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THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



Atlantis Paradise Island Bahamas

Bahamas & Caribbean Comeback

Most Island Destinations Are Going Strong
and Ready to Welcome Groups PAGE 42

The Shifting Landscape
in Site Selection
PAGE 32

How to Stay Ahead
of the Hackers
PAGE 22

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In This Issue

VOLUME 36 NO. 3

MARCH 2018

FEATURES

- 14 **Gaming Resorts**
Unique Experiences Await in Lesser Known Locales
By Patrick Simms
- 22 **How to Stay Ahead of the Hackers**
Cybersecurity — Don't Get Caught in the Phisher's Net
By Christine Loomis
- 26 **Catering to High Expectations**
Food Trends & Tactics to Satisfy Divergent Tastes
By Sophia Bennett
- 32 **The Art of Site Selection**
Four Experts Weigh in on the Shifting Landscape
By Christine Loomis

DESTINATIONS

- 36 **Southwest Hot Spots**
Meet Amid Desert Vistas, Mountain Ranges and Beyond
By Sophia Bennett
- 42 **Bahamas & Caribbean Comeback**
Most Island Destinations Are Ready to Welcome Groups
By Christine Loomis
- 50 **Need a Little Slice of Paradise?**
Florida Meetings Never Fail to Deliver
By Derek Reveron
- 60 **The Power Corridor**
Washington, DC, Virginia and Maryland
By John Buchanan

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 **Publisher's Message** 7 **Tips & Trends**
- 6 **News & Notes** 9 **Snapshots**
- 10 **Perspective**
DMCs Partner With Planners in Crisis Managment
By Marty MacKay, DMCP
- 12 **Perspective**
7 New Ways for Event Managers to Rethink Failure
By Lindsay Martin-Bilbrey
- 66 **People on the Move**



Credit: Ilani

Ilani Casino Resort, which opened in Ridgefield, Washington, last spring, is located on the Cowlitz Indian Tribe's reservation. **PAGE 14**



Credit: High Beam Events

A tantalizing spread of healthful light bites, courtesy of Austin, Texas-based High Beam Events. **PAGE 26**



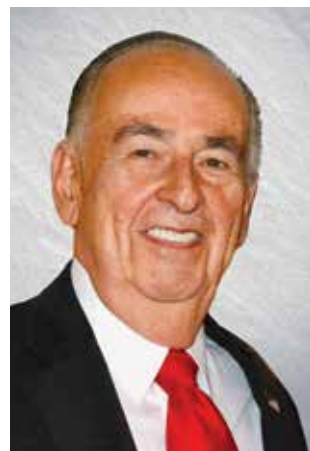
Credit: K. Summerville for Visit Alexandria

A water taxi plies the waters of the Potomac River from Alexandria to Washington, DC. **PAGE 60**

Publisher's Message

Paradise on the Rebound

The Bahamas and the Caribbean want planners to know that the islands are rolling out a big, beautiful welcome mat for 2018 meetings following a rough 2017 hurricane season. Many islands, such as those in The Bahamas, were largely unaffected, others are well on the way to full recovery, and some are still working their way back. Atlantis Paradise Island Bahamas (shown on our cover) made it through the storms unscathed and continues to upgrade its offerings including more that



connect guests to the Bahamian people and their cultural experiences and traditions. What will shine through is not only the friendliness of the people of the Caribbean, but their fortitude and resilience in overcoming adversity to support fellow islanders as they rebuild and start anew. Also stepping up is the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), which continues to raise funds to assist member countries affected by the storms. The Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association's Caribbean Travel Marketplace was the first major convention of 2018 held in Puerto Rico January 30–February 1, signaling that Puerto Rico is "open for business and ready to receive groups and conventions," says Alma Pedrosa, CDME, acting president and CEO of Meet Puerto Rico in our feature on page 42, "Bahamas & Caribbean Comeback." She continues, "We feel proud of our people, our offerings and our determination. ...Puerto Rico has always been one of the most desirable meetings and conventions destinations, and we look forward to the future with enthusiasm."

Planners also can look forward to exciting new developments in the region, including the massive Baha Mar resort in Nassau, which debuted its first phase last spring — the impressive 1,800-room Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, the 200,000-sf Baha Mar Convention, Art and Entertainment Center and The Royal Blue Golf Club, featuring the only Jack Nicklaus-designed course in The Bahamas.

Read about another slice of paradise — Florida (page 50), whose hurricane-affected areas have recovered and are ready for 2018 meetings. Other brands of paradise can be found in "Southwest Hot Spots" (page 36), "Gaming Resorts" in known and lesser known locales (page 14), and the "Power Corridor" (page 60).

And while we're on the subject of site selection, turn to page 32 where four experts weigh in on the shifting landscape in destination due diligence.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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News & Notes

Carnival Cruise Line Expands West Coast Presence

MIAMI, FL — Carnival Cruise Line announced the deployment of Carnival Panorama to Long Beach in 2019 — the first new Carnival ship based in Southern California in 20 years; the grand reopening of its 146,000-sf state-of-the-art Long Beach Cruise Terminal and a multimillion-dollar port development project in Ensenada, Mexico.

In 2019, Carnival will make history when it deploys its third Vista-class ship, the 3,960-passenger Carnival Panorama, on seven-day Mexican Riviera cruises from Long Beach, providing an exciting new seagoing vacation option to this vital and fast-growing market.

The renovation of the Long Beach Cruise Terminal more than doubles the size of the facility's space while dramatically enhancing the overall passenger experience and operational flow. www.carnival.com



(L to r) Carlos Torres de Navarra, vice president, strategic and commercial port development, Carnival; Carnival Cruise Line President Christine Duffy; and Robert Garcia, mayor of the city of Long Beach, California.

Brenda Bazan Confirmed as President & CEO of Houston First

HOUSTON, TX — The Houston City Council unanimously approved the appointment of Brenda Bazan as the new president and CEO of the Houston First Corporation (HFC). Bazan will assume responsibilities as the new leader of Houston First, effective immediately. Bazan has been with the organization since its inception in 2011.

"It's an honor to be selected by Mayor Turner and confirmed by Houston City Council. The future of Houston is bright and I am committed to making sure HFC serves as a beacon of light," said Bazan. www.houstonfirst.com

Anaheim Celebrates Fifth Record-setting Year for Tourism

ANAHEIM, CA — Visit Anaheim announced that Anaheim welcomed 24.2 million tourists in 2017. This year marks the fifth record-setting year in a row for visitation to this destination. Anaheim has experienced a 31 percent growth in tourism since 2012.

Development projects have been on the rise in the destination with several highly impactful projects underway to sustain tourism for years to come. Most notably, Disneyland's much-anticipated Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge and updates to Downtown Disney. In September 2017, the Anaheim Convention Center's seventh expansion, ACC North, was unveiled, adding 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space and cementing the Anaheim Convention Center as the largest convention center on the West

Marriott to Open The Drew Las Vegas in 2020

LAS VEGAS, NV — Marriott International Inc. and global development firm Witkoff announced a plan to open a new resort at 2755 Las Vegas Boulevard South. The integrated resort and casino named The Drew Las Vegas will debut the Edition brand in Las Vegas and mark The Strip's first JW Marriott. Anticipated to open in late 2020, the resort will feature nearly 4,000 rooms and suites as well as more than 500,000 sf of convention and meeting space. Once open, the hotels will be managed by Marriott International. Two Blackbirds Hospitality, led by renowned hotelier and former Cosmopolitan CEO John Unwin, will oversee the launch and operations of resort. The Drew Las Vegas will include a casino, luxury hotels, together with convention facilities, entertainment, nightlife, retail and dining curated into one cohesive guest experience. www.marriott.com



Anaheim finished its ACC North expansion last September.

Coast. ACC North allows meeting professionals the flexibility to design unique experiences for their attendees from education sessions, workshops, galas, marketplace connections and networking events. Additionally, many of Anaheim's annual conventions hit record attendance or grew in size in 2017, including NAMM, Natural Products Expo West, VidCon, California Dental Association, OC Auto Show and LuLaRoe. www.visitanaheim.org

Meetings & Events Industry Releases New Economic Impact Data

WASHINGTON, DC — Face-to-face meetings and events play an integral role in bolstering our national economy and key business sectors, according to a new report from Oxford Economics, commissioned by the Events Industry Council and supported by the Meetings Mean Business Coalition and other industry partners. Data for the report was compiled through a nationwide survey of meeting planners, exhibitors and venues and represents almost 9,000 domestic business travelers, almost 50,000 international air travelers and 11,000 hotels.

"Our report illustrates that the meetings and events industry continues to grow across all segments as it contributes hundreds of billions of dollars in revenue to the U.S. economy and supports 5.9 million jobs," says Adam Sacks, founder and president of Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics company. "Notably in 2016, meetings generated \$325 billion of direct spending and \$845 billion in business sales. These numbers represent a contribution of \$446 billion in GDP and \$104 billion of federal, state and local taxes. The total tax impact per household was \$879 per U.S. household."

Results show that every dollar spent on face-to-face meetings and events generates an additional \$1.60 — or 160 percent — in benefits for the U.S. economy.

Direct spending on meetings expanded 23 percent between 2009 and 2016, primarily due to increases in the number of meeting participants. Business services was the industry most impacted by meetings in 2016, with \$196.3 billion in total economic output. The finance, insurance and real estate industry followed with \$141.1 billion in total economic output, followed by the manufacturing industry with \$92.6 billion in total output. And, meetings-related travel expenses represented 13.2 percent of total travel and tourism spending in the U.S. www.eventscouncil.org

Tips & Trends

Top 10 Trends for Incentive Travel, Rewards and Recognition Programs

The Incentive Research Foundation's signature 2018 Trends Study highlights 10 key trends that will affect organizations, their products and services, and the workforce in 2018. From market optimism to concerns about risk and safety, the study identifies key areas of change and their implications for workforce engagement, incentive travel and recognition. "From culture shifts to technological advances to regulatory pressure, the IRF is tracking some essential shifts in the industry and discussing how to anticipate and respond to these trends," said IRF President Melissa Van Dyke.

