadors.** Personal branding is not something you

do by yourself; a core community must be created.

Above all, however, “Trump is authentic, and that’s the most important tenet of personal branding,” concludes Arruda.

Author Chirag Kulkarni, reiterates much of the Arruda’s advice in his Inc.com piece, “What Donald Trump Can Teach You About Marketing” but adds further guidance — simplicity sells. “This means keeping your underlying message as simple as possible so everyone can understand it,” says Kulkarni and offers as evidence the theme Trump has religiously followed throughout his presidential campaign — “Make America Great Again.”

Also touting the success of Trump’s campaign slogan is Steve Halsey, whose feature story for G&S Business Communications entitled “Branding Lessons from the Summer of Trump” reads: “A good brand strategy is about inspiring the future, not reliving the past.” Bestowing kudos upon the GOP contender for his positive “Make America Great Again” theme, Halsey explains that it’s successful because it reminds voters of a bright future that restores the good old days of economic growth and prosperity.

Never Be Boring

Create strong emotion, manipulate the media and always be entertaining are the branding principles Geoffrey James shares in his Inc.com piece, “3 Huge

Branding Lessons from Donald Trump.” With emphasis on the “b” word — boring — the author offers modern-day insight. “The internet and the smartphone have reduced the average person’s attention span to about that of a goldfish,” says James. “Under these circumstances the cardinal sin of branding is boring people. Say what you will about Trump, he’s never boring.”

The Team at Work

Going inside the Trump operation, Eric Danziger, CEO, Trump Hotels, says the Trump family is involved in every aspect of its namesake properties. Citing architecture and décor as key elements of the hotel brand, he elaborates, “Each hotel and resort has a distinct design that is culturally relevant, with iconic architecture that is at home in its locations, contextual and relevant to the destination.”

The term “design,” however, is not limited to a Trump Hotel’s physical properties — it extends to the quality of its guests’ on-property experiences, experiences that receive hands-on attention from the family. “Ivanka Trump personally oversees the design and creative vision for all Trump Hotel properties as they are developed, working extensively alongside the most talented designers in the world to ensure the Trump family’s exacting standards are appreciable in every detail,” says Danziger.

What can the meetings industry learn from Mr. Trump’s personal branding? Trump Hotels’ CEO answers that it’s the importance of not overlooking details. “This attention to detail is what makes a meeting planner or hotel brand great, rather than just good.”

Trump Attaché Service

In the spirit of adhering to every detail, Danziger mentions the hotels’ signature Trump Attaché service. His description: “More than a concierge or butler, Trump Attaché delivers personalized attention without intrusion so guests experience an unprecedented level of VIP treatment upon request or sometimes before it. Trump Attaché meticulously keeps track of individual preferences.”

Brian Honan, director of sales and

marketing, Trump SoHo New York, attributes a major component of Trump SoHo’s success to a simple stat: More than half of the hotel’s line staff has been employed since the property’s 2010 opening. “There is an enormous amount of pride our associates carry with this name. They feel a vested ownership in the product and the customers whom they serve.”



SoHi, Trump SoHo New York’s 46th-floor rooftop event space, accommodates up to 150 guests for world-class meetings, receptions, banquets and events.

One of the SoHo hotel’s exceptional attractions for the corporate and incentive market is its 45th-floor ballroom, with three walls of glass showcasing an over-the-city view of Manhattan from the East River to the Hudson River and beyond.

Patricia Tang, director of sales and marketing, Trump International Hotel, Washington, DC, says that branding is especially important to Trump Hotels because it is a family-owned business. “The Trump name is synonymous with luxury, quality, outstanding hotel location and service that is consistent with today’s guests’ expectations.” With respect to the meetings and hospitality industries, she adds: “Branding is a means of giving a sense of what can be expected at a property.”

Whether it’s Trump’s open-in-the-fall Washington, DC, hotel (located in the city’s historic Old Post Office building on Pennsylvania Avenue) or late summer’s to-be-debuted sleek, modern Vancouver property (the city’s first luxury hotel to open in the past six years), you can bet

promotion began at conception. In his “Kick Ass” article, author Bravo explains: “Trump doesn’t wait for something to be finished to start promoting it. Marketing continues while the project is under construction.”

Customization in the Market

Following the “know your market, cater to your market” edit is the addition of a 13,200-sf, column-free Presidential Ballroom incorporated in Trump International Hotel, Washington, DC — it will be the capital city’s largest luxury ballroom. The hotel’s red, white and blue décor will reflect its location, and its exceptionally high ratio of 38,000 sf of event space to its 228 guest rooms is expected to attract the meeting planner. Along the same line of thought are Trump Vancouver’s one-of-a-kind entertainment



venue, Drai’s, the city’s first pool bar and nightclub; a Champagne Bar serving up the finest bubbly vintages; and the latest incarnation of the Michelin-starred, modern Hong Kong-style restaurant, Mott 32.

Of these significant attractions, all enhancing each hotel’s geographic and cultural differences, Tang explains: “So often, luxury chains simply move the same processes around from property to property so while there is consistency, there is not the customization to the specific market.”

A Family Affair

General Manager Philipp Posch, Trump International Hotel & Tower Vancouver, details his recent experience with the Vancouver hotel and the family’s di-

rect involvement — from choosing the furniture placed throughout the property to the kind of music played in the lobby. “We used to send mattresses to New York so that Ivanka and her brothers could test the quality. The same goes for carpet samples. We would send them to the head office so that Ivanka could walk on the samples, with her heels, and see how it feels for the female guest attending weddings or corporate events.”

Another Ivanka-inspired addition is the Vancouver hotel’s “Quick Bites” menu, a dining option that guarantees meal service within 15 minutes. Initiated by the hotelier’s daughter, it was developed for the property’s busy, on-the-go guests with little time to wait for breakfast or lunch.

Of the Trump family’s personal involvement — Donald Jr., Ivanka and Eric (each bearing the title, executive vice president of development and acquisition) — Tang says, “They consistently are checking on the details, ensuring that the project stays on track and that we are on target to deliver on the service and amenities as promised. They are always available to speak with clients and make it a point to say ‘thank you,’ not just to guests, but to all of the hotel associates.”

It’s a family affair. With Donald J. Trump at the helm, a simple



philosophy drives his global conglomerate and guides his adult children, whose everlasting commitment is to the Trump brand’s perfection. It is a viewpoint from which all can learn.

It is: “Whatever you do, do it better than anyone else. Never settle.” **C&IT**

Site Selection

Meeting-Friendly Golf & Spa Resorts

The Sweet Spot for Reward and Incentive Programs

The media like to mention when well-known corporations take employees to high-end resorts. What the stories don't include is how critical to a company's bottom line these gatherings are, and how teambuilding programs, rewards and incentive trips boost productivity, bond team members, increase employee retention and significantly

decrease costs associated with having to constantly train new workers. Meeting-friendly resorts with excellent golf courses and enviable spas are the sweet spot for reward and incentive programs, and for meetings that strategically combine achieving corporate business goals with time for employees (and perhaps spouses and families) to play and relax.

By Christine Loomis

The Value of Meetings

The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado, understands the value of meetings. It offers a resort campus that meets the needs of employers and employees on every level, and is less than 30 minutes from the city's airport.

All of that made it the right choice for Amanda Polewski, marketing coordinator for Plano, Texas-based Montgomery

Coscia Greulich LLP, a firm that offers strategy and management consulting in addition to traditional accounting services. Polewski was tasked with remotely planning the company's May 2016 client appreciation trip, which meant she had to trust and depend on her contacts at the resort. The process was a success.

Without the benefit of site visits, Polewski went with recommendations from within the firm for potential resorts. "The Broadmoor was one of the resorts recommended by a partner in our firm who has done multiple similar trips. The trip needed to be short — two days maximum — and because of that, we couldn't afford to lose much time in transit from the airport. Other factors during the RFP/proposal process were cost, weather and hours of daylight."

When all was said and done, Polewski found that The Broadmoor, a five-diamond, five-star resort, provided the most competitive rates. "The Broadmoor definitely gave us the best rates for rooms and golf, and were additionally situated perfectly for a May golf trip," she points out. "The other recommended resorts were on the coasts, and in addition to being higher in cost they were also looking like they would be much more crowded and hot due to location and time of year."

Even when there were problems, Polewski says the resort knew what to



"The Broadmoor definitely gave us the best rates for rooms and golf, and were additionally situated perfectly for a May golf trip."

Amanda Polewski
Marketing Coordinator
Montgomery Coscia Greulich LLP
Plano, TX



An aerial view of The Broadmoor.

do. "Jeff Overgaard was my main point of contact and handled all of the Broadmoor-side planning for us. He handled all of my questions with patience and set up everything we needed.

"Communication is obviously limited when you're planning remotely, so that can be a challenge the bigger the group and the more requirements," she adds. "When we ran into problems with the group being separated and possibly missing the first tee time, it was frustrating trying to redirect everything remotely from all involved parties. But The Broadmoor was responsive as soon as I let Jeff know the situation, rescheduling everything for the day as needed. For our group's purposes, I would say that planning remotely was as effective as meeting with key Broadmoor representatives beforehand and planning with the benefit of onsite tours would have been."

Because the focus of this event was golf and dining, the golf experience was impor-

A shirodhara treatment at Spa at the Boulders Resort & Spa — a 33,000-sf award-winning luxury spa.



An aerial view of Ponte Vedra Inn & Club's famous "Island 9th" hole.

Credit: Ponte Vedra Inn & Club

Credit: The Boulders

All the Ways You Never Thought to Include Golf in a Meeting

Golf doesn't have to mean a full-on 18-hole tournament, and golf isn't only just for diehard players. In fact, golf lends itself to all kinds of formats that can be easily included at a meeting or convention and that can facilitate teambuilding, fun and challenges to motivate employees.

The golf team at Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa in San Antonio, Texas, has found many creative ways to integrate golf into meetings and inspire groups. Here are just a few of them.

- **Set up an executive course.** Play either 18 short holes for about 2.5 hours or nine short holes for less than an hour and a half. The golf staff can do this easily even if there is no actual executive course on-property.
- **Speed golf.** In this format, players walk, run or jog the course with four clubs to see who can complete the course the fastest. It's just nine holes and players are timed, with starts at five-minute increments.
- **All-sport golf.** No golf club required for this one. Instead, the golf bag includes a football, soccer ball, lacrosse stick and ball, Nerf Vortex, tennis racket and ball, baseball bat and ball, Frisbee, hockey stick and golf ball. Players tee off with whichever piece of equipment they want, then move to the landing spot and choose the next piece of equipment. When they reach the green, they use the hockey stick — or something else if they want — to put the golf ball in the cup.
- **Glow-in-the-dark golf.** For both golfers and non-golfers, this putting activity includes glow-in-the-dark props and golf balls, as well as glow-in-the-dark necklaces for all participants. The players putt through the course, keeping track of their score to see who finishes with the least number of putts. It's a great icebreaker or teambuilding activity.
- **Frisbee golf.** No, it's not traditional disc golf. The target in play here is a circled zone on each green. Groups can play one to nine holes, and each team works to score a hole on the green by landing in the circled zone. The team with the least number of throws wins. The resort also has paired this activity with a cigar-rolling station so attendees can learn to roll their own cigars. It's about creating fun and memories — definitely not about building golf skills.
- **5K fun run.** No golf necessary. This is a way to use the course and get attendees out into a beautiful setting, running along the golf course. Many golf courses, including Hill Country Golf Club, are designated as Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries, offering both nature and golf-course landscaping for a 5K run.