- 1. Building a Brand-Asset Culture Becomes a Business Imperative:** With over 80 percent of businesses' value in their intangibles, the IRF expects non-cash awards to grow as the focus on brand, culture and innovation becomes even more critical to business success.
- 2. Market Optimism Leads to Budget Growth:** The incentive travel industry's net optimism score for the economy is up almost 20 points from 2017, and average annual per-person spend of \$3,915 reflects a 4 percent increase.
- 3. Regulatory Pressure Drives Changes:** Over 70 percent of respondents to the IRF's Regulations Study said they had made changes to their programs' design, communications, rewards and/or reporting in response to regulations.
- 4. Cost and Time Tensions Continue:** Although incentive travel budgets were up again in 2017, 60 percent of respondents said costs are rising faster than budgets.
- 5. Increased Focus on Managing Risk:** From PCI compliance to concerns over the EU's GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), ensuring program participant data is secure and appropriately used is a central concern for all types of non-cash award programs.
- 6. Expanding Capability With Increasingly Predictive and Intelligent Technology:** Predictive analytics, artificial intelligence and augmented reality capabilities will be a fundamental requirement for the effective incentive, rewards and events business partner.
- 7. Wellness Hits a Tipping Point:** The largest number of net increases (38 percent) reported by respondents was the inclusion of wellness components focused on fitness, food and comfort in their programs.
- 8. Unique Destinations Gaining Popularity:** Planners are interested in new and different sub-destinations. Whereas Rome may have been the primary consideration, Puglia, Italy is becoming an attractive option.
- 9. Merchandise Awards Move Toward the Meaningful:** There is a strong desire in 2018 not for more choice, but for more meaning. Impactful products may have local sourcing or organic roots and be easily personalized and customizable.
- 10. Gift Cards Gain Momentum:** Mid-size firms on average spend almost half a million dollars annually on gift cards across all programs, while the largest firms each spend over \$1 million annually.

To view or download a copy of the full study, please visit: theirf.org/research/irf-2018-trends-study/2390/

News & Notes

Eden Roc Miami Beach Unveils \$250 Million Transformation

MIAMI BEACH, FL — Eden Roc Miami Beach is newly transformed after \$250 million in renovations. The 415-room refurbished property is bringing the Beach Cosmopolitan lifestyle to guests from around the world by combining the enigmatic spirit of Miami with a beachside attitude that offers an immersive escape.

Updates include the reimagination of Morris Lapidus’ famous 16-seat lobby bar by interior designer David Rockwell; the introduction of the signature Nobu restaurant and the flagship Nobu Hotel tower (boasting a hotel-within-a-hotel concept); the soon-to-open Malibu Farm restaurant; and inclusion of Boho Hunter — an upscale boutique featuring contemporary women’s fashion and accessories from Latin American designers.

With some of the most breathtaking ocean views and oversized balconies, a refreshing renovation to all 415 spacious guest rooms and suites creates a calm seaside atmosphere, with a number of new amenities, including a pathfinder guide in every room offering a 24-hour locals guide to Miami; 55-inch flat-screen TV and JBL Bluetooth speakers; Nespresso machine; curated in-room art from Saatchi Art; and more. Also, the “Spa Eden Roc” will be reinvented as Esencia Wellness, and a brand new outdoor beach bar concept, Gitano, will open in spring 2018.

www.edenrochotelmiami.com

Carnival Fascination Resumes Year-round Service From San Juan

MIAMI, FL — Carnival Fascination resumed its year-round schedule of seven-day southern Caribbean departures from San Juan following an extensive multimillion-dollar dry dock that added a variety of popular food and beverage concepts.

On its San Juan-based program, Carnival Fascination departs every Sunday on week-long voyages visiting five tropical destinations: St. Lucia, Barbados, St. Kitts, St. Thomas and St. Maarten, each of which is home to world-class beaches, centuries-old historical sites, unique and exciting shoreside experiences, and an array of shopping and dining opportunities. Christine Duffy, president of Carnival Cruise Line, noted that prior to the dry dock, the ship was chartered by FEMA to house relief workers in St. Croix.

The new spaces include: Guy’s Burger Joint, developed in partnership with Food Network personality Guy Fieri; RedFrog Rum Bar; Blueguana Cantina; Blueguana Tequila Bar; Alchemy Bar, a vintage-themed cocktail “pharmacy” that’s the go-to spot for guests seeking a unique experience with mixologists who “prescribe” concoctions; and Bonsai Sushi Express. These complement Carnival Fascination’s popular onboard features such as a luxurious 12,000-sf health and wellness center and an array of entertainment choices. www.carnival.com



Visit Fort Worth Announces New Name and More

FORT WORTH, TX — The Fort Worth Convention & Visitors Bureau (FWCVB), announced new economic impact numbers for tourism, released their 10-year Destination Master Plan, debuted the “Fort Worth Stories” marketing video series and officially announced its new name, Visit Fort Worth, at its fifth annual meeting and breakfast at the Omni Fort Worth Hotel. New research released shows record growth in visitation, spending and jobs directly related to the Fort Worth tourism and hospitality industry: 9.1 million visitors; \$2.4 billion in economic impact; 23,000+ jobs supported by tourism; \$116 million in local tax revenue; and \$598 tax savings per household saved per year in taxes generated by tourism.

The new 10-year plan is a blueprint for ensuring Fort Worth is a must-visit city. The goal of the plan is to increase economic impact for tourism, create more jobs and raise the city’s profile to make Fort Worth even more competitive. The plan calls for action in five key areas: enhance visitor experiences; strengthen messaging about Fort Worth; grow visitor facility needs, a headquarter hotel and the convention center; support transportation to increase connectivity; and collaboration with the city, chambers and other strategic partners.

The Visit Fort Worth sales team booked 10 citywide conventions slated for 2018: Fort Worth welcomed the International Geoscience and Remote Sensing Symposium (IGARSS) convention in 2017, with more than 2,000 attendees from 49 countries in attendance, delivering a \$5 million economic impact to Fort Worth; and Visit Fort Worth Sports helped land seven NCAA tournaments and championships to the new Dickies Arena.

The full series of “Fort Worth Stories” can be viewed at www.fortworthstory.com.

Snapshots



Credits: 1-4 Christie's Photographic Solutions; 5 SITE; 6, 7 Meet Puerto Rico; 8 Celebrity Cruises

1-4 The SITE Florida & Caribbean Chapter sponsored a night at the theater at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts in Fort Lauderdale for a performance of “Wicked” in February. The evening — a hosted planner event — included a private reception and dinner in the JetBlue Flight Deck at the Club Level of the theater. **1** (L to r) Rita Lopez, Riverside Hotel; Alex Castellanos, Paradisus Punta Cana; Ezra Quintanar, Paradisus Cancun & Playa del Carmen; John Iannini, V.P., Melia Hotels International – America and 2018 president of the SITE Foundation; Jorge Colona, regional director of group sales, Melia Hotels International; Maxine Lockhart, Red Lion Hotel Corporation; Vicki Ascione, V Event Management; Brandon Hall, Discover the Palm Beaches; Filippo Ascione, V Event Management; Dana Weaver, Growmark; Bill Sellmer, SMI Travel Inc.; (unidentified); Jim Marzullo, Ultimate Incentives. **2** (L to r) Francis Purvey, E.V.P., Sunlark Associates; Maura Dominguez-Zhang, managing partner, Synergy-Connect and 2018 president of SITE Florida & Caribbean; and Paula Carlson, senior group sales manager, Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort. **3** (L to R) Marissa Torres and Dahlton Bennington of PROfound Planning; Danielle Dunfee, global DOS, Benchmark Hospitality. **4** The Melia Hotels team included (l to r) Alex Castellanos, Ezra Quintanar, John Iannini, Rodrigo Martinez and Jorge Colona. **5** The 2017 SITE Crystal Award winners were represented by seven companies and their clients from around the globe. The awards were presented at the SITE + MPI Global Forum, which took place January 12–14 in Rome. **6-7** Meet Puerto Rico kicked off 2018 by hosting its first major convention January 30–February 1 — the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association’s Caribbean Travel Marketplace. **8** Celebrity Cruises partnered with Galapagos National Park to plant more than 30,000 trees on Santa Cruz Island, in Los Gemelos, and helping to conserve this pristine archipelago that’s home to flora and fauna found nowhere else in the world.

By Marty MacKay, DMCP

DMCs to the Rescue: Partnering With Planners in Crisis Management

No one is exempt from a disaster. They can happen anywhere, to anyone. Now more than ever, meeting planners are asking (and if they are not, they should be) their supplier partners about emergency preparedness. As your worldwide Destination Management Company (DMC), our team at Hosts Global brings to the forefront the need for this conversation between planners and DMCs far before programs occur. It is critical to address this topic in the early stages of planning a meeting, convention, incentive program or special event and with all parties involved to ensure clients

“During a crisis, you must **be prepared to make swift decisions** in order to protect the safety of your guests and your teams.”

are safe and all teams are prepared for various types of emergencies. We cannot say it enough. A communication plan is key in a crisis.

Dangers of Being Unprepared

It is extremely difficult to plan for the unknown. However, the danger of being unprepared for a potential crisis is an even greater risk for your meeting or event. These dangers include inadequately training your staff and not having a clear communication plan should an emergency occur. During a crisis, you must be prepared to make swift decisions in order to protect the safety of your guests and your teams. You empower your staff with the knowledge and authority to make these critical safety calls through advanced preparation.

High-level Goals and Measures to Consider

To initiate your preparedness plan, we have found it beneficial to consider the following high-level goals and protective measures:

- Protect the safety of employees, clients, suppliers and others at risk in the event of an emergency.
- Maintain high service levels by minimizing disruptions of business operations.

- Protect facilities, physical assets and electronic information.
- Protect the organization's brand, image and reputation.

Some basic protective actions are similar across many different hazards:

- Physical safety is a concern for all hazards and may involve sheltering in place or evacuating.
- Develop a business communications plan that is shared with all employees.

- Make an emergency supply kit to be prepared for a variety of situations.
- Learn about receiving local advance emergency alerts, locations of nearby shelter and evacuation sites and creating a list of local emergency contacts.
- When recovering from a disaster, safety as well as mental and physical well-being must be considered.

How to Work With Your DMC for Local Emergency Preparedness and Crisis Management

Our team at Hosts Global believes in being proactive, and that extends to being prepared for various emergency situations that may arise. To do so, we've created an emergency action plan template, to ensure we can help keep our people and our clients safe, while protecting our business. We have made this template available for our DMCs across our 300+ destinations along with checklists and helpful information for them to create an emergency communication plan that reflects their destination's needs. Although we all face the same accidental and terrorist hazards, not every location faces the same natural disaster threats. When working with your local DMC we recommend gaining their expert advice on local threats and focusing on communication as the first step. In my opinion, the most

Be Prepared

critical communications document you can create is a one-page, high-level event overview. When the unthinkable happens, it is essential to have important facts when time is limited. This overview, at a minimum, should include information about your key decision-makers and their agreed upon triggers for action. This way, you don't second guess yourself under pressure. An example of a situation where this document might be useful could be an outdoor event where weather might be a risk. In advance of the event, key decision-makers should decide what the trigger(s) will be for cancelling the event due to inclement weather. That way, during the event when emotions are high and there might be a tendency to push the envelope because you don't want to cancel, you already have an agreed upon, reasonable risk threshold set when emotions were calm and collected.

Resources Available to Meeting Planners

Last year, as the president-elect of the Association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI), I had the opportunity to collaborate with fellow destination management executives and MSA Security, a global security firm, to develop the "Emergency Preparedness Certificate Program." MSA was critical for establishing essential course criteria as well as creating planning checklists so course participants can depart with tangible templates to utilize. After completing our first certificate program, we quickly realized the need to bring in legal counsel to answer many questions, so we now

partner with the seasoned team at Barnes & Thornburg LLP as well. The course has been very successful. To date, it is the only comprehensive event emergency preparedness and risk management certificate course customized for meeting, event and DMC professionals.

I encourage you to learn more about this specialized training opportunity. For details regarding the certificate program and upcoming training event, please visit: www.adme.org/aws/ADME/pt/sp/emergency.

Training

I've participated in a number of emergency preparedness seminars. A common theme in each training is the difficulty of knowing how you will respond in the time of crisis. My continued takeaway is that the more scenarios you can envision and discuss, however unpleasant, the more likely you are to make good decisions should you find yourself in one of those situations. Please remember, this type of scenario training should not just include immediate staff, but all field staff and partners who are essential to the successful execution of your event. I'll close with a helpful tip: in the months leading up to your event, take time to talk through one scenario a week in your team planning meetings. Encourage each team member take a turn walking through a scenario and then openly discuss as a group. Everyone will provide different points of view and their diverse feedback will ultimately make your preparedness plan complete.

C&IT



Marty MacKay, DMCP

is president, Hosts Global's Alliance of DMCs. Marty has spent her entire career mastering the event world. Her professional background began on the client side, where she learned the event business from the ground up while working at a leading fortune 500 company. Since joining Hosts Global in 2013, she has more than doubled the size of the Alliance and introduced best practices and standards across the membership. Marty is the president of ADMEI and leader in the hospitality industry's focus to drive emergency preparedness. www.hosts-global.com

By Lindsay Martin-Bilbrey, CMP

7 New Ways for Event Managers to Rethink Failure

If you want to be great at event management, you need to get comfortable with failure. Being an event planner requires you to constantly put yourself on the line: From taking a chance on an unknown speaker and convincing your board to change up how you program your conference or adding a new event app like Pathable so you can better connect your attendees with the relationships they want. The more chances you take, the likelier you are to sometimes — even frequently — fall flat on your face. And when it happens, occasionally all of the attendees are watching. But as Robert F. Kennedy said, “Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.” Don’t beat yourself up for failing. These seven options will help you see your failure in a positive light.

1 Failure Is a Chance to Increase Your Resilience

There are only two possible options to failure: Either you give up, or you dust yourself off and try, try again.

If you take the second option, you’re guaranteed to become more resilient. Trying again gives you confidence. The next time you fail (yes, you’ll fail again), you’ll remember this situation and think, “I got a little bit further towards my goal this time. I can try this again (and again, ad nauseam).”

Remember Thomas Edison’s words as he tried to create the light bulb, “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”

2 Failure Is The Beginning — Not the End

We tend to think of failure as the end of an opportunity. Your boss decides to go with another venue, so you pack away the capacity chart for the property you really wanted. The end.

However, every failure is actually a beginning. Maybe you keep an eye on the property to watch for renovations and updates they’re making. You build a new case for your boss on why this venue is the right fit for your event. They’re impressed by your persistence and decide to take a chance on the space.

As Gena Showalter said, “Giving up is the only sure way to fail.”

3 Failure Allows You to Build Tolerance to Risk

“Winners are not afraid of losing. But losers are. Failure is part of the process of success. People who avoid failure also avoid success.” — Robert T. Kiyosaki

Failure is proof that you thought you could reach the sky; that you were confident in your ideas. You could avoid having that uncomfortable meeting with your conference committee when “everyone” swears that new agenda structure fell flat

with attendees, but you shouldn’t. Because sometimes you get the conference evaluation results back and 50 percent of the attendees actually loved it!

Sometimes you win big. Sometimes, it’s a draw. However, at the end of the day, you should be proud of your failures. Each one represents a time you put yourself out there.

Just make sure you’re learning from your failures. It’s a foolish person who repeats a bad idea once proven wrong.

4 Failure Keeps You Realistic

Winning feels good. Succeeding feels good. So, when we plan an outrageous idea that goes 1,000 percent smoothly, it can go to our heads. Which can make us tough to live with and perhaps tempt us to bite off more than we can chew the next go-round.

Taking risks and dreaming big doesn’t mean that you ignore reality. You still have to keep in mind the time, resources and scope of your event. Keep this question at the core of your thinking: Is this best for our attendee experience?

Then go ahead. Think outside of the box. Just have backup plans in case out-of-the-box is too big for your conference compatriots. And always do your research and create the business case for why you took the risk.

Because when you fail (and again, remember, you will at some point), and someone points a blaming finger, you’re well prepared to say yes, we did fail. Here was our thinking when we tried the ideas and here’s what we learned to do better next time.

5 Failure Helps You Test Assumptions

Event planners rely heavily on assumptions. Think about the ones you’ve made this month alone, from “That type of

AV company can’t provide the support we need” and “Surely we can afford that event app” to “No one really likes that much chicken at conferences” and “They’ll probably get the most value from this new program (even though we haven’t talked to any actual prospective attendees).”

Assumptions help you make better decisions. Just like it’s a rare venue that would take your business sans deposit without previous meetings history, your assumptions help you use previous experience to infer what will and won’t work. Sometimes, we can get the wrong assumptions into our heads. And we need to know we’re wrong so we don’t continue to repeat our mistakes.

6 Failure Can Make a Team Stronger

I once worked with an association who rebranded their organization and annual event and didn’t tell the membership it was happening until we magically changed the logo and redecorated the entire conference hall live during a

look back and am incredibly proud of that time. We didn’t play a blame game. We instead acknowledged and moved forward, stronger.

7 Failure Helps You Reach Beyond Low Hanging Fruit

If you aren’t leading your events team to think about longer range goals and innovations for your attendees on a regular basis, then you’ll forever stay in a short-range, low-success space. We joke a lot in the events world about how slow change happens, but it can be startling to realize we’re part of the problem.

Meeting planners are risk-averse by nature. We want to know the outcomes and redundant backup plans for everything. This means that when we’re too focused on the now, it steals our energy and momentum towards later — our future.

Sometimes you won’t know the outcome before you take the risk.

“Sometimes you win big. **Sometimes, it’s a draw.** However, at the end of the day, you should be proud of your failures.”

morning general session. I think 50 people (out of 7,500) knew before we did it.

It didn’t go well.

As embarrassing and frustrating as the public failure was, though, our staff and board failed together as a team. From the CEO and the board president on down, we shared the responsibility for the failure to be transparent, listened to the hurt feelings from the membership, and ate crow together as a team.

This memory might sound negative, but in hindsight, I

Attendees have more options than ever for their professional development, their networking and their conferences. Why sacrifice our long-term event viability and financial stability by holding too tightly onto our fear?

I mean, they’re called Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BHAG) for a reason.

And the more you practice failing, the less likely you are to be scared about trying to achieve that BHAG. **C&IT**

This article originally appeared in Pathable’s blog on May 28, 2017.



Lindsay Martin-Bilbrey, CMP

has been planning association, corporate and nonprofit events for more than 15 years. Her favorite part of being part of Pathable’s event app team is collaborating with clients and other event professionals on how to make meetings exceptional for all attendees. Contact her at: <https://pathable.com/>

Gaming Resorts

Unique Cultural Experiences Await Groups in Many Lesser-known Gaming Locales

The choices in gaming resorts today are as diverse as the selection of table games at a casino. The hotbeds of the industry remain Las Vegas and Atlantic City, but there are compelling gaming resorts that beckon corporate groups to less-traveled corners of the country, from Hollywood, Florida, to Biloxi, Mississippi, to King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, to Ridgefield, Washington. Unique cultural experiences await groups in many of these smaller gaming enclaves and a prime example is Ilani Casino Resort, which opened in Ridgefield last spring.

Developed by Salishan-Mohegan LLC in collaboration with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Ilani is located on the tribe's 156-

acre reservation, about 17 miles from the Hilton Vancouver. The 368,000-sf facility includes a 100,000-sf gaming floor and a meeting and entertainment venue seating up to 2,500 guests. Attendees have at their disposal a variety of retail shops, bars and restaurants, including Tom's Urban and Michael Jordan's Steakhouse. The Friedmutter Group, an architecture firm that specializes in gaming facilities, designed Ilani to highlight the beauty of the Northwest and home of the Cowlitz tribe, with panoramic mountain views and prominent use of wood, stone and zinc as building materials.

Ilani adds to the gaming options in Washington, which is also home to Tul-

alip Resort Casino. Having recently completed a \$15 million renovation, Tulalip offers 30,000 sf of meeting space and 360 redesigned guest rooms that express the rich history and culture of the Tulalip Tribes.

Southwest

For five years, sales representatives from Spectrum Technologies have been enriched by the culture of the Mescalero Apache Tribe at the Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino. The New Mexico gaming resort offers groups AAA Four Diamond facilities that include 273 guest rooms and 40,000 sf of meeting space. "They have a lot of unique paintings and statues, and they really do highlight



Ready to double down at the blackjack table, Foxwoods Resort Casino, Mashantucket, Connecticut.