— CL



The 15-inch golf activity at Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa.

tant. The attendees — all golfers — used two of The Broadmoor's three championship courses (the Mountain Course is not open in May) and thoroughly enjoyed both, as well as the rest of the resort. "They said it was a great trip, a great location and facilitated all around by The Broadmoor staff," Polewski notes.

The most serious problem was related to missed flights on the way out, which was beyond anyone's control but still had to be dealt with. The Broadmoor's location just an hour and a half from the Denver airport allowed those attendees to be rebooked on a Denver flight. While the resort has shuttles to and from both the Denver and Colorado Springs airports, that group chose to drive down from Denver, which Polewski says "worked out well."

In the end, Polewski wouldn't have changed much thanks to the ease of planning with The Broadmoor staff. "The only thing I would have done differently is made sure I got everyone booked on the

group flight out. That situation worked out in the end, but the planning process would have been easier if everyone's flight

information was the same. I don't wish — and I don't think our group wishes — that The Broadmoor would have done anything differently. They made things pretty easy on us."

The Broadmoor doesn't just offer exceptional golf. It also offers an expansive spa and programs with high appeal for corporate executives and incentive award qualifiers, including its fishing school, located at a picturesque pond and Adirondack-style lodge and dock on the resort's East golf course. With its dining table for 20, the lodge is an ideal venue for private functions before or after fishing instruction. The resort also will arrange guided fishing trips for small groups.

Everything a Group Needs

Another resort with an eclectic selection of activities for corporate and incentive groups is Streamsong, which opened in 2013 in Central Florida, almost equi-

distant between Tampa and Orlando. Like the Broadmoor, Streamsong has everything a group needs on its extensive property including 216 accommodations and 24,600-plus sf of flexible function space. In addition to two magnificent golf courses built on the dunes and craters of a landscape once dominated by phosphate mines, the resort offers guided bass fishing, sport shooting, archery, hiking and an opulent full-service spa, all easily incorporated into meeting and incentive programs.

The resort's much-anticipated third course will open in fall 2017, giving golfers even more to experience. Designed by Gil Hanse, architect of the Olympic Golf Course in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Streamsong Black should be exceptional. "Streamsong is about an authentic golf experience," Hanse says, "and the natural environment and landscape at Streamsong is simply like nothing we've experienced. It's one of the very best." Golf-loving corporate and incentive groups can find out for themselves next year.

World-Class Golf at a Historic Resort

Melding a grand historic presence with every modern amenity a group could want, The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, has welcomed discerning groups and VIPs for more than two centuries. It was an easy choice for Rick Eisenman, president and CEO of Richmond, Virginia-based Eisenman & Associates Inc., which brought its 2015 Client Appreciation Outing to the Greenbrier last May. "We chose The Greenbrier for its easy access, unique accommodations, excellent food and service and, of course, world-class golf. There are lots of great people there," he says, "but Greg Furlong and Hill Herrick stand out. Greg was great to work with to book the event, and Hill went out of his way to make sure the golf experience was flawless."

Eisenman's group spent two days playing on two of the resort's five courses. "They loved the Old White, of course, but they also really enjoyed the Greenbrier Course, which I for one don't think gets its due respect," Eisenman says.

In addition to more than 55 available activities, the resort offers extensive meeting and function space. "The Greenbrier not only has a lot of space but it has a lot of unique space, from bright, colorful and ornate ballrooms to the rustic atmosphere at Kate's Mountain Lodge and Howard's Creek Lodge," Eisenman says groups should plan some outside events so that attendees can "experience the beauty of the area," not the

least of which is the surrounding Allegheny Mountains.

In spite of its away-from-it-all feel, The Greenbrier offers surprising ease of access. "Most of my clients are from the mid-Atlantic area so most drove in," Eisenman says. "Those that had to fly had no trouble getting into the Lewisburg airport. And the Greenbrier has a shuttle so you don't need to rent a car." There were many highlights of the event, and dinner



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“Hilton Sandestin offers the key components to support a successful conference.”



Cynthia P. Baxter
Executive Assistant
Newk's Eatery
Jackson, MS

outlets and recreation amenities won't be as crowded.”

Easy Access to Complete Resort Complex

Florida's Panhandle is in many ways unlike the rest of the state. In terms of geogra-

phy, weather and vibe, it's closer to its neighbors to the north and west than to southern Florida. No wonder it's a favorite destination for companies in the South. Newk's Eatery, headquartered in Jackson, Mississippi, and comprised of more than 100 restaurants to date, welcomed 325 of its franchise owners, operators, general managers, marketing, catering and support center staff to the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa for the company's annual convention in April 2016. Located within the Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort in Miramar Beach, Florida, the Hilton is tucked in-between the Gulf of Mexico and Choctawhatchee Bay.

“Hilton Sandestin offers the key components to support a successful conference: layout and ample meeting space, up-to-date audio-visual technology, comfortable guest rooms and plenty of onsite activities,” says Cynthia P. Baxter, executive assistant with Newk's Eatery and a corporate conference planner with more than 12 years of experience.

And it's easy to get to. “The drive is not complicated coming from Central Mississippi or neighboring states to Florida,” she says. “If flying, there are three airports within a 35- to 70-minute drive time.”

Baxter has high praise for the hotel's event and banquet managers. “They were part of our team. They knew every aspect of our agenda. Also, the meeting space layout was very convenient. Even though we used multiple conference rooms, all of our meetings were in one central location.”

Baxter notes that “efficiency is the key to daily setup,” and the space the group used was perfect. “The Coastal Foyer offers a registration desk with a closet and

a separate storage room. It's the perfect setup for registration, storing and moving material to the daily sessions.”

The staff, too, was efficient enough to handle the group's busy schedule and the need to shift gears for each event. “The third day was our busiest,” Baxter says. “We started out with a general session, rotating round tables, lunch with a guest speaker and an afternoon training session. That evening we hosted a reception, awards dinner and closed the evening with a band. The resort was able to flip the meeting space for a seamless transition from each session and event.”

Sandestin Resort's golf facilities, close to the Hilton, were also part of the meeting. “On Monday afternoon, we offered a golf tourney at the Raven. The teams enjoyed the beautiful course and the challenge.”

While attendees were in meetings, some spouses accessed the resort's other amenities, including the spa. In fact, the Hilton Sandestin and surrounding resort area offer so much, Baxter says one thing she would do differently next time is add to the event. “I would include up to a three-day pre- or post-conference rate to reward attendees before or after the conference,” she says.

And she'd make another change as well. “I would have a post-conference meeting with the resort staff. It's important to receive feedback when it's fresh on everyone's mind.”

For other planners, Baxter has these words of advice: “Communicate the group's vision and expectations in order to pull off a successful conference. Always ask questions and never assume the property knows what's important to you.”

Inspiring Setting and Intriguing Activities

Out in Carefree, 27 miles north of Scottsdale, Arizona, Boulders Resort & Spa provides planners with an inspiring setting and a slew of intriguing activities to bond or motivate attendees. The resort has more than 50,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space and can accommodate 10 to 400 corporate guests. Golf and an opulent spa await attendees, as well as opportunities for rock climbing,

horseback riding, exploring the desert via Hummer or ATV and stargazing with a professional astronomer.

The resort has a variety of options specifically for meeting guests, including a spiritual and uplifting shamanic experience, mixology classes during which attendees craft their own cocktails and a cowboy-for-a-day adventure. At the spa, attendees can choose their preferred scent at the Aroma Blend Bar and take away a body product with that specific scent.

Another Scottsdale area resort of note is Talking Stick Resort, which at 15 stories high is the tallest building in Scottsdale and provides spectacular views of the city and the surrounding mountains from guest rooms and the top floor Orange Sky Restaurant.

California-based Lynette Owens & Associates's Vice President of Sales Debbie Grassi recently booked a client at the property and says Talking Stick Resort “offers great rooms, meeting facilities, and golf and spa amenities for many of



The Talking Stick Resort near Scottsdale.

our clients, plus it offers a casino that is as nice as any casino hotel in Las Vegas. The meeting space at Talking Stick is centralized and easy to get to, and outside function space and their Degree 270 venue offer great views of the Scottsdale Valley and beautiful sunset views of the Arizona mountains. Golf is on-property, which makes easy coordination for tournaments and other golf events.”

The Talking Stick Golf Club, adjacent to the resort, offers two professional courses managed by Troon Golf. The North course is a Scottish links-style course with deep bunkers, while the more traditional South course has tree-lined fairways and four holes with water hazards.

The 496-room resort offers nightly entertainment, excellent dining venues, spa services, a popular casino, and cultural displays of the Pima and Maricopa tribes.

Resorts across the country offer groups and planners many activities to choose from. Golf and spa options are always at the top of the list. But planners working with amenity-rich resorts will find more engaging activities and programs to incorporate into their meetings than they can possibly use — not a bad situation to be in.

In the end, though, it's all about boosting business, and these resorts help planners do exactly that. **C&IT**

Newk's Eatery's logo is displayed on the exterior of the Hilton Sandestin Beach Resort & Spa, and (r) attendees strike a pose at the photo booth.



Credit: Frost Images



Credit: Newk's Eatery



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Corporate Social Responsibility



Doing Good While Supporting the Company's Business Goals

By PATRICK SIMMS

Offsite meetings can be opportunities for attendees to do good in local communities, and the main motivation for extending corporate social responsibility (CSR) into the meetings sphere is (or should be) moral: It's simply the right thing to do for companies who have the means.

But satisfying an ethical duty doesn't preclude other benefits that can result from CSR activities at meetings. The programs also can support a company's business goals, such as creating a more cohesive and engaged work force. Participants can bond over the activity, get to know each other better and learn to

work as a team. And assuming they value community service, they also will become more engaged with the company that staged the program and demonstrates it shares that value.

Victoria Johnson, CMP, CMM, global manager, strategic meetings management at Northbrook, Illinois-based UL LLC, has been a champion of sorts when it comes to integrating CSR with the safety science company's SMMP. Doing so is good business strategy, since CSR programs "cover two of the three reasons you have a meeting, which are networking, motivation and learning," Johnson explains. "There is the teambuilding/net-

working component, and attendees also become motivated in their work for the company. They think better about the company and its mission."

Walking the Talk

And especially for high-profile meetings and events, that perception extends beyond the company's employees: CSR "is part of who we are as a company; let's have our meetings and events reflect that as well," says Johnson. "It's a very prominent marketing activity when all can see that you're 'walking the talk.'" As part of the SMMP protocols, Johnson sends post-meeting CSR/sustainability reports

back to UL's CSR office so they can report the activities to the company's board members. They also can feed the information to customer service because some of our customers are now asking about our CSR initiatives," she adds. "More and more customers want to do business with responsible companies. And the other side of it is to attract and retain employees who want to work for companies that are socially responsible."

Teradata, a Dayton, Ohio-based data analytics company, also has integrated CSR into its meetings in a systematic way, via Teradata Cares. "The company does try to have a Teradata Cares presence in most of our large meetings (including the external events Partners and Universe), but it seems it's really becoming

programs to help reflect corporate social responsibility."

Incentive Program Component

This survey result by the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence highlights the integration of CSR with incentive programs, which may be a bit surprising. After all, incentive programs are generally supposed to be about diversion for top performers, as their "reward." But clearly, community service at the destination can be quite rewarding.