Credit: Foxwoods Resort Casino



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Upscale lounge at Ilani Casino Resort, on the Cowlitz Indian Tribe reservation, Washington state.

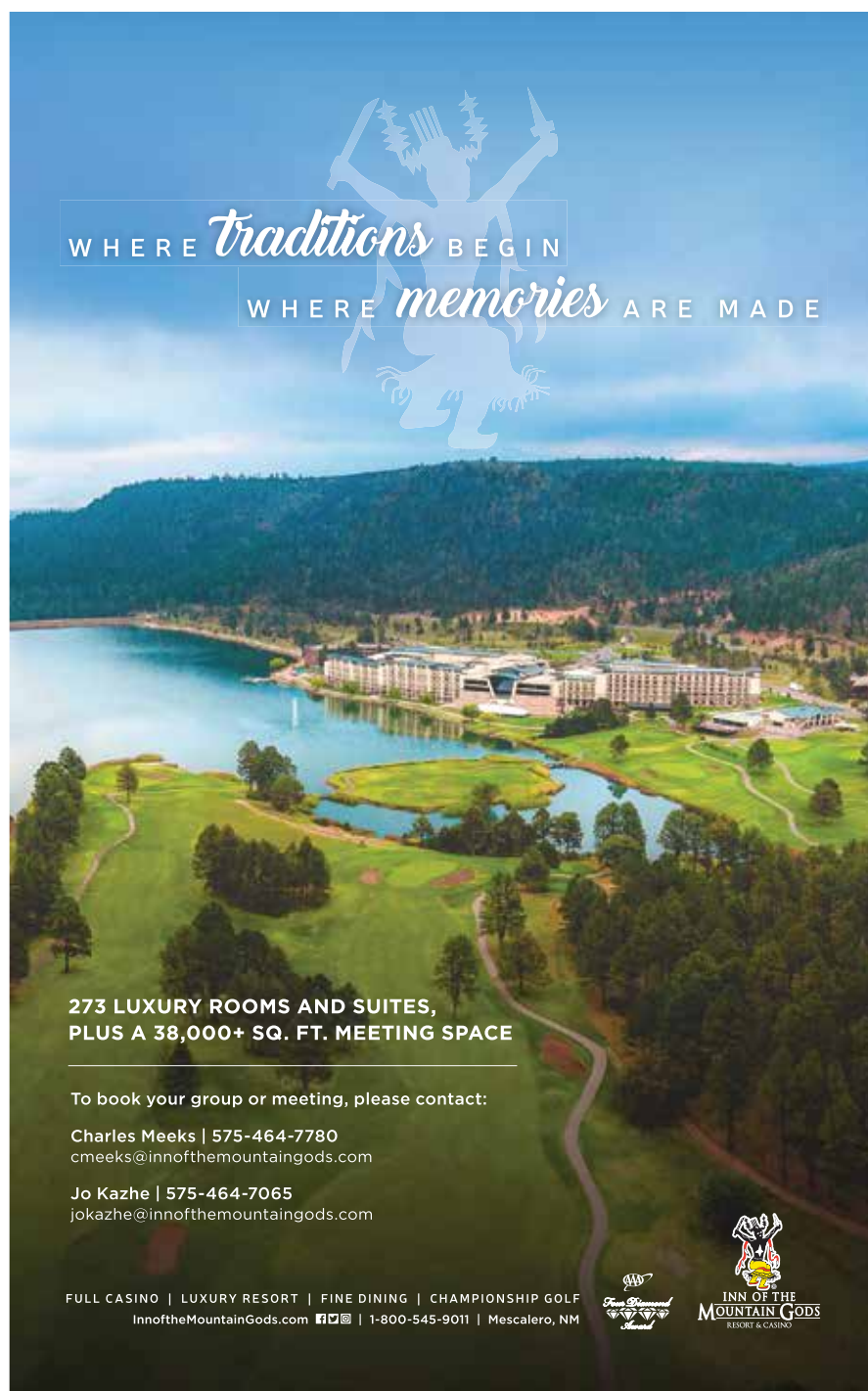
that heritage throughout the property," notes Michelle Lemke, technical solutions director. "Several of our attendees have remarked on that (heritage) and asked questions. So it is showcased in a very professional manner and adds some ambience to the property."

The Inn of the Mountain Gods was



Credit: Ilani Casino Resort

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selected for the company's January sales kickoff meeting primarily because of its location, notes Lemke. "It's nice and remote and takes our sales team out of the daily grind of the sales world and allows us to decompress," she explains. "Secondly, the amenities the Inn offers are quite exceptional. They have a beautiful lounge where we typically host our cocktail hour, a great onsite bar, and then the menu that we typically serve for that cocktail hour is very good. It's a little bit out of the normal scope of bar food."

Apart from providing an atmosphere conducive to networking, the resort's grounds are ideal for teambuilding. "This year, we had a scavenger hunt around the property, and the Inn staff helped our attendees to find clues, which was kind of neat," she says. "I'll never forget the fact that they were interactive and helped to make it fun. They seem to really care about being engaged with the customer. It's also wonderful that the staff hasn't changed since I began planning (meetings there)."

Customers who enjoy robust entertainment offerings along with their meetings may consider another Southwest gaming icon Talking Stick Resort. Located in Scottsdale, Arizona, the 496-room property includes the Showroom, Salt River Grand Ballroom and Pool — all of which host touring entertainers. Recently hosted acts include Dave Mason, Gabriel Iglesias and award-winning blues-rock guitarist Kenny Wayne Shepherd. Talking Stick Resort houses more than 100,000 sf of flexible meeting space. Nearby recreational options include the 36-hole Talking Stick Golf Club, OdySea Aquarium and Topgolf at Riverwalk.

Las Vegas

When it comes to diversity in casino entertainment, arguably no gaming destination can match Las Vegas. Yet many of the city's gaming properties also are quite serious about delivering a standard-setting conference experience. A case in point is the MGM Grand Conference Center, which topped out its 250,000-sf expansion in January. The \$130 million project, opening the end of this year, will expand the conference center to 850,000 sf, including a 22,000-sf expansion of Stay Well Meetings. New facilities will include a 49,000-sf ballroom, 32,000-sf ballroom, three junior ballrooms, 11 breakout rooms and a 5,500-sf outdoor courtyard.

The MGM Grand Conference Center expansion is certainly making headlines, but it's only a part of MGM Resorts' commitment to expanding its group business. When the expansions at Aria, Park MGM and Luxor are completed by the end of this year, MGM Resorts will have 4 million sf of meeting and convention space, reportedly more than any other company in Las Vegas. Aria's \$165 million project to enhance its LEED Gold-certified convention center will deliver an additional 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space. The enhanced center welcomed its first clients in February. Meanwhile, Park MGM has introduced phase one of its new 77,000-sf conference space, and later this year will open phase two: the city's first Executive Meeting Center and Idea Studio. The high-tech space will be ideal for small groups looking to maximize productivity. At Luxor, groups can utilize the new 20,000-sf Galleria Square, which features the 8,000-sf Lotus Ballroom, five meeting rooms ranging from 1,400–1,650 sf, and a 4,700-sf prefunction area. With the expansion, Luxor's meeting space now totals more than 40,000 sf. In addition, Luxor completes a redesign of more than 1,700 hotel Tower Rooms in March.

Further cementing its resources for meetings, MGM Resorts partnered with Cisco Systems in November to upgrade and double its wireless infrastructure



Inn of the Mountain Gods is "...nice and remote and takes our sales team out of the daily grind of the sales world and allows us to decompress. ...The amenities the Inn offers are quite exceptional."

Michelle Lemke, Technical Solutions Director
Spectrum Technologies, El Paso, TX



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Spectrum Technologies enjoys the 40,000 sf of meeting space at the unique and remote location of Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort and Casino, Mescalero, New Mexico.

throughout all MGM Resorts meeting and convention spaces in Las Vegas (except Circus Circus). The new system features increased high-density coverage and faster download speeds.

Wynn Resorts Ltd. began construction on its new Las Vegas Strip development, Paradise Park, in January 2018.

At Ameristar Casino Resort Spa, "we were able to have the media and the electronics we needed to support our meeting."



Todd Holmes
Facilities Manager
Starbucks
Kirkwood, MO

The 47-story, 1,500-room hotel and convention center will be built alongside a 38-acre lagoon, ringed by a mile-long boardwalk and white-sand beach. The development is replacing the golf course behind the Wynn Las Vegas and Encore. Design integrated with recreation is, as always, paramount for Wynn — there are plans for a nightly Carnivale parade of floats on the hourglass-shaped lagoon. Wynn is also doing its part to add more renewable energy resources in Nevada — powering Paradise Park entirely by energy from a dedicated solar array built outside of Fallon, Nevada.

Caesars Entertainment also has been augmenting its hospitality product in Las Vegas with a \$100 million renovation of the Palace Tower at Caesars Palace. The proj-

ect spans 1,181 guest rooms and suites, including the 10 opulent villas on the resort's 29th floor. The elegantly designed new guest rooms and suites feature cool gray tones accented by royal blue and champagne gold. By the second quarter of this year, the Flamingo Las Vegas will have completed a \$90 million renovation of 1,270 rooms. The rooms' décor pays homage to the Flamingo's 70-year history.

A modern addition to Las Vegas' resort collection is the M Resort Spa Casino, located in nearby Henderson. Opened in 2009, the 390-room hotel offers more than 92,000 sf of meeting space, including a pavilion, grand ballroom and multiple reception areas. Both natural lighting and views of the Las Vegas skyline complement the function space. Alternative gathering venues throughout the resort include Lux, the expansive 16th floor function space; Hostile Grape wine cellar; and the M Pool, which includes outdoor event terraces. Top-quality F&B is a major focus of the resort, which houses nearly 30,000 sf of kitchen space and culinary work ar-



Talking Stick Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona houses more than 100,000 sf of flexible meeting space.

Credit: Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort and Casino

eas. Most of the M Resort's restaurants feature outdoor dining on terraces that overlook the 100,000-sf pool and events piazza, as well as the Las Vegas Strip.

Northeast

Caesars Entertainment is not only conducting major guest room renovation projects in Las Vegas. In the home of the world-famous Boardwalk, Harrah's Atlantic City completed a \$30 million renovation of its 450-room Bayview Tower last summer. In addition, The Pool at Harrah's/The Pool after Dark received a \$2.6 million redesign and a new fitness center was introduced.

Major renovations have also been completed at the Tropicana Atlantic City. The \$200 million project has refurbished all 21 meeting rooms in the Havana Tower (16,000-sf combined), 18,000-sf Ballroom and the 20,000-sf Grand Exhibition Center. The Tropicana also offers meeting planners newly refurbished and renovated guest rooms in the North, South and Havana hotel towers, new amenities and experiences such as AtlantiCare Life Center Fitness and Escape AC, and three new dining concepts by award-winning chef Jose Garces: Olón, Bar Olón and Okatshe. After the company acquired the adjacent boutique hotel, The Chelsea, last year, the property began the process of linking it to Tropicana's operations as its fifth hotel tower, bringing its total guest room count to 2,369 and adding 5,600 sf of meeting space.

Up in Uncasville, Connecticut, Mohegan Sun is also making strides with the upcoming summer debut of its convention space expansion. Totalling 250,000 sf, the new space includes a 125,000-sf Expo Center, 20,000-sf Earth Ballroom, 15 meeting rooms and 20,000 sf earmarked for new dining or entertainment space. Expansive meeting space options are also available at Foxwoods Resort Casino. Along with a variety of smaller meeting rooms, facilities include the 47,533-sf Premier Ballroom, 15,000-sf Celebrity Ballroom and the 25,000-sf, column-free Foxwoods Grand Ballroom,



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divisible into five sections. A 4,000-sf prefunction area with 23 foot ceilings provides ample room for registration or pre-dinner cocktail hours. Foxwoods also features the 1,400-seat Fox Theater and the 4,000-seat Grand Theater.

Cumberland Farms has taken advantage of these spaces over the last seven years for its annual meeting and trade show. The most recent installment brought about 1,200 attendees to the property. "We have a wonderful partnership with them; they have really become part of the Cumberland Farms family," says Debra J. White, senior executive assistant, adding that the company has booked its 2018 and 2019 trade show and year-end meetings with Foxwoods. "We typically hold a large cocktail party for our vendors, and we've held that in the past in two of their ballrooms. But this year we decided to go over to Grand Pequot and we used their High Rollers (Luxury Lanes and Sports Lounge). It's pretty amazing. So we had an event there on one evening for 600 people, and the next evening another event for roughly 300 people, while simultaneously using another one of their ballrooms for a dinner for about 600. It was the first time we had done that kind of an event for our store managers, and they were thrilled because they had the bowling alley and we had put on a nice spread of food."

White commends Foxwoods' culinary service in general. "They have a tremendous chef who's always willing to work with us; if there's something on the menu that we would like to see changed, they change the food offering for us," she explains. "And they make positive suggestions about how we can change things to spice things up a little bit."

Pennsylvania's gaming scene has been growing in recent times. The Sands Casino Resort Bethlehem opened in 2009, bringing a 150,000-sf casino to the state, complemented by the Sands Bethlehem Events Center, offering 12,000 sf of rentable space and an onsite AV and event team. And for the last five years, King of Prussia has been home to a full-amenity gaming resort, Valley Forge Casino Resort. Guest rooms are divided into two towers: The 483-room Radisson Tower and the 154-room Casino Tower, which recently underwent a \$6 million renovation. Since the property opened, renovations have been made to the Event Center and the 100,000 sf of function space, which includes five ballrooms. In addition, dining space has been converted into a classic steakhouse, Revolution Chop House, and the Valley Beach Poolside Club was created.

Southeast

Beau Rivage, located in Biloxi, Mississippi, has also recently completed a rooms renovation. Ninety-five of the property's Jasmine, Cypress and Beau Chene Suites have been remodeled to better represent the Gulf Coast lifestyle. The materials palette includes the blue-greens of the local waters and foliage, the colors of driftwood and sand, and yellows and fuchsia pinks. The project was a collaboration between MGM Resorts Design & Development and the Beau Rivage Facilities team.

The 1,740-room Beau Rivage offers groups 50,000 sf of function space, including the 17,000-sf Magnolia Ballroom; an 85,000-sf casino; a 1,550-seat theater; upscale retailers; the nearby Fallen Oak golf course; and a spa and tropical pool. During their free time, attendees can catch headliners such as Kansas, Kool & the Gang, Billy Idol and Jim Gaffigan. A new offering for groups who want to feel the breeze on the Mississippi Gulf is the Betsy Ann Riverboat, a 150-passenger true stern wheel paddleboat docked at Point Cadet Marina. The

vessel, featuring an enclosed climate-controlled main cabin, is now available for two-hour tours, sunset cruises, dinner cruises as well as private charters.

Down in the Sunshine State, the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood is adding a \$1.8 billion, guitar-shaped tower with 800 rooms to its current 500 guest rooms. The project is scheduled to be completed by late 2019, and will also add 50,000 sf of function space along with new dining



"We have a wonderful partnership with (Foxwoods); they have really become part of the Cumberland Farms family."

Debra J. White

Senior Executive Assistant
Cumberland Farms
Westborough, MA

and entertainment venues. The hotel currently offers 120,000 sf of meeting space, including a 38,000-sf exhibit hall divisible into 10 spaces. Other venues include the 5,500-seat, 18,000-sf Hard Rock Live arena and a 7,000-sf poolside function area.

Midwest

The Ameristar brand has made a name for itself in the Midwest via the Ameristar Casino Hotel Kansas City and the Ameristar Casino Resort Spa St. Charles. The Kansas City property is a AAA Three Diamond full-service hotel



Expansive outdoor setup at M Resort Spa and Casino in Las Vegas.

with 184 well-appointed rooms and the largest casino in the Kansas City area at 140,000 sf. Numerous amenities complement the hotel's 15,000 sf of function space, including seven dining venues, live entertainment and even an 18-screen movie theater.

Located just west of the Lambert-St. Louis International Airport, the Ameristar Casino Resort Spa St. Charles has a slightly smaller casino at 130,000 sf but a larger hotel at 400 guest rooms. The AAA Four Diamond property houses a 20,000-sf conference center. Other highlights include an indoor-outdoor pool, a full-service luxury day spa, state-of-the-art fitness center and a pool deck featuring fountains, a firepit and Missouri River views.

A small group of Starbucks facilities managers gathered last year at the Ameristar Casino Resort Spa St. Charles for an annual regional kickoff meeting planned by Todd Holmes, Starbucks facilities manager. Holmes, who was personally familiar with the Ameristar brand prior to selecting the property, remarks that the "conference rooms were very comfortable; they were able to arrange it in a way that was conducive to our group. We were able to have the media and the electronics we needed to support our meeting. We had some people that dialed in from the Indianapolis market, and so we were able to have the conference call option in the room. It worked out perfectly."

One aspect of the event that did not go perfectly was a power outage throughout the hotel one evening. But the personalized planning assistance that Holmes had been receiving from Ashley Gaddy, senior executive sales manager with Ameristar, continued throughout that situation. "Through no fault of their own, the power was out. We had people staying up on the 23rd-25th floors. Ashley called me and said, 'We understand if anybody wants to go to a different hotel. We will have somebody go up and get their bags.' And they really supported us during that time. We just hung out in the lobby, and when the power came on we all either went to the casino or up

to rooms. But it made for a memorable story to tell when we get together again. We like to talk about it in a good way: how the company, and specifically Ashley, handled the situation for us. I can't imagine anything she could have done to deliver better customer service, and she still stays in touch to this day. The next time I'm in charge of organizing (the meeting), we'll stay there again."

Upscale gaming hotels don't leave

the guest experience up to chance, and the long-term partnerships that companies like Cumberland Farms and Spectrum Technologies have established with such properties are a testament to the remarkable customer service their attendees receive, year after year. With the growing variety in gaming resorts across the country, planners have more opportunities to create such partnerships.

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How to Stay Ahead of the Hackers

Cybersecurity — Don't Get Caught in the Phisher's Net
By Christine Loomis



Is the meetings industry setting itself up for a catastrophic cyber incident in the near future? Are planners putting themselves at personal risk if their attendees' information is hacked and data collected and used for meetings is breached?

The hacking of Equifax, reported in September 2017, may be proof that any company and any individual can fall prey to cyberattackers these days, and that hackers are often an elite group of competent international criminals who are out to collect and use data for immense personal gain.

Data breaches may be about personal information gathering, or they may be about corporate espionage or ransom. A breach can be an aim to disrupt if the group itself or someone speaking at the conference is controversial, and that may be particularly true if the meeting

involves government or military employees. A breach may be hackers just trying to see what they can get because they know a venue isn't very secure.

The fact is, when you put a lot of people together in one place, all using their mobile devices and laptops, and all registered using personal data and/or accessing sensitive data for the meeting, it's a scenario ripe for cyber infiltration.

The Risks Are Many, the Criminals Clever

Sean Donahoo, CEO of Disruptive Solutions, which provides cybersecurity solutions in the meetings industry, says there are multiple possibilities. Registration kiosks and websites can be hacked in order to steal personal information. Hackers can "impersonate" or shut down conference Wi-Fi or disrupt audio-visual equipment. Cyber-savvy criminals can

also set up cellphone intercept equipment, another way to gain access to personal information. And if embarrassing or disrupting a conference or corporation is the goal, criminals can do such things as exploiting a conference app and sending fake updates or other messages. All of these things, Donahoo says, have negative potential, from embarrassment, to harming reputations, to loss of sensitive data to causing major financial damage to companies or individuals.

And then there's the venue. Paige Schaffer, president and COO, Identity and Digital Protection Services Global Unit, at Generali Global Assistance, says, "Identity theft and fraud risks run rampant at both convention centers and hotels, as well as unfortunately in most locations throughout the world. Hotels may pose slightly more significant risks only because they are not usually

reserved exclusively for a given conference. In other words, many other people may be in the hotel outside of an event, which makes it a bit more difficult to ensure that only registered attendees enter a conference area."