"I have evidence based on our post-event surveys that (CSR) is the most valuable experience from people attending incentive trips," notes Thais Toro, MBA, corporate event planner for Atlanta, Georgia-based Cox Automotive. The com-

"CSR activities are truly a unique way to break down barriers and allow attendees of all generations, demographics, interests and abilities to work together to accomplish something great."

Bonnie Boisner, V.P. Event Management
Aimia, Minneapolis, MN



pany partners with local organizations that are in need in destinations such as the Caribbean, Puerto Rico and Mexico. This year, a 210-participant incentive group visited Aruba, where Cox provided a senior center "not just a monetary donation but improvement of the organization. We painted the whole facility inside and out in four hours," Toro relates. In order to ensure the paint job was feasible in that time, Cox hired a contractor to prep the walls and surfaces. Incentive qualifiers also took to improving the garden at the center, treated the seniors

The general trend reflected by UL and Teradata is a rise in CSR activities at meetings. As Bonnie Boisner, vice president of event management for marketing and loyalty analytics company Aimia, notes: "We work with many of our clients to incorporate CSR activities into their meetings and events. It continues to grow year over year. According to the 2015 SITE Index, over two-thirds of both buyers (67 percent) and sellers (71 percent) incorporate one or more activities in their travel

Cox Automotive's 2016 Presidents Club incentive trip to Aruba included volunteering at a senior center doing gardening, painting and other services.



Attendees of last year's Teradata Partners conference assembled wheelchairs and donated them to a local organization in Anaheim, California.

and staff to lunch, and gifted them bags of personal items.

"The hotel we were using as well as the DMC were so impressed that an international company was giving back to their community, which (they noted) never happens with the people who are actually from the island. They got inspired, and the DMC provided us complimentary transportation, while the hotel provided complimentary water and some side food items for lunch.

So we were able to save that money and invest it back into the senior center," Toro adds.

Teambuilding and Competition

Apart from being an inspiring activity for attendees and local partners, the paint project was organized so as to promote teambuilding. "We assigned them to groups and we made it competitive," says Toro. "Each group of 10 or 20 wore a bandana of a different color, and painted a different part of the wall." Similarly, a CSR activity at a meeting in Wisconsin



“More and more customers want to do business with responsible companies. And the other side of it is to attract and retain employees who want to work for companies that are socially responsible.”

Victoria Johnson, CMP, CMM, Global Manager, SMM
Global Meetings & Events, UL LLC, Northbrook, IL

had hundreds of Cox attendees competing in captain-led teams to build hygienic kits. The event was organized by Clean the World, a company that recycles soap and other discarded hygiene products. “It was very energized and very well appreciated by my attendees,” Toro adds.

At a Teradata Universe event in Copenhagen, the company supported a charity for cystic fibrosis, a disease that affects lung function. “It’s all about their lung capacity so we had the participants blow windmills, but they did a challenge where we would time them for one minute: how many seconds could you blow the windmill in one breath,” Morgan describes. “It was a lot of fun because the participants get really competitive and they learn about the charity.”

Time-Effective Activities

Despite the various benefits of CSR activities for the host company and the attendees, some meeting schedules may be too tight to accommodate them. However, that does not prevent the host company from engaging in CSR at the destination, without the attendees themselves participating.

“Nonactive” CSR initiatives, Johnson says, can include partnerships with organizations like Clean the World. “When we negotiate our contracts we ask the hotels to either pay for it or pay half with us,” says Johnson. “So even if the host says we have no time (for a group activity), we can still have that ready to go if the hotel is willing to do it.”

With a similar rationale, UL has partnered with a food recovery organization. “They are certified in food safety handling. They come in and they rescue the

A bike-building program held by UL at its leadership conference in Phoenix, Arizona, elicited these thank-yous from young beneficiaries.

viable food, and they put it in certified containers and bring it to a local shelter. So that’s another nonactive CSR way of doing things.”

As far as “active” CSR, there are ways of keeping the programs time effective. “We’ve worked with clients to incorporate small activities including filling backpacks with school supplies for children in the local communities,” says Boisner. “This could be a time-effective CSR activity as much of the activity (buying the supplies, packing the backpacks, etc.) could be done prior to the onsite experience.”

Boisner also suggests saving time by combining CSR with a dinner or reception one of the evenings. “As an example, one of our automotive clients had artist Erik Wal do a few different paintings. Then they did a silent auction for the paintings. The money was donated to the boys and girls club.”

This year, Cox Automotive combined CSR with the registration period for a 2,000-attendee Sales Summit in Phoenix, Arizona. While participants waited to register or after they registered, they visited Red Cross stations where they assembled bags of personal hygiene products to be donated to the fire department.

Activities held onsite as opposed to a coach ride away save time, as do lunch-hour activities and individual activities that can be performed when time allows. The most time-effective solution will depend on the nature of the meeting and its agenda. “At Partners, we have a specific time slot on a Tuesday, 12–2 p.m., so everyone knows from year to year that during that break a Teradata Cares activity is going on,” says Morgan. “But a lot of the smaller meetings do it around the lunch hour, where attendees can stop by the Teradata Cares table. At Universe, they have a Cares booth going the entire three-day conference, and people can stop by and do the activity any time. So however the conference is set up, we try to fit in the Cares activity appropriately.”

Gaining Traction With Attendees

Most if not all attendees will be moved by a community service mission, which has a universal appeal. “Meetings and

Sourcing CSR Opportunities

A strategic approach to CSR at meetings is in part a sourcing challenge. Planners must find charitable opportunities in the destination based on numerous criteria, including highest impact to the community, costs involved, time involved and whether the nature of the activity will fit attendee demographics. Following are some of the major avenues for locating these opportunities, along with planners’ commentaries:

CVBs “The CVB is usually a great resource for locating CSR opportunities as they are very knowledgeable on the destination, culture and needs of the area,” notes Bonnie Boisner, vice president of event management for Aimia. “We check with the city first” to obtain referrals, says Sherri Morgan, director of community relations, Teradata Cares. “So for example, if we’re going into Atlanta we’ll check with the local agencies and charities because we want to make sure we’re doing something that they need. It’s really popular to build bicycles, but if the local boys and girls club doesn’t want it or need any at that time, we don’t want to do that.”

DMCs “Our DMC partners are very active in CSR locally and can provide excellent suggestions as well,” says Boisner. Victoria Johnson, CMP, CMM, global manager, strategic meetings management, at UL LLC, notes, “There are also national companies that specialize in (CSR activities), such as Impact 4 Good, but if they’re not located at the meeting site you have to ship in materials. What I’m finding is that more DMCs are catching on to CSR, and they are more affordable to use.”

Hotels “We have partnered with hotels directly, as they often have unique experiences right on the property,” says Boisner. **In-house Community Relations** “We have a community relations team in our company, and we go through them first,” says Thais Toro, corporate event planner, Cox Automotive. “Based on the meeting location, they provide me with a list of organizations that have a need and that will work for us, given the size of our group.”

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events bring together a diverse group of attendees, but one thing remains constant — people want to make a difference,” as Boisner puts it. “CSR activities are truly a unique way to break down barriers and allow attendees of all generations, demographics, interests and abilities to work together to accomplish something great.” But ideally, the nature of the activity will be appealing in and of itself. That quality will help to drive participation among the group. Thus, a match with participants’ interests and skillsets is desirable.

Some activities will be especially appealing to the more technically oriented. Teradata groups have built wheelchairs for veterans as well as “Green Machines” (the modern version of the Big Wheel) for kids. “It’s a technology company, so they like putting things together,” Morgan says. “They like putting together relief kits also, but I think they enjoy really in-depth building a little more.”

At the Teradata Universe event that took place this April in Hamburg, Germany, a more creative CSR activity was offered to attendees. The company partnered with Children for Tomorrow, which supports children and families who have become victims of war, persecution and organized violence. “The charity does a lot of art with the children to get them to express themselves and the tragedy that they’ve been through,” Morgan says. “So

attendees made origami cranes to create an artistic display for the children.” Charity representatives were onsite to coordinate the activity.

Both tech skill and creativity were combined in a bike-building program held by UL at its leadership conference in Phoenix, Arizona. While the company’s engineers were mostly focused on the building, other members in the teams could contribute creatively by decorating the bikes or coming up with the team chant. “So they divided and conquered based on skillset,” says Johnson. “Also, with UL being a safety company, it was nice that the company that we used for the activity did a safety test of each bike and then put a tag on it that it passed for safety.” She adds, “There may have been a few people who left the event to work in their hotel rooms, but we had the majority participating.”

A key driver of participation in any CSR activity is that the attendees are clear on how the community will benefit from the activity. “I think one of our goals as event planners is to explain how their effort will be perceived and who will be benefited,” says Toro. One approach is to let a director from the partnering organization make a presentation prior to the activity.

In the case of the senior center in Aruba, once attendees visited the facility, the impact that their effort would

have become very clear. “It was hot, but (attendees) didn’t care since they saw the seniors and the condition of their facility. Our people in general are very giving. And when we went back to the hotel we had about 100 people from the staff welcoming us and clapping.” At this point, repeat qualifiers in Cox’s incentive programs will actually ask what the next community service activity will be.

Gaining Traction With Leadership

The idea of integrating CSR with meetings also must be accepted by meeting owners and upper management. They may believe, for example, that charitable contributions are sufficient and that taking up valuable meeting time with CSR activities is unnecessary.

At the UL leadership conference in Phoenix, the bike building served to make the case for such activities to the company leaders in attendance. “The motivation was to expose them to the fact that they could do this with their meetings, so it cascades into the organization,” explains Johnson. “I did get people saying that that’s what they want to do now. And our president was ready for us to do another one next year. He saw firsthand what a great motivation and networking opportunity the build-a-bike activity created.”

C&IT

Site Selection

Attendees experience the sugar-white sand beaches at Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa on Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast.

It's Better at the Beach

Where Seaside Events Rise to the Occasion

By Diana Lambdin Meyer

One of the many benefits of having meetings and special events at a beach location is the considerable savings on decorations. Mother Nature has taken care of that in the form of palm trees, sunsets and peaceful vistas complemented by refreshing breezes and the occasional wispy clouds passing by.

Décor by Mother Nature

"That's one reason I really like coordinating beach events because the décor is naturally taken care of and no one ever complains about the view," says Michelle, who has managed corporate events from coast to coast for a major financial institution for more than 10 years.

"In fact, I can't remember ever receiving a complaint about a beach event because everyone is always so relaxed and

in good spirits when outdoors and so close to the water," she says.

The Sanctuary at Kiawah Resort, located on the pristine beaches of Kiawah Island, a 10-mile-long barrier island about 25 miles southwest of Charleston, South Carolina, has been the setting for dozens of the meetings Michelle coordinates for her employer.

The property has two focal points, starting with the Kiawah Island Golf Resort, which has more than 22,000 sf of meeting space and 90 holes of championship golf. The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Resort features six outdoor spaces ranging from an intimate 650-sf veranda to the massive Mingo Point, which can accommodate from 50 to 800 people.

Michelle has used all of these spaces for various events, but always gets the most positive feedback from events at Mingo Point, which she describes as "a

massive picnic area with shade trees, casual seating spaces and fabulous views."

"I like that there is a built-in outdoor kitchen, so you save in catering and setup costs," she says. "We've had oyster roasts with steel drum bands and it's just the perfect setting to bring a group together."

Over the years, Michelle has learned to check on three things before planning a beach meeting or event:

- The tidal charts. Low tide makes for ugly, sometimes smelly backdrops.
- Bug season and how various community environmental guidelines choose to manage this component of Mother Nature.
- Shade or shelter from the sun for a daytime event.