Additionally, she says, "most hotels have free, open Wi-Fi running in their lobby area 24/7, which opens up channels of attack for cybercriminals. Convention centers may be more limited in their Wi-Fi access requirements. Again, however, both hotels and convention centers pose cyberthreats, so organizers and attendees should ultimately not take any differences into account. Cyberattacks can occur, and identities can be stolen, anytime and anywhere."

Phishing & Spearphishing

Schaffer notes that phishing of one kind or another is still the major cyberthreat at conferences and in many aspects of life in general. "In 2016, for example, more than 55 percent of the more than 1,000 data breaches reported in the U.S. were caused by spearphishing, according to the Identity Theft Resource Center. Spearphishing occurs when cybercriminals target employees who have access to sensitive data by sending them bogus emails that appear to come from a trusted source and that request confidential information. Spearphishing emails may also include links or attachments that lead to malicious websites, or that install malware on an organization's network," she says.

Schaffer points out that cybercriminals often specifically target large events with their phishing campaigns because they can so easily obtain an attendee list, including contact information, which is all they require to get started. "Phishing emails are increasingly difficult to detect as criminals become ever more savvy, and any conference attendee that is duped by them may unknowingly hand over their sensitive data, whether that be personally identifiable information (PII), credit card information, corporate information from the organization for which they work, etc."

While phishing may be the most common cybercrime tactic aimed at confer-

ences and their attendees, Schaffer says it's by no means the only threat. "Attackers can hack the physical scanners that are used to collect PII from attendees, set up bogus event websites that ask visitors to enter their sensitive information and can even hack legitimate conference websites, also for the purposes of collecting PII."

Then there's the non-digital arena, "low-tech" identity theft, which is also rampant at conferences.

"Because the majority of attendees

do they encrypt sensitive customer data? If a vendor does not engage in these practices normally, then they almost assuredly would not do so at an event."

But even that is not enough. Schaffer says conference organizers should investigate whether a given vendor has suffered a data breach or been the victim of a cyberattack in the past. "Countless organizations experience breaches in today's day and age, and in and of itself this is not necessarily a cause for major concern. Critically important, however,

"Most of the technology used at a typical conference has been exploitable for years."

Sean Donahoo

CEO, Disruptive Solutions

at a large event travel from out of town," Schaffer notes, "they're likely to carry sensitive documents and other materials with them, especially at business-oriented conferences, and therefore pick-pockets and muggers often loiter near event venues. Attendees need to remain vigilant against these threats, but event organizers must also play their part by providing educational resources about all identity theft risks and best practices to protect against them."

Consider the Vendors

In addition to all that, Schaffer says vendors at conferences also can pose a threat. "Vendors often collect payment information or other types of PII, and if they do not properly handle this data it can pose serious problems. To effectively combat this risk, conference organizers should ensure that any vendors collecting payment information onsite are fully compliant with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS)."

Event organizers, Schaffer says, should research how effectively vendors protect their own customers. "Questions to be asked include, do they have adequate firewall protection in place? And,

is a vendor's response to a past breach. If an organization has experienced a breach and done little or nothing to rectify damages, reimburse constituents or update their security systems, that vendor should not be allowed to participate in a given event."

Online Registration, Fake Websites & More

One staple of conferences these days, online registration, is another potential risk, though Donahoo says there are many variables that affect the different parties involved with a registration website.

"Users," Donahoo says, "should verify that they're on the correct site before entering any information and should make sure there's a secure connection before using the site. To do that, they should look for 'https' in front of the address and check for an indication on the browser bar that the site is secure, usually a lock icon with the word 'secure.'"

Planners, for their part, have to vet registration providers. "Planners should take the time to ask about their registration provider's security practices, specifically how data is stored, retained and

#1 Best Practices

Start With a Question

Sean Donahoo, CEO of Disruptive Solutions, says best practices begin with planners asking themselves the right questions.

- What do we have that people might want, e.g. personal information, corporate information, patents, research?
 - What do we have that people might want to disrupt (those things that attract “hacktivists”)?
 - Is the venue a soft target? That is, does it have weak security, physical or cyber?
 - Are there any parallel threats such as protests outside of the conference?
 - What about VIPs and keynote speakers? Are they controversial? Do they carry messages that some people may want to suppress?
- Identifying the answers to those questions tell a planner where cybersecurity must begin. — CL

transferred,” Donahoo says. “They should ask how the provider conducted website and web app security testing and penetration testing. They should consider bringing in a security consultant to review the provider’s responses.”

Registration providers must also do their part, “by ensuring that website and applications are secure, by developing products with security in mind from the beginning and by conducting security testing and evaluation,” Donahoo adds.

Schaffer also points to the possibility of fake websites. “Online event registration can certainly pose risks, for two main reasons,” she says. “First, cybercriminals may set up a fake registration site, and given their growing sophistication, these can be quite convincing as legitimate pages. Anyone who is duped into entering their data, likely including payment information, would be providing that information directly to the criminals.”

But even fully legitimate registration sites may pose an issue, Schaffer notes, “as nefarious parties may be able to simply hack these pages to steal registrants’ PII. It’s difficult to say that online registration is always safe or always dangerous, as the truth of course lies somewhere in the middle. However, it is quite evident that entering personal information almost anywhere online can pose a threat, and this is certainly not limited to event registration sites.”

There’s no question that technology is getting more sophisticated and infiltrating deeper into contemporary life. At conferences, the use of technology has increased dramatically over the past few

years — not just in terms of online registration and payment, which are now the norm, but in terms of conferences using mobile apps, digital badges, interactive education sessions dependent on mobile devices and ever-increasing bandwidth at venues so that more and more attendees can be online at the same time, to name but a few possible problem areas.

Fake Wi-Fi Networks

“Identity theft and fraud risks naturally increase in line with the number of users connected to a given Wi-Fi network,” Schaffer says. “Especially with open, public Wi-Fi, which is extremely common at large events, savvy criminals can utilize the connection to easily steal sensitive information contained on other connected devices. Additionally, it’s common for malicious parties to set up fake, open Wi-Fi networks at events that appear legitimate, similar to their strategy of establishing phony registration websites. Of course, any unsuspecting attendee connecting to one of these networks would essentially be opening a direct line between their data and the fraudsters.”

Because of these increasing risks, Schaffer says it’s critical to avoid connecting to open Wi-Fi networks whenever possible. “While even secure networks that require login credentials to connect are not immune from cyberthreats, they are far less likely to result in data theft than open, unsecured networks.”

Donahoo points out that this risk isn’t new. “We’re already there and we’ve

been there for awhile,” he says. “Most of the technology used at a typical conference has been exploitable for years. Add in potentially poor cybersecurity practices and it’s just a matter of time until conferences become another routine target. Conferences have the potential to bring all of the top industry professionals to one location. That’s going to peak someone’s interest.

“It has to be about changing the mindset of both the planner and the attendee. Planners can start baking cybersecurity into their budget and plan. Attendees should not let their guard down just because they aren’t in the office.”

Apps & Badges

And what of conference apps and scannable badges? The first is a bit more complex.

“Like any other app, if it’s not secure it can be exploited,” Donahoo says. “At a minimum, the app should not be storing or transmitting sensitive data in the clear. To mitigate potential problems, planners should ask the same security questions they used regarding their registration website. And again, planners should consider bringing in a security consultant to review the app and security documentation. Moreover, since many conference apps are ‘re-skinned,’ meaning the same app with a customized event look, if an app is not secure it can affect more than one event.”

Scannable badges, Donahoo says, should not contain any information you would not want a stranger to have. “Ideally, the only info would be your registration

number and the scanner/system marries that up with the personal info. Keep in mind that badges get lost and that people wear them around their hotel or resort and the conference venue.”

Threat Prevention & Mitigation

With so many vulnerabilities and so much at stake, what should planners be doing to prevent attacks?

“First,” Schaffer says, “event planners should designate specific personnel as ‘trusted event employees,’ who are solely responsible for handling attendee PII. Identity theft risks decrease in line with a lower number of total individuals who come into contact with sensitive information. Additionally, as noted previously, establishing secure Wi-Fi networks is

wiping of data contained on lost or stolen devices. Low-tech considerations are also important, such as keeping sensitive documents in securely locked areas and thoroughly vetting staff members who will handle PII. Additionally, it’s critical that organizers validate their employees’ event IDs or badges.”

Donahoo strongly advises planners to make cybersecurity part of the planning process. “The earlier the better,” he says. “Planners won’t think twice about hiring consultants for everything from swag to tablecloths, but cybersecurity is rarely in the plan.”

He also discourages planners from relying solely on their IT, network or internet providers/consultants to cover security. “If you think they have it cov-

ing planning is no longer an option. It’s a must. As Donahoo notes, “It’s only a matter of time until potential data thieves realize that most of the event industry is an easy target.”

For that reason and others, once planners have put the right security measures into place, Schaffer says they should not be afraid to promote that.

“This actually serves as an educational method as it informs event attendees about security best practices, which should influence them to take the requisite steps to ensure that their own data is protected. This type of transparency will also showcase that organizers are committed to keeping their customers’ information secure, instilling trust in the organization.”

“Spearphishing occurs when cybercriminals target employees who have access to sensitive data.”

Paige Schaffer

President and COO, Identity and Digital Protection Services Global Unit
Generali Global Assistance, Bethesda, MD



critical. Event staff should have their own separate network as they will have the greatest access to attendee PII. Limiting that information to one network significantly decreases the risk of identity fraud. As cybercriminals often set up phony event networks, conference organizers must make it sufficiently clear which networks are legitimate so that attendees can better avoid connecting to the wrong ones.”

Schaffer points out that there are a number of secure data handling processes that planners can implement to better protect personal information, and they include both high- and low-tech solutions. “Encrypting emails that contain sensitive information is one effective, preventative measure as is utilizing technology that allows for the remote

erred, you’re probably wrong. Their job is to handle bandwidth and connectivity. Adding items to their Statement of Work (SOW) such as encryption and daily, rolling passwords is a good start. But,” he notes, “cybersecurity consultants can go beyond that to such preventive measures as conducting active threat monitoring throughout the event.”

Donahoo says planners should make use of the right tools and practices together. “Use a VPN (virtual private network). I strongly recommend IDVector (www.idvector.net). Utilize encryption, full disk and email. Use only strong, unique passwords. Remember that free Wi-Fi isn’t free. And use smart browsing and email habits, meaning don’t be ‘click happy.’”

Making cybersecurity part of meet-

It also may send a message to would-be cyberattackers that this group is not, in fact, an easy target.

Despite all of the identity theft and fraud risks that come with the territory of large events, Schaffer says the events must go on. “It’s critical that event organizers, conference attendees and anyone in any profession or situation is aware of the cyber risks that exist today, and that they take the right preventative measures to protect their information. We must all remain vigilant as threats continue to increase in severity,” she says.

“However, at the same time we must all go on with our lives. We cannot let the fraudsters beat us through fear and intimidation. Countless events take place without any cybersecurity or identity theft issues.”

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Food & Beverage

Credit: Sanctuary Beach Resort

Fresh seafood
at Salt Wood Kitchen
& Oysterette at
Sanctuary Beach
Resort in Marina, CA

Catering to High Expectations

Food Trends & Tactics to Design Healthier Menus and Satisfy Divergent Tastes

By Sophia Bennett

Providing a range of healthy, nourishing foods and beverages made from locally sourced ingredients is one of the biggest trends in the meeting industry. There are many good reasons for attendees' shift in thinking when it comes to food choices.

"I think we're all just more informed," says Megan Delaney, an independent meeting planner in Greenacres, Florida. "People are in general more health conscious. They're moving from American-style big plates to enjoying food and making sure it works for their body. There's also been a huge uptick

in people finding out that they have a sensitivity to gluten or that dairy is what's causing their GI issues. They're realizing that with diet and exercise they can control their weight or prevent diabetes. And they're finding that for religious or moral reasons they don't want to eat red meat."

While healthy food is a priority for many people attending conferences and incentive trips, not everyone has made this shift. Plenty still come to meetings expecting to splurge on comfort food and eat dessert after every meal. How do you balance these two expectations?

It may be easier than you think. A lot of it is about striking a balance between healthy and less healthy food. "Every single meal we're looking at — does it appeal to our mass audience?" Delaney says. "If there are cupcakes, have we balanced that with whole fruit for people? Are we taking into account dietary needs? Does every meal have a vegetarian protein and something that's vegan? We try to appease people with having some comfort food while at the same time making sure that healthy options are always available."

Serving really good food made with real ingredients also can go a long way toward satisfying everyone. "As corporate budgets decrease for large-scale events, companies are really focusing on high-quality catering options and using more locally grown food," says Shane Terenzi, senior event producer for High Beam Events, an Austin, Texas-based company that focuses on corporate meetings, experiential and social events and destination management.

"We are seeing so many huge companies and small companies wanting to incorporate local ingredients as much as possible. Caterers want to give back to their communities and that includes working with local farmers to get the ingredients they need and working with ranchers to get locally raised meats."

One of the most important things to remember when designing healthy menus is not to buy into old stereotypes about healthy food being boring or unappealing. "Don't be constrained by any self-imposed limitations," says Mike Schugt, president of Teneo Hospitality Group, a resort representation



Chefs and caterers want to contribute to their communities by working with local farmers, as well as provide clients with exceptional food and beverage options.

company in Orlando, Florida. "Attendees want healthy food, so give it to them and get very creative."

Chefs can be your best friend in making this happen. In many cases they're the ones leading the charge for healthier food and beverage options, says Tom Garcia, acting vice president, food and beverage for Benchmark, a global hospitality company. "They are engineering recipes

meat like chicken. We also do a lot of fish and seafood."

Baron's grain salads featuring quinoa, bulger and barley are very popular these days. He's also using plenty of seasonal fruits and vegetables and fresh herbs. "Herbs are big for me in cooking," he says. "They add a lot of fresh flavors." One of his favorite things to do is coat melon with them and grill the slices. "It changes the structure of



"I like to get a background of what they're doing and why they're doing it. ...We work within their price range to deliver what they want out of the meal."

David Baron, Executive Chef
Salt Wood Kitchen & Oysterette, Sanctuary Beach Resort, Marina, CA

and menus to include healthier options. Now the meeting planner or decision-maker of events and meetings can view healthier options when maybe it wasn't top-of-mind prior to choosing the food offerings."

The New Health Foods

Executive chef David Baron with Salt Wood Kitchen & Oysterette at Sanctuary Beach Resort in Marina, California, shares several healthy food trends he's observed in recent years. "Red meat is less popular for some people," he says. "They want white

it and gives it some extra flavor."

Healthy fats are in high demand, as are natural sugars such as honey and agave. Fermented foods continue to be popular as more people learn about the benefits of eating probiotic food. Baron is also using more nuts and seeds in dishes.

Delaney likes to allow people to build their own meals so they can choose exactly what goes into their food. As an example, she describes a lunch buffet that starts with simple salad greens. People can select their own protein, garnishes and dressing,

depending on their tastes and dietary restrictions. “I can see 10 different people walking through that buffet line, and they’re all satisfied and have choices,” she says.

The “build your own meal” trend has gotten very popular in recent years, Terenzi says. “People are wanting to

finding more ways to accommodate diners with food allergies or sensitivities; eating preferences such as Paleo, Mediterranean, vegetarian or vegan; or religious limitations such as halal or kosher.

Restaurants and caterers are increasingly setting out a

or group expects and enjoys,” he adds. After all, the ratio of healthy food to sweet and salty treats meeting attendees want will vary widely from group to group. “If healthy options are a priority, the meeting planner will need to deliver that message to the chef and catering manager.”

Striking the right balance between healthy options and indulgent ones can be fun. Given the popularity of small plates, Delaney likes to set up themed stations around the dining area to encourage participants to try a little of everything. “You can have one that’s fun healthy options, then one that’s for people who follow a halal or vegetarian diet,” she says.

This is a good way to serve ethnic cuisines without alienating people who are hesitant to try new things. “An ‘around the world’ feel gives everybody that little bit of satisfaction and little bit of healthy, and it helps broaden people’s horizons,” she says. “They

“Companies are really focusing on high-quality catering options and using more locally grown food.”

Shane Terenzi, Senior Event Producer
High Beam Events, Austin, TX



know what they’re consuming and they’re wanting to do things themselves.” Part of this is that more people view food as a form of entertainment, so they want to interact with it. But it also allows people with dietary restrictions to identify exactly what’s going into their meal or snack.

Terenzi shares a few of his favorite DIY meals and snacks. For stuffed avocado bars, caterers set out halved, pitted avocados and allow guests to add crème fresh, cotija cheese, queso dip, salsa and other ingredients. At canapé stations, guests are encouraged to top crostinis with seared ahi tuna, cooked meat and vegetable spreads. A client serving guests at South by Southwest eschewed their traditional early morning alcohol offerings and instead set up a create-your-own parfait station with dairy and nondairy yogurt, granola, fresh fruit and other add-ons.

“Meals now are much heavier on vegetarian options versus beef,” says Schugt. “Desserts are very small and more just to taste versus a piece of cake or pie. There’s a move to organic foods versus processed.” Attendees also are grateful to receive scratch-made foods when possible.

Cater to Dietary Restrictions

A big part of the move toward healthier food has to do with the growing number of dietary restrictions. Meeting planners and chefs are

full list of what each dish on a buffet contains. That way people can judge for themselves whether they can eat something or not. It also can be helpful to point out which foods contain allergens and which are appropriate for people with different dietary needs.

When it comes to working with corporate meeting planners, “I try to get the group’s rules — and by rules I mean dietary restrictions and aversions,” says Baron. “I like to get a background of what they’re do-



“Now the meeting planner or decision-maker of events and meetings can view healthier options when maybe it wasn’t top-of-mind prior to choosing the food offerings.”

Tom Garcia, Acting Vice President, Food and Beverage
Benchmark, The Woodlands, TX

ing and why they’re doing it. Then I tell them to let us do our job and our sourcing to do what we do best. We work within their price range to deliver what they want out of the meal.” He often ends up customizing menus to their tastes and needs.

Strike a Balance

Meeting food doesn’t have to be all healthy all the time. “Guests like to see the healthier options available, and may grab a little here and there, but the chips, pretzels and chicken wings are still going to be the most popular items,” says Garcia.

“The meeting planner has to have strong knowledge of what the client

can try some new spices or vegetarian foods and see how they like them.”

Beautiful Presentations Will Wow Attendees

“I would definitely say the trend is to find more fun ways of bringing healthy food and beverage into events,” says Terenzi. One great way to do this is through eye-catching and entertaining displays.

“Colors can add a lot,” says Jarrod Salaiz, senior event producer with High Beam Events. So can edible flowers or Instagram-worthy plating. “When we think about selling a client on healthy food, it can seem a little scary. But if it’s beautiful and tastes great, people will



High Beam Events produces creative, beautiful presentations, and a plethora of delicious food options for varied dietary needs.

social media). No one will be able to resist digging in.

Stay Healthy at Breaks

Healthy food should carry over from meals into snack time. Serving healthy, high-protein items will give people more energy to participate in events throughout the day.

“What people are snacking on and drinking in today’s world is getting

go crazy for it. It will bring people in no matter what the food is.”

Creating more attractive food displays can be as easy at putting vegetables and fruits on more interesting platters or containers, Garcia says. Or it

can be as involved as building an entire buffet around a clever theme and fun decorations. Work with your caterer and any event designers to create something no one has seen before (or everyone has been buzzing about on



Make-your-own smoothie stations and fruit-infused water often replace ice-cream buffets in keeping attendees healthy and hydrated.

adapted in banquet kitchens," says Schugt. "Previously, you would have popcorn stations and ice cream stations. Now that's been replaced with smoothie stations and many different and interesting presentations of coffees and espressos. Hotels have baristas for breaks and meals to prep coffee drinks like lattes. Instead of having bags of chips, you'll find Kind bars."

"Corporations and groups are not going for the meat platters as much anymore," Baron says.

"They're going for vegetable and fruit plates with dips."

For the latter, cooks can offer plenty of alternatives to ranch dressing. Try hummus plain, blended with white or fava beans instead of garbanzos, or combined with vegetables like beets or roasted peppers. Yogurt-based dips have less fat than their sour cream-heavy counterparts.