A fourth tip is equally important for any meeting planner coordinating a beach event — remind women to pack



Credit: The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Resort

Mingo Point at The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Resort on South Carolina's coast can host low-country oyster roasts and barbecues for up to 800.

flats, which are easier for walking in the sand than heels. Otherwise kick those shoes off and go barefoot. It's a good excuse to have a pedicure before this business outing. Or, pedicures on the beach could be an event in itself. Think about it.

Sea Turtles Welcome

Another consideration on Mother Nature's schedule that may impact events on a number of our nation's beaches

is the nesting season for endangered loggerhead and green sea turtles. Florida, Hawaii and the Caribbean fall into this category.

On the 26 miles of sand on South Walton Beach on Florida's Gulf Coast, the turtle nesting season is from May until late September. Each morning during this period, volunteers with South Walton Turtle Watch patrol the beaches and if evidence of a nest is found, orange

netting is placed around the area and signs notify humans to keep away.

Local ordinance prevents leaving tents, tables or other setups on the beach overnight, and if a turtle comes ashore and lays eggs in the middle of an event space, well, you'll just have to work around it.

Donita Jacobs with Torchmark Travel in Dallas has been coordinating events for corporate clients for years on South Walton beaches and has rarely encountered a complication because of sea turtles. In fact, the times it has occurred, her attendees have been delighted to witness this wonder of nature and learn more about the protection of wildlife and endangered species in this area.

"Sea turtles are always welcomed guests at any of our events," says Jacobs. "We move our event a few feet down the beach and everyone goes on with business."

Numerous times over the years, some of these beaches in South Walton Beach have been named the most pristine and



Credit: Ocean Reef Club

Ocean Reef Club in the Florida Keys is a private tropical retreat perfect for elegant waterfront events and activities.



Marco Island Marriott's wide, flat beach is perfect for oceanfront cookouts and events.

Credit: Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort

environmentally protected pieces of coastal property in Florida, which is one of the attractions to this area, as well as the sugar-white sand and the turquoise reflection it creates combined with the clarity of the water here.

South Walton Beach includes 16 unique and charming beachside communities that are known for artists' galleries, festivals and independent restaurants all connected by more than 200 miles of hiking and biking trails.

Sandestin is one of those 16 beach communities and home to the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, the largest full-service beach resort on Florida's Northwest coast. The more than 60,000 sf of indoor

Floating Venues

The **Grand Floridian**, permanently docked at the Diplomat Resort & Spa in Hollywood, Florida, can accommodate up to 550 guests on four decks. The 128-foot yacht features a covered sky lounge, a sun deck, two after-balconies, and a state-of-the-art media system including 13 high-definition televisions.

The **Belle of Louisville**, which just celebrated 100 years of cruising the Ohio River from its port in Louisville, Kentucky, can accommodate up to 650 people on a number of open decks, but 200–230 seated for dinner in air-conditioned comfort. A sister boat, the Spirit of Jefferson, can seat 150 on two decks.

Flagship Cruises, just a few short blocks from the San Diego Convention Center, has nine vessels to choose from, with capacity ranging from an intimate 32 on the Quiet Heart to 600 in a reception on the California Spirit. Each boat has LCD projector and screen, plasma TVs, internet and more.

The **Bricktown Water Taxi** in Oklahoma City cruises the Bricktown Canal and can accommodate 20 people each for dinner, lunch or sightseeing cruises. Taxis run very close together so a larger group in separate taxis does not feel distanced from one another.

Sail Wild Hearts in Orange Beach, Alabama, is a 53-foot catamaran that can accommodate up to 49 passengers in a casual event sailing the waters of the Gulf of Mexico or the back bays. Enjoy heavy hors d'oeuvres for a sunset cruise or light lunch that includes snorkeling and dolphin watching.

No passport required to cruise along the international waterway of Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River outside of Detroit, Michigan, on one of two climate-controlled yachts: The **Infiniti** accommodates 130 guests seated on two levels; the **Ovation** manages 300 on three levels.

Explore Lake Michigan, the Chicago River and the Chicago waterfront via the four boats of **Entertainment Cruises**. The river cruises can accommodate up to 100 people with drinks and light hors d'oeuvres, but the lake sailing ships have a variety of options that can include receptions for up to 700 people.

Biscayne Lady Yacht Charters in Miami offers more than a dozen floating vessels of various sizes, from catamarans and sailboats to a variety of elegant yachts. Whatever your capacity — from as few as six to nearly 400 — the options for receptions, dinners and celebrations are customizable to your needs.

The **Southern Belle Riverboat**, which cruises the Tennessee River from Chattanooga, accommodates up to 340 people for a buffet-style meal or 375 for a cocktail reception. Or host your meal for up to 450 people at the pre-event center on the Landing, then cruise everyone all together for dancing or sightseeing throughout the year.

Cruise the Mississippi River out of New Orleans on the **Paddlewheeler Creole Queen** using one of three dining rooms that can provide a seated dinner for groups

ranging from 64 to 220. Book the entire boat and seat up to 375 for dinner or 819 for a stand-up reception with plenty of space remaining for a dance floor.

Explore the Lake Superior shoreline near Duluth, Minnesota, with a selection of four cruises with **Vista Fleets**. Smaller boats are ideal for smaller groups of up to 36 for a sit-down dinner; larger boats can accommodate up to 220 for a stand-up reception or 125 for a sit-down dinner. Tours run May through October.

— DLM



Credit: Diplomat Resort & Spa

The Grand Floridian yacht, docked at the Diplomat Resort, offers group cruises.

and outdoor event space is one of the many reasons Jacobs at Torchmark has used the resort for meetings with her client. These gatherings usually range from 100–150 people.

"A number of the indoor meeting spaces have great windows and views of the Gulf for when we have to be indoors, but the variety of outdoor spaces for receptions and meals always provides a fresh option," Jacobs says.

She utilizes the outdoor venues as an opportunity for "walking meetings" when possible. With small groups of 20 or fewer, the conversation continues while moving along the beach or pathways, thus making better use of time but also providing more exposure to the natural environment, which is the premiere attraction of this region.

"It can be a little cool in winter and early spring, but the Hilton Sandestin is equipped with a number of outdoor space heaters that allow us to be outside but still comfortable," she says.

Florida's 'Magical' Southwest Coast

"A lot of people don't realize just how beautiful the Florida Gulf Coast is," says Bryan, a meeting planner for a major lifestyle recreation company who is coordinating a major event at the Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa in Southwest Florida. "The beach business is our business and these are just magical.

Bryan's company has hosted gatherings for up to 1,000 people at beachfront properties from Bermuda and the



Credit: Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa

Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa's Cabana Club at sunset.

Bahamas, to Mexico and Hawaii. He is particularly looking forward to hosting a dinner on the massive flat beach in front of the Marco Island Marriott.

"Not all beaches are conducive to large tables, but this beach is very flat and that makes everyone more comfortable," he says.

Bryan is also excited about Marco Island Marriott's rebranding to JW Marriott, which will take place on January 1, 2017. This is a part of major renovation that has been underway for almost two years and includes the addition of another tower of guest rooms and meeting space. When complete, the new JW Marriott Marco Island Resort will have 810 guest rooms.

Noteworthy Beach Meeting Spots

The **Ocean Reef Club** on the northernmost tip of Key Largo in the Florida Keys has in its backyard the country's



Credit: South Seas Island Resort

A teambuilding boat regatta adds an element of fun competition to the meeting agenda at South Seas Island Resort on Captiva Island, Florida.

only living coral reef, a great attraction for conference attendees who snorkel or dive. The hotel has 275 guest rooms, more than 30,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, two 18-hole championship golf courses, a marina and 20 tennis courts, all about an hour from Miami International Airport.

The iconic **Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa** in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, has recently completed a \$25 million, resort-wide renovation that includes 511 guest rooms, pool area, spa and 61,000 sf of meeting space. Located on 65 acres of beachfront property, the Sawgrass Marriott includes 99 holes of championship golf.

Hollywood, Florida, tucked in-between Fort Lauderdale and Miami, is the home to the **Diplomat Resort & Spa** and its 209,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space. Even the indoor space has balconies and floor-to-ceiling windows with ocean views, but nothing beats the Infinity Pool Deck that accommodates up to 1,500 people, or the palm-tree lined courts and terraces for smaller groups.

On Florida's Gulf Coast, **The Ritz-Carlton, Naples** features a private beach that can accommodate up to 700 people with banquet rounds set for eight. In addition, a lovely tea garden can accommodate about 75 people. Two outdoor pools offer a number of options, as does an outdoor courtyard.

Also on Florida's Southwest Gulf Coast is the **South Seas Island Resort** on Captiva Island, 330 acres that is part wildlife preserve and part luxury resort.



Credit: Wild Dunes Resort

The oceanfront Grand Pavilion at Wild Dunes Resort near Charleston, South Carolina, can host up to 600 people.

The 2½-mile white sand beach is ideal for group activities that include sandcastle building contests, beach Olympics and cardboard sailboat regattas. With 471 guest rooms, the South Seas Island Resort also includes four lawn settings, two beach venues and a marina event space, which is exceptionally popular because of the manatees and dolphins that enjoy the company at the marina.

At **Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa** on Southeast Florida's Atlantic Coast on the south end of Palm Beach island, the 30,000 sf of meeting space includes an oceanfront courtyard and ballroom terrace, event lawn and pool terrace for events. Overnight accommodations in a business cabana provide private access

to the business lounge and pools as well as space for up to five guests per cabana.

In Fort Lauderdale, the **Lago Mar Resort and Club** is an intimate 10-acre family-owned property with 500 feet of private beach. In addition to the beach space, the Lago Mar offers a garden filled with subtropical flowers and a garden courtyard that overlooks the pool and opens to the beach.

Miami's South Beach is the setting for the **Fountainbleau**, which features three lawns on various levels capable of accommodating up to 1,000 people for dinner. The BleuLive Stage, which extends over the pool area, is a great addition to that location. The Glimmer Boardroom Terrace keeps toes out

of the sand while offering a 180-degree ocean view.

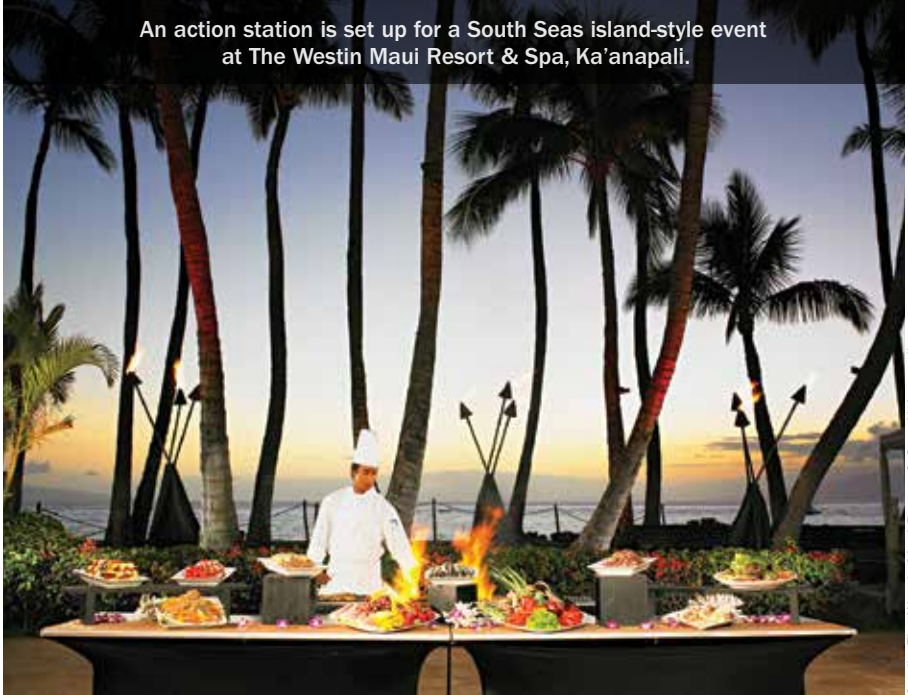
Wild Dunes, located on Isle of Palms Beach about 30 minutes from downtown Charleston, South Carolina, hosts a number of corporate teambuilding exercises that showcase the Atlantic Ocean location. Try crabbing competitions, kayaking through salt marshes and estuaries, a low-country boil and oyster roast — even weave baskets with low-country sweetgrass. The resort is on 1,600 oceanfront acres and includes 36 holes of golf.

Nicknamed the Grande Dame of the California Coast, the **Hotel del Coronado** in San Diego is a National Historic Landmark with 65,000 sf of meeting space that sits on 28 acres of beautiful coastline just seven miles from the San Diego International Airport.

The **Montage Laguna Beach** in California is renowned for its outdoor event spaces that includes three lawns or gardens at more than 4,500 sf each and capable of hosting up to 300 people in a sit-down dinner. Each of those spaces has a fabulous ocean view and two include fire pits. Two generous pool decks also overlook the Pacific Ocean.

The **Westin Maui Resort & Spa, Ka'anapali**, features that all-important full-service outdoor kitchen and grills, three terraces for groups up to 400, and 11,000 sf of outdoor space that includes waterfalls and beach access. Indoor spaces include small boardrooms, a 1,000-person capacity ballroom and 11th floor event space with spectacular ocean views.

C&IT



Credit: The Westin Maui Resort & Spa, Ka'anapali

An action station is set up for a South Seas island-style event at The Westin Maui Resort & Spa, Ka'anapali.


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The Orlando Eye observation wheel is central to the I-Drive 360 dining and entertainment complex.



Credit: The Orlando Eye



Credit: Visit Orlando

Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel (left) and Visit Orlando Chairman of the Board Peter Kacheris celebrate the recordbreaking 2015 visitor attendance.

It's All About the Experience!

By John Buchanan

It's no accident that Orlando — the No. 1 family vacation destination in the world — also rules the roost as the top U.S. meeting destination, again named to that lofty position for 2015 by Cvent. The city broke an all-time record with 66 million visitors in 2015, the most of any other U.S. destination.

Orlando offers formidable airlift, with one of the most passenger-friendly major airports in the country, and a long and ever-expanding list of exceptional meeting hotels ranging from high-end luxury to high-value economy.

But the factor that truly sets Orlando apart in the minds of many meeting planners and attendees is its extraordinary range of things to do. And that range stretches from a world-class dining scene, to nightlife and entertainment, to unique offsite venues and the spectacular theme parks that make Orlando the singular place that it is.

"The great thing about Orlando is that the list of things to do during a meeting is always being updated," says Stephanie Green, director of product development at destination management company Hello! Florida. "And that's important since we have

groups that repeat Orlando as their destination year after year. But we're still able to find new and exciting things for them to do, because there is always something new and exciting to do in Orlando, whether that's at a theme park or an airboat tour or some other kind of activity that gets them outdoors in the sunshine."

Adds Fred Shea, senior vice president, sales and services, for Visit Orlando: "Everything you hear now about what's going on with meetings is that it's really all about the larger experience attendees can have in the destination. Everything you read now says attendees are looking for an experience they will remember, a meeting they can look back on in the future and say was a great event. So the message we want to get out is that when you come to Orlando, and you use venues such as CityWalk or Disney Springs or the new I-Drive 360 or the Harry Potter venue at Universal or the IllumiNations fireworks show at Epcot at Disney World, your attendees are going to have experiences that they cannot get anywhere else. And they're going to remember those experiences for a very long time and tie them back to your meeting." ■

A Dining Mecca

Of all the ways in which Orlando has evolved as a destination over the last few years, none has been more significant than the improvement of its dining scene. “The most important thing to understand about Orlando as a meeting destination is that the city’s dining scene has grown dramatically over the last few years,” says Visit Orlando’s Fred Shea. “And that’s especially true of dining opportunities for meeting groups.”

As current examples of an ongoing evolution that brings ever-increasing quality and sophistication to Orlando’s restaurant scene, Shea cites Pointe Orlando, a dining, shopping and entertainment district across the street from the Orange County Convention Center, and the new I-Drive 360 complex located a short distance up the street.

At the same time, Shea says, Orlando’s

culinary innovation also is centered on the well-established “Restaurant Row,” located along Sand Lake Road, and the new and expanded Disney Springs complex that is now being completed on the massive site of the old Downtown Disney in Lake Buena Vista.

“The opening this year of the fully completed Disney Springs is going to be a huge factor in the expansion of our local dining scene,” Shea says. “But at the same time, we’re seeing new restaurants at CityWalk at Universal Orlando. And, of course, ‘Restaurant Row’ is still a thriving dining area, especially for meetings and events.”

A newly invigorated and much improved inventory of local restaurants is vital to the continued growth of Orlando as one of the largest and most prominent meeting destinations in the U.S., notes Jennifer Targhetta, an account executive at destination management company 360 Destination Group.

“One of the misconceptions about Orlando has been that we



The annual Food & Wine Classic at Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin features culinary artistry and wines from around the world.

only have chain restaurants,” Targhetta says. “And that is definitely not the case. Over the last few years, the dining scene in Orlando has really developed and evolved. So today, I’d say we’re one of the better dining destinations in the entire country. And we have fine dining restaurants located all over the city at this point.”

Orlando also can boast a list of restaurants operated by James Beard Award winners and nominees, as well as celebrity chefs from Todd English to Emeril Lagasse to Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto, who debuted a new and already acclaimed Morimoto Asia at Disney Springs last year.

“We’ve also seen the number of new restaurants being opened increased even further over the last couple of years,” Targhetta says. “And that is very important to our continuing growth as a meeting destination, because of course planners and attendees want a good selection of really great restaurants when they come to town. And Orlando has that now.”

Although Targhetta has an area-wide list of restaurants she favors for clients, she is particularly fond of Restaurant Row, located along Sand Lake Road. She frequently works with planners to create dine-around evenings that are logistically convenient.

“We use Restaurant Row so often because it’s very convenient for groups,” Targhetta says. “You have so many good restaurants right there. You can find any kind of food you want. And there are always new places opening.”

Among her favorite establishments is Vines, a locally owned restaurant that serves steaks and seafood, as well as small tapas-style plates. The restaurant also works

Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto opened his eponymous restaurant in Disney Springs last year.



Credits: Walt Disney World Resort



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A Dining Mecca

with planners to create customized, one-of-a-kind menus. “It’s a relatively new place that’s only been open a few years,” Targhetta says. “But it has become very popular with meeting groups because they do a really great job.”

Another dining venue she likes is Eddie V’s, a chop house. “It has a great location,” Targhetta says, “because the back side



Pointe Orlando, across from the convention center, has multiple restaurants to choose from, including Tommy Bahamas.

of the restaurant overlooks Sand Lake. So it offers a really nice environment, with great views.”

Another go-to Restaurant Row option for Targhetta is Roy’s. “We do a lot of groups there, because it’s a very unique place that serves South Pacific-style seafood that is very influenced by Hawaiian cuisine,” Targhetta says. “They also have a very good sushi bar.”

Targhetta also favors Pointe Orlando because of its location and roster of dining options under one roof. “We use Cuba Libre a lot,” she says. “One obvious reason it’s so popular is that Cuban cuisine and Cuban culture are such a part of Florida. Another great thing about Cuba Libre is that they provide great service for groups. And they’re always helpful in trying to help planners create the best event they possibly can.”

Within the Pointe, Targhetta also likes the new Lafayette’s, which serves New Orleans-style Cajun and Creole cuisine in a Big Easy-themed, fun environment. It also features live music. “It has great décor that really plays up the New Orleans theme,” Targhetta says. “It’s just a lot of fun. And something different.”

Visit Orlando’s Shea shares Targhetta’s enthusiasm for Lafayette’s

The new STK, which opened last month in Disney Springs, offers full restaurant buyouts and a private dining room.



The House of Blues bar and restaurant, serving traditional Southern cooking, also features a live music club.

ette’s. He also considers it one of the most important additions to the city’s list of restaurants well suited to meeting groups.

Another Pointe eatery that Targhetta likes is Tommy Bahamas. “It is a chain restaurant, but it’s very popular with groups because it’s fun,” she says. “And again, it just offers something different. It also offers good value and good service, both of which are very important to planners.”

In Disney Springs, in addition to the new Morimoto Asia, Targhetta recommends — and uses — the House of Blues and The Boathouse, a spectacular waterfront venue that features amphibious cars and classic Italian wooden boats that can accommodate small groups for scenic boat rides within the sprawling Disney Springs complex.

Orlando also is home to a pair of world-class new steakhouses. Del Frisco’s is located in the convention center district, across the street from Pointe Orlando. The second is the Orlando outpost of critically acclaimed STK, which opened last month in Disney Springs, and features rooftop and private dining.



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Entertainment & Nightlife

Just as Orlando's dining scene has evolved to become more sophisticated, so has its entertainment and nightlife scene. "For example, Blue Martini has been a popular entertainment venue for years," says Jennifer Targhetta of 360 Destination Group. "But now it has moved over to the Pointe and is even more fantastic. It's just a great venue for groups. And Cuba Libre has done a great job of making the transition each night from a restaurant to a nightlife venue. And it has that great Latin energy."

New on the Orlando nightlife scene is a local outpost of Mango's, the world-famous Latin club that features Las Vegas-style live entertainment backed up with a tasty menu and formidable array of creative and colorful cocktails, including an amazing array of Cuban mojitos.

"And Mango's has an amazing energy," Targhetta says. The venue can host

groups of up to 2,000 attendees.

Other live entertainment venues recommended by Shea include the new Cowgirls Rockbar in the I-Drive 360 complex, as well as more established local favorites Howl at the Moon and Tin Roof, both of which feature live music in a fun, energetic environment. Tin Roof also is among Targhetta's favorite entertainment venues.

Among Visit Orlando S.V.P. Fred Shea's favorite places for live music is Urbain 40 American Brasserie & Lounge, a stylish dining and entertainment venue on Restaurant Row. "They feature live music like jazz and American standards, so it's a wonderful venue for meeting groups that want something different. It's a throwback to the 1940s."

Another restaurant that morphs into an after-dinner live entertainment venue and is recommended by Shea is Rocco's Tacos & Tequila Bar, which serves 225 different tequilas. "It's a lot of fun, and because of that it's become a sort of nightclub, in addition to serving great Mexican food," Shea says.

Villas of Grand Cypress is famous for its golf course that is a replica of the Old Course at St. Andrews Scotland.



A new bridge to Disney Springs makes for easy access for guests of the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista.

And for planners and attendees looking for something a little more grandiose, there are the long-running La Nouba by Cirque du Soleil at Disney Springs and Blue Man Group at Universal CityWalk.

Coming in 2017 to International Drive is a more casual/fun entertainment option: Topgolf, a state-of-the-art golf range facility. 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 offer teambuilding options and up to 3,000 sf of private event space. For those who want to experience the outdoor version, Orlando offers more than 175 golf courses to choose from.

Another fun venue, Shea says, is the bowling-dining-entertainment complex Splitsville, located in Disney

Springs. "Bowling has become popular again, especially for groups," Shea says. "And Splitsville is just something that is very unique and a lot of fun."



A new place for good old-fashioned fun is Splitsville, a bowling, dining and entertainment venue in Disney Springs.



Blue Man Group's multisensory performances take place at Universal CityWalk.



La Nouba by Cirque du Soleil is in residence at Le Théâtre in Disney Springs.



Credit: Walt Disney World Resort

Credit: Lindsey Best

Credit: Walt Disney World Resort

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Unique Venues

Orlando also offers some extraordinary offsite venues, with most of them — such as CityWalk at Universal or Epcot at Walt Disney World — located within the city’s fabled theme parks.

And then, of course, there are the three major theme parks themselves — Disney World, Universal and SeaWorld — which take the term “offsite venue” into an entirely new dimension.

CityWalk at Universal, which has recently completed an

expansion that included the addition of a number of new dining and entertainment options, is “a fantastic location for doing a block party for large groups,” 360 Destination Group’s Jennifer Targhetta says. “And you can do a buyout that offers a lot of individual options for dining and entertainment. For smaller groups, you can also do individual buyouts of venues like Jimmy Buffet’s Margaritaville or Hard Rock Cafe and Hard Rock Live.”

Hard Rock Live at Universal Orlando ranks as one of Targhetta’s favorite venues.

“We’ve done all sorts of things at Hard Rock Live,” she says. “We’ve done awards dinners. We’ve done receptions that include a live

entertainment show. We have a small group coming up in the fall that is going to use the (John) Lennon Room for a special meet-and-greet. It’s just a really cool venue that offers a number of options in terms of how you use it.”

Onsite catering is provided by the adjacent Hard Rock Cafe, which is also available for buyouts.

Another offsite venue unique to Orlando is Fantasy of Flight, a private facility, open only to groups, that features museum-quality exhibits about the history of aviation. “We’ve used it for receptions,” Targhetta says. “We’ve used it for dinners. We’ve used it for

Hard Rock Live Orlando at Universal Orlando Resort hosts corporate functions catered by Hard Rock Cafe.



Credit: Universal Orlando Resort



A group event setup at Epcot's Imagination Pavilion.

Credit: Walt Disney World Resort

parties. It’s just a very unique venue that is educational, but also a lot of fun.”

When it comes to fun, few attractions in Orlando can match the new Orlando Eye, a giant and stylishly modern “Ferris wheel” that features enclosed compartments. It delivers dramatic, panoramic views of the Orlando area, especially



Rendering of the new outdoor event space at DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld, which is adding a new conference center.

Credit: DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld

at night. “It’s a great venue for groups, because you can do events outdoors or indoors right beside it,” Shea says. “You can also bring in live entertainment. And it’s part of the I-Drive 360 complex that also includes new venues such as Madame Tussaud’s wax museum, so for large groups, the Orlando Eye can serve as anchor attraction for a multi-faceted evening.”

Stephanie Green, director of product development at destination management company Hello! Florida, points out that another activity popular with groups is airboat excursions

along the St. John’s River or the waterways in nearby Kissimmee that skirt the northern edge of The Everglades. “An airboat tour gives attendees a chance to see the natural side of Florida,” Green says. “And for a lot of people, seeing the alligators and the many varieties of birds and other wildlife you see, it’s just another aspect of the area that is special. It’s exciting. And memorable.”



Credit: Hard Rock Live Orlando



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The Theme Park Capital

Of course, no matter how many activities there might be to choose from in Orlando, none can rival the major theme parks for attention and enthusiasm. “Orlando is the theme park capital of the world,” says Visit Orlando’s Fred Shea. “The theme parks are the number one reason why we are the No. 1 family vacation destination in the world. And they’ve played a major role in the growth of our meeting industry. For so many groups, the existence of the theme parks and the unique appeal and opportunities they offer are among the main reasons they select Orlando as their destination.”

For many meeting planners, the first time they come to Orlando for a site inspection, they are surprised by what the theme parks offer for adult groups, Shea says. “They’re actually quite surprised by what the theme parks can do for a meeting and the production capabilities they have. They’re also surprised by the flexibility the parks have and the fact that they can accommodate any kind of group, from a relatively small group to a major city-wide convention. And in terms of what they can do, they can do virtually anything a planner wants done. And all of it can be tied to your corporate identity or meeting theme.” But the real benefit of the theme parks, he says, is the extraordinary production capabilities that are included in the price. “And in addition to having all that included in the price of the event, that also means the planner does not have to worry about that stuff. It’s taken care



A rendering of Mako, Orlando’s tallest, fastest and longest roller coaster, which opens this month at SeaWorld.

of by professional people that do nothing but stage spectacular events for groups. And what those facilities can do for you can’t be done anywhere else in the world.”

Stephanie Green of Hello! Florida adds that one of the reasons why the theme parks are so popular with groups is that they give planners and attendees the chance to do an event that is truly exclusive. “For example, groups can get exclusive use of Epcot at Disney World or the Harry Potter venue at Universal,” she says. “And to be able to be given exclusive access to a particular part of a theme park on a particular night is just something very special. There’s no other way to do it than to be part of a group. And that’s very special. That’s the appeal, because it’s something they’ll remember forever.”

At the same time, however, none of the theme parks rest on their laurels. Each of them is always planning something new and even more spectacular.

Walt Disney World Resort, for example, is now working on a new Star Wars-themed land covering 14 acres — the largest single-themed land expansion ever for the resort. Universal is completing the “Skull Island: Reign of Kong” attraction that will debut this summer, paying homage to the monumental King Kong of movie fame; and Volcano Bay, a full-blown water theme park, is coming to Universal in 2017. SeaWorld opens the new “Mako” shark-themed, 200-foot-high roller coaster on June 10 — billed as Orlando’s tallest, fastest and longest roller coaster.

Meanwhile, ever-popular with groups is the nightly IllumiNations: Reflections of Earth fireworks exhibit at Disney’s Epcot; and the Wizarding World of Harry Potter’s Hogsmeade and Diagon Alley parks, which are even more enchanting at night.

With all the fantasy and thrills Orlando has to offer, it’s no surprise that the city set an all-time record for overall visitation, with 66 million fun-seekers arriving in 2015, more than any other U.S. destination. As such, meeting planners can be confident that meetings in Orlando will draw enthusiastic support from attendees and stakeholders alike.

C&IT



The Great Wall at Skull Island: Reign of Kong attraction, debuting this summer in Islands of Adventure at Universal Orlando Resort.



Star Wars shows and experiences at Disney’s Hollywood Studios will be augmented by a planned Star Wars-themed land.

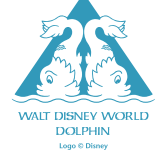


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Destination

The new Breeze Ocean Kitchen restaurant at Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa.

Florida

Exceptional Hotels & Resorts and Superb Customer Service Draw Groups Back Year After Year

By John Buchanan

There are two simple, overarching reasons why Florida ranks perennially as the undisputed king of statewide meeting destinations. One is the quality of the Sunshine State's unparalleled hotel and resort product. The other is the Florida brand itself, which appeals to meeting attendees of all demographic profiles, especially during the winter.

And every year as a result, Florida attracts planners and attendees who come for the first time, hold a successful meeting, and then immediately decide to come back.

Amy Hanson, executive assistant at Minneapolis-based equipment manufacturer Graco, used a Florida destination for the first time in January, when she arranged a five-day, four-night meeting for 95 attendees at Streamsong Resort, a sprawling property located in rural Bowling Green, south of and about equidistant between Tampa and Orlando.

The selection of a Florida destination was an easy one. "Because the meeting is in January, we want a warm destination, because Minneapolis is cold in the winter," Hanson says, noting that her timely discovery of Streamsong was a matter of fortuitous coincidence.

"As a meeting planner," she says, "I get invited to numerous luncheons throughout the year where hotels and resorts send in their sales staffs so I can visit with them and learn about them. So, at just the right time, I went to one of those lunches, and Streamsong was one of the resorts that was represented. So I met with them and was very intrigued, because my attendees like to play golf. But we also like to offer other options that are fun. And Streamsong not only has great golf, but it has also clay sport shooting, fishing on an onsite lake and a nice spa. So it was a perfect choice for us. And it was also something new and different."

Streamsong, which offers 24,600 sf of meeting space, also represented a perfect match demographically. "Ninety percent of our attendees are men," Hanson says. "And with the four main amenities that Streamsong offers, I knew all of our attendees would be interested in at least one of them."

Another positive factor was Streamsong's location, in a fairly rural setting, away from major urban centers — and typical meeting destinations — such as Orlando and Tampa. "That was good for us for two reasons," Hanson says. "One is

that our event is very meeting- or business-focused, so we like a destination that does not offer a lot of distractions like big cities do. But at the same time, we want our attendees to be able to relax and have a good time. And Streamsong met both of those requirements. It's just a very unique property."

High Marks Across the Board

After experiencing Streamsong, Hanson has high praise for the property on all counts, starting with its room product.

"What's amazing to me about the rooms at Streamsong is that they all have a great view, of either the lake or the beautiful grounds," Hanson says. "And all of the rooms are very modern and clean. So in addition to having a nice view, the rooms are warm and inviting at the same time. The rooms are also built for the business traveler, with all the functionality and amenities that people in business want and need when they're on the road, from a beautiful shower to a little refrigerator and a nice coffee maker. And every room has a couch, so at a meeting, they're perfect for getting together and networking in your room if you want to. That also makes them very comfortable." Rooms also have free Wi-Fi. "And for me as the planner, free Wi-Fi is a big deal."

Hanson also singled out Streamsong's food and beverage service as superb. "The food and beverage at Streamsong was excellent," she says. "And one of the highlights of the meeting was an amazing awards reception we did the first night. We had an open bar and served heavy hors d'oeuvres and tons of great desserts. And all of the food was done exceptionally well. And the presentation and service were as good as the food."

One item that really created enthusiasm among her attendees was fish tacos. "They actually bring out an entire, big fish and cut it up for the tacos right from the oven," Hanson says. "Our attendees thought the fish tacos, done that way, were really something special. But all of the food was equally good. And everything is very fresh. You couldn't ask for better food for a meeting group. In fact, the feedback we got from attendees was that the food at Streamsong was the best they've ever gotten at any of our meetings."

As a planner, Hanson also cited Streamsong's service standard as a key element in the success of her meeting. "I give them an A+ for service, across the board," she says. "The service was consistently excellent, even when it came down to the smallest things. Everything was done right. They always went the extra mile for us. And that's true from the catering staff to meeting services. They just pay attention to every detail. I can't say enough about how amazing the service is. The resort is beautiful. The amenities are great. The food is great.

But it's the service that makes the experience so amazing for a meeting planner and attendees that you want to go back and have that experience again. You just know from the minute you get there that you're going to be well taken care of."

Hanson and her attendees were so well taken care of, she says, that Graco is already talking about going back for the same meeting in 2018.

A Longtime Florida Loyalist

Unlike Hanson, who experienced Florida as a planner for the first time this year, Kristin Tschirn, director of continuing medical education at New Orleans-based hospital operator Ochsner Health System, has been enthusiastically using a number of Sunshine State destinations for years.

Among the properties she uses in a regular rotation is The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, located on the Atlantic coast near Jacksonville. Tschirn uses the hotel every other year for a 45–50 attendee, three-day CME meeting of colon and rectal surgeons.

"My attendees and I cannot say enough good things about The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island," Tschirn says. "It's wonderful for that particular meeting, because a lot of the physicians like to bring their families. And there is just so much to do there, including shopping and also things for kids to do. Amelia Island itself is beautiful. But The Ritz-Carlton itself is fabulous.

And they do a phenomenal job for meetings. They just make everyone feel welcome and at home. And the property itself is just gorgeous. And it's beautifully maintained."

The 446-room hotel, with more than 48,000 sf of meeting space, also is perfectly sized for Tschirn's meetings. "It's big enough to accommodate a range of group sizes or multiple meetings at the same time," she says. "But it's

also small enough that you don't get lost, like you do in a really big hotel. It's just the perfect size for most meetings. And the amenities — the beach, the pool, the spa, the golf course — are fantastic. And the food is great, too."

She and her attendees also love the nearby small town of Fernandina Beach, a timeless throwback to unspoiled old Florida. "It's just so quaint and wonderful. All of our attendees love it because they can walk up and down those old cobblestone streets."

Among Floridians in the know and well-informed meeting planners, Amelia Island and Fernandina Beach rank high on "favorite place to go" lists. Last year, Visit Florida, the Official Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation, held its annual Florida Encounter, a hosted buyer show for meeting planners from across the country, at Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort. The hotel and the destination earned a



Natural light streams into a meeting room with extraordinary views of the golf course at Streamsong Resort in Central Florida.



Credit: Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort

The Falcon's Nest restaurant and pub at Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort boasts the best burgers in town.

chorus of accolades. Florida Encounter has built a reputation as one of the premier hosted buyer programs in the meeting industry. As a result, it selects each year's destination and hotel with great care. And for 2015, Omni Amelia Island did an outstanding job for attendees, including a representative from *Corporate & Incentive Travel* as a media member. Florida Encounter will partner with Experience Kissimmee and Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate next year. The event is set for November 29–December 2, at the Omni property.

Located on 1,350 acres of unspoiled property on a barrier reef just off the northeast coast, Omni Amelia Island features 404 guest rooms and 80,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space. One of its most unique venues is the largest multitiered pool deck in northeast Florida.

Amenities include nine restaurants, including Bob's Steak & Chop House, and Verandah, which serves fresh seafood and Southern-inspired cuisine. Other key amenities include a trio of 18-hole golf courses designed by legendary golf architects Pete Dye, Bobby Weed and Tom Fazio; and a world-class spa. Activities include kayaking and paddleboarding among pristine and well-protected marshlands that abound with wildlife.

Located just 18 miles south of Jacksonville is another of Tschirn's go-to properties, the charming AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club. Built in 1928, the resort is another time-honored symbol of the history of Florida tourism, but one with markedly modern amenities and service.

"Ponte Vedra Inn is just such a neat property," says Tschirn, who is going back later this year. "It's very unique. And like Fernandina Beach, it's that 'old Florida' that you don't see any more. But there's also just so much to do. And you can be in Jacksonville in a matter of minutes if you want more options. I just love Ponte Vedra Beach. And like The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, Ponte Vedra Inn has great amenities, like great beach, great tennis courts, the great TPC Sawgrass golf course. And a lot of my doctors love golf and tennis." The resort offers 25,000 sf of meeting and banquet space.

A Newly Discovered Gem

Earlier this year, Tschirn discovered a new Florida property that quickly earned a spot on her favorite hotels list when she used it for the first time in her rotation for the meeting that goes to Amelia Island and Ponte Vedra Beach — the 602-room Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. Located in South Walton, near Destin on Florida's Emerald Coast on the Gulf of Mexico, the Hilton Sandestin features what is arguably the best, unspoiled white sand beach in Florida — and one of the best in the world. The Hilton Sandestin also is Northwest Florida's largest, full-service beachfront resort hotel.

Like other planners who experience it for the first time, Tschirn and her attendees were enthralled by the unique beauty of the Emerald Coast.

"The Emerald Coast of Florida is just somewhere that everybody wants to see and experience," she says. "It has soft, white sand beaches that are some of the best in the world. The water is clear. It's just unlike any other place I've seen in Florida, and I've been to a lot of the state's resorts. And Hilton Sandestin, by far, has the best beach I've ever seen."

The room product at Hilton Sandestin also is excellent, Tschirn says. The rooms are especially suited to her group, because many of the doctors bring their families. "The rooms are huge," Tschirn says. "And you're getting a very large room without paying a premium rate. I brought my family to the meeting and there was plenty of room for my two kids. The rooms are not just large — they're fantastic."

Tschirn also was surprised by how much there is to do.

The Hilton Sandestin, part of a sprawling resort complex, features six restaurants, three bars, a one-mile stretch of beach, three swimming pools, four championship golf courses and a world-class Serenity by the Sea spa. It also features 40,000 sf of newly redesigned indoor event space including the all-new 7,500-sf Coastal Ballroom and 20,000 sf of outdoor space.

Nearby offsite attractions include the charming Village of Baytowne Wharf, Topsail Hill Preserve State Park, Big Kahuna's Water and Adventure Park, Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park and the Silver Sands Premium Outlet shopping center.



Credit: Ponte Vedra Lodge & Club

A newly refreshed deluxe ocean suite at Ponte Vedra Lodge & Club in northeast Florida near Jacksonville.

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Credit: Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort

The Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort.

Despite such onsite and offsite amenities, Tschirn — like virtually all planners — values service above all other factors. And based on her experience as a first-time client, she hails the service at Hilton Sandestin as some of the best she has ever received.

“I’ve done a lot of meetings,” Tschirn says. “And the thing that really struck me about Hilton Sandestin is the service. And one of the people responsible for the service we got was our onsite event concierge. I never had to ask for anything. He was always just right there, anticipating my needs. He was absolutely fantastic. He took care of every single thing I needed, sometimes before I even knew I needed it. And any time there just might have been any kind of problem, he knew about it before I did and took care of it. He never missed a beat. The service at the hotel is just outstanding.”

The Magic of Marco Island and Sanibel Island

Kristie Daniel, meetings and events manager at The Valvoline Company in Lexington, Kentucky, is another longtime user of Florida as a destination. But over the years, she has remained loyal to a single, and relatively little-known destination located in the Gulf of Mexico off the southwestern coast — Marco Island.

Daniel has used the 727-room, Balinese-themed Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa multiple times over the past decade as the site for Valvoline’s annual 425-attendee, company-wide employee workshop held in October. The company will go back this year. “The hotel is in our normal rotation of destinations for the meeting,” Daniel says. “We love it.”

The resort features nearly 80,000 sf of event space, two private 18-hole championship golf courses and an acclaimed spa.

Why is the Marco Island Marriott so popular with Daniel and her attendees?

“The main reason we keep going back is the customer service,” she says. “This meeting is mostly attended by young people, between 18 and 25, who managed QuickLube service centers. And for them to feel as welcomed as they are and to

feel as comfortable as they do is very important to us. And the staff at the hotel remembers people’s names from two or three years ago, or even further back. The customer service there is so good that it’s the standard I compare every other hotel to when I do site visits.”

Daniel also praises the hotel’s rooms. “The accommodations are wonderful,” she says. “And one reason I say that is because every room has a balcony with a nice view. And again, because the majority of our attendees are young and they haven’t traveled much yet on their own, Marco Island and the Marriott give them a special experience. It’s a real treat for them to stay in such a nice hotel in such a nice place.”

She and her attendees also appreciate what she calls truly exemplary food and beverage service. “I don’t think there’s another hotel out there, at least not one I know of, that has food and beverage that can compare to the Marco Island Marriott,” she says. “It is phenomenal. And it never runs out. Because we have a young group, they eat a lot. And not once in all these years have we ever run out of food before everybody had everything they wanted.”

Her attendees like the hotel as much as she does, she notes. “The other thing that makes it such a great destination for this meeting is that the attendees don’t have much free time,” Daniel says. “It’s a very serious business meeting. But they do get a couple of afternoons free, and they just like to go to the



“The Emerald Coast of Florida...has soft, white sand beaches that are some of the best in the world. The water is clear. It’s just unlike any other place I’ve seen in Florida.”

Kristin Tschirn, Director, Continuing Medical Education
Ochsner Health System, New Orleans, LA

beach. But we do also have a couple of small groups that will go fishing or to the spa. And then, of course, there is golf. And the golf there is great. But the main thing people want to do is just relax on the beach.”

Of course, the main thing Daniel wants is flawless service. And she always gets it at the Marco Island Marriott, she says.

“For me, the highlight of every meeting I do there is the service I get,” she says. “The team the hotel has in place is just impeccable. And they always go above and beyond to give us the best service we get anywhere. We have a genuine relationship that has been in place for a long time. And that relationship and their commitment to us shows in everything they do.”

Although Hanson, Tschirn and Daniel agree that the service they get at the Florida properties they use is a critical factor in

the success of the meetings they do in the state, it is the obvious appeal of Florida itself, as a place, that also plays a key role.

“The great thing about Florida is that there’s always sunshine, Tschirn says. “And if it does happen to rain, there’s always something to do, whether that’s going shopping or to the spa. And when the weather is nice, which it is most of the time, you have the great beaches, the golf courses and the outdoors in general. It’s just a great destination, no matter where you are.”

Sanibel Island, near Marco Island is known as “The Shelling Capital of the Western World,” as it has more shell variety than any other single beach in Florida. Half of the island is a natural preserve and boasts miles of bicycle paths, abundant nature, watersports, sandy beaches and breathtaking sunsets.

With more than 400 species of shells, the beaches of Sanibel Island are considered the best shelling beaches in North America, according to www.sanibelcaptivaonline.com, which states that because Sanibel runs east to west rather than north to south, the torque of the island’s south end acts as a ladle scooping up the shells the Gulf brings from the Caribbean and other southern seas.

Planners and meeting-goers looking for a beachfront site find that Sundial Beach Resort and Spa on Sanibel Island is a popular site for laidback corporate events. Nine meeting rooms, each with comprehensive audio-visual capabilities, comprise the 12,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space,

and the resort boasts that it is the only destination on the Florida Gulf Coast of Sanibel Island capable of accommodating up to 300 guests.

New dining options include a daily breakfast buffet overlooking the Gulf of Mexico and a new restaurant, Shima Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar, that can be used for private group events.

Currently, the Sundial Beach Resort and Spa offers special value for groups that book by December 31, 2016, which includes the following:

- Complimentary one hour cocktail reception.
- 10 percent off F&B.
- Waived resort fee.
- Complimentary meeting space.
- Complimentary internet in meeting rooms.

For more information, contact meetings@sundialresort.com.

Talk of the Town

Palm Beach County is home to the only property in South Florida that is directly connected to a convention center. The new 21-story, 400-room Hilton West Palm Beach, which is connected to the Palm Beach County Convention Center with an enclosed walkway, opened earlier this year and boasts 24,000 sf of meeting space including the 13,350-sf Oceana Ballroom and the 5,800-sf Coral Ballroom as well as two 2,400-sf expansive lawn spaces for special events and fitness programming.



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Whether you are looking for an indoor or outdoor venue setting, Sundial Beach Resort & Spa offers the most expansive selection of event space on Sanibel Island. Enjoy gatherings outside on the enchanted lawns and tropical beaches, or plan a formal event inside our ballroom or any of our nine meeting sites. Host your event at Sundial, the only Sanibel Island venue capable of entertaining up to 300 guests with its 12,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event facilities.

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Located within the gateway to both Palm Beach and downtown West Palm Beach, the new 12-story convention hotel, featuring 400 guest rooms and 43 suites, sports a double-height grand lobby that features views of the hotel's landscaped Palm Deck that features a zero-entry expansive pool, private cabanas, Restoration Hardware furnishings and a pool-side bar and fire pit.

With an in-house panel of experts to provide programs for teambuilding, including glow-in-the-dark lawn games, scavenger hunts and outdoor bootcamp fitness classes, the hotel goes the extra mile to enrich the group experience. Guests also have access to a state-of-the-art fitness center and specialty classes,



Credit: Sundial Beach Resort & Spa

The new Shima Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar at Sundial Beach Resort & Spa on Sanibel Island.

a flotation menu featuring inflatable toys and rafts for relaxing in-pool, oversized chessboard, outdoor fire pit and more.

Hilton West Palm Beach offers several culinary options such as Manor, the hotel's signature farm-to-fork style restaurant serving contemporary American cuisine; Galley, the hotel's lobby bar with prohibition-style handcrafted cocktails and shared tapas; and Provisions marketplace provides locally sourced goods such as Rabbit Coffee Roasting Company, freshly prepared bites, cold-pressed juices and gifts from Palm Beach shops and artists.

Directly across the street is CityPlace — a 72-acre mixed-use development with more than 60 specialty retail shops, a distinguished collection of restaurants and bars and an open-air plaza with a distinctive water feature with dancing fountains.

The Kravis Center for the Performing Arts, Norton Museum of Art, Clematis Street and Downtown's Art & Entertainment District are within a short walk of the hotel, along with Worth Avenue and Palm Beach, which is three miles away.

When it comes to time-honored Florida destinations, none is more renowned — especially for upscale meetings — than Palm Beach. And now, it has a highly acclaimed luxury hotel that is ideal for small to medium-sized groups.

One of only six new hotels in the U.S. to be recently named

one of *Forbes Travel Guide's* 2016 Five Star Hotels, Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa is at the top of the list as one of the hottest meeting and event destinations. This is the first time Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa has received the Forbes Five Star designation as an independent brand. Its namesake, Eau Spa, received the Forbes Five Star title for the second year in a row, making the brand one of only 21 hotels in the U.S. that hold Forbes Five Star ratings for both the hotel and spa; and one of eight independently owned and operated brands.

Formerly The Ritz-Carlton, Palm Beach, the 309-room Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa is located on seven acres of prime beachfront property and features more than 30,000 sf of meeting and event space, including a trio of ballrooms. Its 9,860-sf main ballroom can be divided into three separate and equal venues. The meeting facilities also include a pair of state-of-the-art ballrooms. Unique meeting amenities include a 3,000-sf oceanfront terrace with a fire pit.

Resort amenities include a state-of-the-art fitness center, three Har-tru clay tennis courts, a 24-hour Business Lounge, two oceanfront swimming pools, four restaurants including the fine-dining Angle, which features fresh local seafood and locally sources seasonal ingredients, and Breeze Ocean Kitchen, which opened in March.

Michael King, the resort's managing director, said in a news release, "Breeze Ocean Kitchen is an exciting example of the fresh updates that are making our Eau Palm Beach brand a hallmark of the new Palm Beach lifestyle. Both resort guests and locals will enjoy the access this provides to an unparalleled oceanside oasis, whether it's for a sunny lunch, vibrant tapas at five, or a Sunday afternoon Paella experience with live music and sparkling cocktails."

With seating for up to 120 guests, the restaurant features striking design details such as a runway fire feature that lights up evening lounge areas. A "look out" bar top floats above the resort's beach to offer extraordinary views of the sea and sunsets. Innovative GPS-controlled slat roofing adjusts to allow both optimal sunshine and protection from afternoon showers. The relaxed yet energized space is softened by lush foliage and during the evening hours, suspended lanterns and twinkling lights set a magical stage.

Currently, Eau Palm Beach is offering meeting planners the "Meet Your Heart Out" program that requires a minimum of 10 guest rooms per night, starting at \$159, and includes:

- One hour complimentary beer and wine reception, including dry snacks.
- Complimentary basic meeting space Wi-Fi.
- 10 percent off Eau Spa services.
- One per 50 complimentary room policy.
- Two upgrades to Ocean Front Suites over the peak nights.
- Two complimentary welcome amenities — chefs selection.

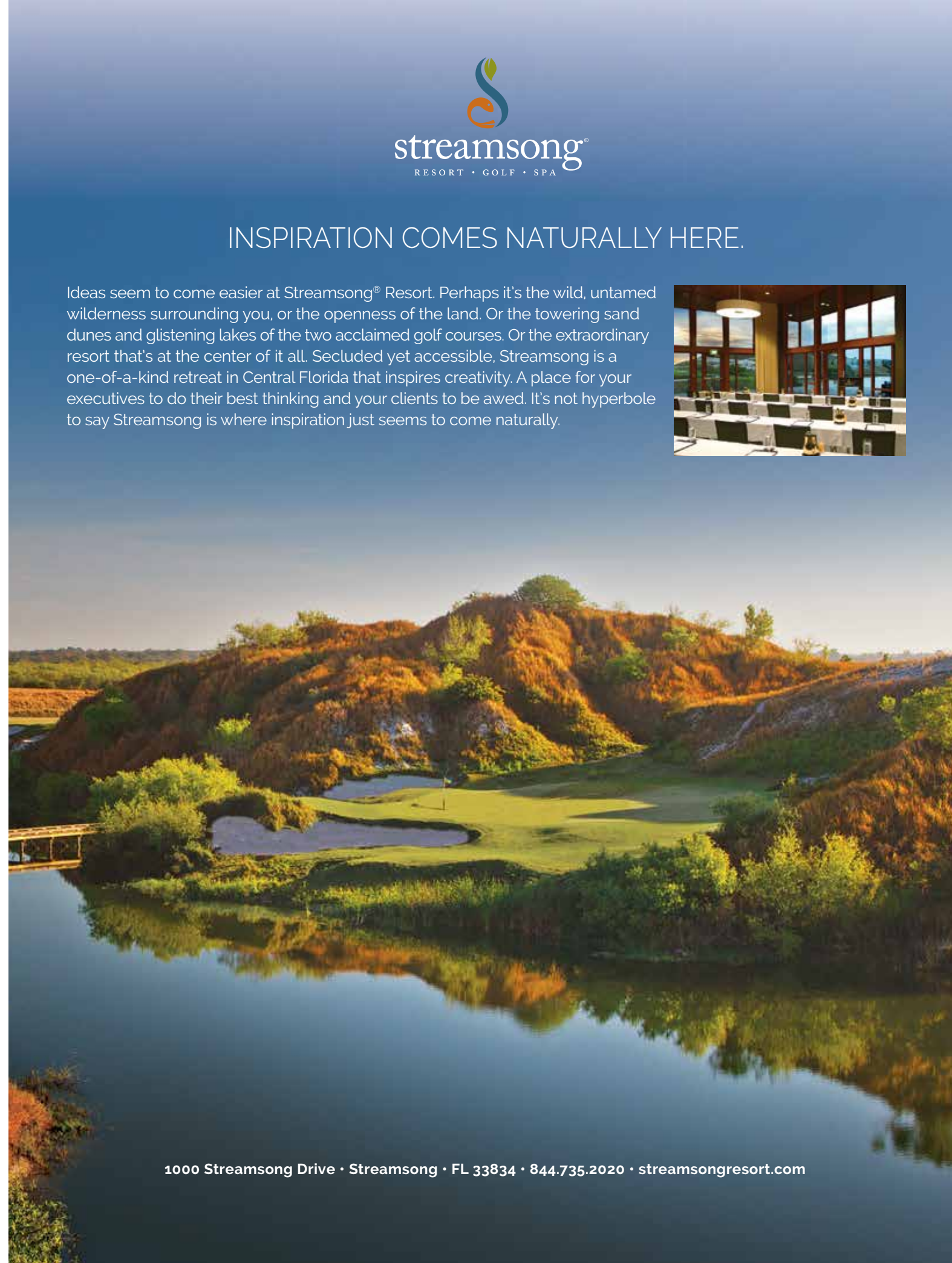
No matter which part of the Sunshine State corporate groups gather in, marvelous memories and unrivaled experiences inspire and vitalize attendees so that they can't wait to return for another meeting in Florida. And, of course, the sunny, temperate climate can't be beat, either.

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On The Move



PAYANO

Pam Payano was named corporate sales manager for The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau. She was marketing project manager at Turkel Brands where she worked with the GMCVB's convention sales department on campaigns to attract meetings and conventions to Miami.

Peter Thoene was named director of sales and marketing at Mauna Lani Bay Hotel & Bungalows on Hawaii's Big Island. He most recently was director of sales and marketing at Mauna Kea Resort.

Hotel Granduca Houston has appointed **Anne Janis** as director of sales



THOENE

and marketing. She formerly served as regional director of sales for Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.

The Westin Nashville has named **Dawn Kruis** as sales manager. She was sales manager and catering manager at Millennium Maxwell House Hotel in Nashville.

Karina Davies was named director of sales and marketing for Fairmont Washington, DC, Georgetown. She was in the UAE as opening director of sales and marketing for Fairmont Ajman.

Corinthia Hotels has named **Diane Parker** as head of sales for the



KRUIS



DAVIES

Eastern region of the U.S. and Canada, Chicago and the Midwest, as well as Brazil. She was director of leisure sales for Chicago and Toronto at The Trump Hotels Collection.

Hyatt Times Square New York has named **Vincent de Croock** as director of sales, marketing and events. He was director of sales and marketing at De L'Europe in Amsterdam.

Cat Carter was promoted to complex director of sales and marketing at the Sheraton Grand Chicago and Westin Chicago River North. She most recently served as director of sales for the hotel. **C&IT**



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37	Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista	407-827-3803	www.hiltonorlandolakebuenavista.com	Jared McLachlan	orldw-salesadm@hilton.com
17	Ponte Vedra Inn & Club	800-234-7842	www.pontevedra.com	Tony Fitzjohn	sales@pvresorts.com
49	Streamsong Resort	863-428-1000	www.streamsongresort.com	Group Sales	meetings@streamsongresort.com
47	Sundial Beach Resort & Spa	239-395-6008	www.sundialresort.com	Brett Lindsay	brett.lindsay@sundialresort.com
19	Talking Stick Resort	480-850-7777	www.talkingstickresort.com	Michael Maggart	michael.maggart@talkingstickresort.com
39	The Villas of Grand Cypress	407-239-4700	www.grandcypress.com	Perry Goodbar	meetings@VillasGrandCypress.com
COV IV	Visit Orlando	800-643-0482	www.orlandomeeting.com	Fred Shea	convention.sales@orlandocvb.com
29	Visit South Walton, Florida	800-822-6877	www.visitsouthwalton.com/groups	Pamela Watkins	meetings@visitsouthwalton.com
41	Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel	800-524-4939	www.swandolphinmeetings.com	Gino Marasco	meetings@swandolphin.com

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Bridget W

July 1 at 8:50pm • iOS

Gotta say this conference has been an inspiring experience for the whole team. So glad we made the trip to Orlando! Title of today's team-building event: Management Secrets from a Master Chef. BTW, I found a hot new sales lead at last night's Oscar party! #ThisMeetingRocks #OrlandoMeeting



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