Beyond Food: Healthy Beverages

Health-conscious consumption doesn't stop at the break table. Consumers are more concerned than ever about what they drink. And food providers are responding with flavorful choices meeting participants can enjoy all day.

"The No. 1 thing you're seeing, because we're always trying to hydrate attendees, is flavored water or spa water," says Delaney.

Baron backs this up. "We cut down

coffee in the lobby and are doing infused water with citrus or fruit or berries," he says.

Water stations provide some interesting opportunities to meet other meeting goals. Salaiz points out that many consumers who are interested in eating better are also concerned about lowering their carbon footprint. A water station that allows them to continually refill a water bottle is more eco-friendly than utilizing several plastic water bottles.

In addition, he says, com-

adding sugar and cream to your coffee there's a special butter with healthy fat that you can add."

"Fresh pressed juices are always a big hit," says Delaney. Fruit isn't the only thing being juiced anymore; drinks that contain vegetables such as beets, carrots, spinach and kale are also quite popular.

Juice is great for breakfasts or breaks, but it can also be used in mocktails, which are another healthy beverage trend. "People are serving less alcohol, but when they're doing



"Don't be constrained by any self-imposed limitations. Attendees want healthy food, so give it to them and get very creative."

Mike Schugt, President
Teneo Hospitality Group, Orlando, FL

panies can set out their own branded reusable water bottles (or sponsored water bottles) that attendees can pick up. This provides an additional opportunity to share a marketing message or sell a sponsorship.

"Coconut water is becoming more available for meetings and events," says Garcia. "Teas are back in popularity and offered all day." Kombucha, a fermented tea that contains probiotics (and a tiny bit of alcohol) may also be popular with some attendees.

For people who still crave that cup of coffee, there's a new option that's being called a healthier choice: butter coffee. "This was a hit in Austin a few years ago," says Salaiz. "Instead of

bars, instead of using traditional sweet and sour mixes they're doing fresh juices," says Terenzi.

Meeting attendees go crazy for smoothie bars. One twist is to allow people to make their own or choose from a list of ingredients, Terenzi says.

No matter what food and beverages you serve, the key is to keep it fun, Salaiz says. "There are so many caterers who want to experiment with different flavor profiles and different colors." With their help, meeting-goers won't even remember that they indulged in healthy treats on their trip. All they'll remember are the flavors that tempted their taste buds day after flavorful day."

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Meeting Trends

The Art of Site Selection

Four Experts Weigh in on the Shifting Landscape in Destination Due Diligence

By Christine Loomis



Some elements of site selection will never change. The primary consideration for planners has been and will continue to be choosing a site that meets the needs of their company or clients.

In many cases, however, multiple destinations and venues can offer what's needed in lift, space, budget, quality, experience and so on. And, as times change, new elements and options may be added to the mix in terms of what destinations and companies put on the table. It's up to planners to negotiate terms that will make it all work.

SITE Foundation's 2018 SITE Index includes data on various aspects of site selection and evaluation, and among the findings are two important elements:

First, buyers and sellers have similar views on what's important in selecting a destination, namely appeal to participant audience, value for the dollar and overall safety.

And research indicates that even though budgets have increased, buyers are looking for ways to reduce costs, and that effort is led by selection of less expensive amenities and less expensive destinations and hotels. In addition, shorter programs and fewer par-

ticipants also are part of the equation, which can affect site selection as well.

We asked four experts to weigh in on what drives site selection and evaluation today, how educating planners on what they need to know about site selection has changed and how things might evolve in the near future. While the experts agree on many of the issues, they have some differing opinions, too.

The Top Trends

Alisa Peters, CMP, CMM, Illinois-based senior global account manager with Experient, a Maritz Global Events Company, puts her top trends into three categories.

She labels the first category Not the Usual Suspects. "Planners want new, interesting, memorable and shareable in a destination to attract attendees," she says.

Next: They Weren't Born Yesterday. "Planners know that room rate is not the headline anymore. Hidden fees are truly the name of the game when it comes to budget, and they are turning over every rock to find them. This isn't a side gig for an admin assistant anymore," Peters emphasizes. "Legal and procurement are typically a second line of evaluation.

The details matter and the cracks will be uncovered. Finding them and addressing them in agreements is a must."

The last top-three trend for Peters is Partners, Not Vendors. "Planners want to know that the 'home' they contract with will feel like home, with teams that become a part of their team throughout the planning. They don't want to feel like they're sitting across the table from a vendor. They want to feel like they're sitting at the table with a partner (for a great meal, with interesting stories). Relationships matter," she says. "Now more than ever."

Scottsdale-based Maria Maddock, manager, global accounts, HelmsBriscoe, puts the top three trends today succinctly. "No. 1: Location is still most important. No. 2: Clients hate resort fees and feeling nickel-and-dimed. Value," she says, "is important." As for No. 3: "Clients want free Wi-Fi."

Matthew Marcial, CMP, CAE, vice president education and events at MPI, is on the front lines in terms of what meeting planners have to know and learn, including about site selection. He has oversight of MPI Academy, which provides not only the CMM program and courses that qualify for CMP clock hours,

but also education for WEC, among other things. His top three trends are shorter booking windows, less short-term availability due to greater hotel and venue demand, and a greater focus on venue technology capabilities.

What Has Changed?

Marcial is in a unique position to evaluate how educating planners about site selection has evolved in recent years. "I would say the fundamentals of site selection have not changed. The primary focus always has to start with understanding the stakeholder objectives, because that will drive the overall success for an event and those objectives impact every aspect of the site-selection process," he says.

"What has changed in recent years are elements like supply-and-demand and other economic factors that have an impact on a planner's ability to negotiate the most favorable rates and concessions. There has been a greater focus on some of the big-picture trends, including economic influences, that impact the site-selection process versus the more tactical and logistical elements you'd see on a planner's site checklist."

While he says the topic of site selection is less in demand by more senior planners, he notes that, "Across the board we have seen greater interest in hearing about the industry trends that can play a substantial role behind the scenes in the site-selection process."

On the client side, Peters notes that as the makeup of audiences has changed, so too, have selection criteria. "For more senior executives, where time is money, the quickest journey with the least potential for travel interruption is king right now," she says. "Finding markets that are affordable and don't require a transfer in an airport is crucial. A flawless hotel experience with impeccable service is a must, and flexibility onsite, with meeting space that can be adjusted with air walls based on last-minute content drivers, is key."

But, she continues, site requirements are different for corporate groups of mixed audiences and those with emerging talent, particularly millenni-

als. "These clients want the new hidden gem. They know that millennials, who have been backpacking and transferring and traipsing through airports their whole lives, are not afraid to switch planes. Planners are leveraging that and are no longer afraid of booking destinations that require a transfer. These clients want markets that haven't been explored, with unique experiences that can be captured on social media. They want to make sure that the event is full



Alisa Peters, CMP, CMM
Sr. Global Account Manager
Experient
Cary, IL

"(Millennials) want markets that haven't been explored, with unique experiences that can be captured on social media."

of moments that allow for true relationship building and connection."

Heather Connelly, CMP, incentive travel manager with Gordon Food Service in British Columbia, says one trend she's seeing that's different than past years is that hotels today may be going a bit overboard in trying to attract planners.

"I feel that some hotels are trying to make the visit more of a wow to really

get your attention and stand out," she says, "with things such as special welcomes, personalized room gifts and hotel services offered to the planner. Some hotels are listening more and also asking the right questions, not just the standard, 'What do I have to do to get your business?' Selecting a hotel is not just about the room rate. There are many factors to look at, and smart hotels know how to show off their property. It is nice to be pampered a bit during the site visit. However, sometimes I feel I'm getting a better experience than what our guests would have when they're in the hotel."

Maddock says one change she has seen is increased attendance. "Participation seems to be up as I regularly encounter rooms blocks being filled and requests for addendums to increase room block or find overflow hotels."

Additionally, Maddock says corporations today want "unique team activities that provide an authentic sense of place," which influences where the meeting will be set.

In terms of how things may continue to evolve and change, Maddock sees her clients as willing to try more value brands to save money, such as hotels that offer a free breakfast or reception.

For his part, Marcial says, "As the overall landscape for group business becomes more competitive, I believe we'll be seeing venues up their game in terms of upgraded accommodations, technology capabilities and overall flexibility in working with groups."

Incentives and Site Selection

"Business is booming, and with it, incentive events," says Peters. "But at the same time, the world is growing ever smaller due to dramatic weather events, Zika and changes in the political climate. Finding a home for incentives that will truly incentivize attendees has become more of a challenge if you have a reasonable budget."

She believes planners no longer can rely on the destination alone to be the incentive, and may have to be flexible in terms of seasons. "Compression on 'safe' markets, those free of weather con-

cerns, has increased, driving up rates in peak incentive months at the traditional beach-and-sand destinations," she says. "This has created a climate of creativity, where planners are having to think about how they can 'wow' attendees and get them excited about urban destinations, or how they can sell their internal stakeholders on holding events during a different time of year.

"Incentive planners have become creative marketers. They must think about the entire journey, end-to-end, to make it something special, to make it marketable enough to make qualifiers walk the extra mile, make the extra call and put in the extra hours to win it. If attendees aren't posting to Instagram and Facebook during the journey and the minute they arrive," she adds, "you have failed a bit."

Security and Site Selection

Today, security impacts site selection in ways it never did previously.



Matthew Marcial, CAE, CMP
V.P. Education & Events
MPI
Dallas, TX

"Today planners are...looking for greater insight into venues' specific security plans."

"Now, it's a topic I always try to discuss with hotels during a site visit so I can understand what their procedures are when a situation arises. In the past, it was a question I didn't ask until the pre-con meeting," Connelly says.

Given recent mass shootings and bombings here and abroad, Peters says security is more important than ever and has broad impact on meetings. "Political climates are ever-changing in our current environment. Keeping current on changing visa requirements, unrest and potential developments is a must now, and it's a daily workload. That work doesn't end when the contract is signed. Our company is constantly monitoring the globe for all force majeure events including earthquakes, weather-related ground stoppages or delays, fires, floods, hurricanes and any other crazy Mother Nature events. We're also on the lookout for political unrest or security concerns so we can alert our clients the minute we know that we/they may need to 'get out in front of something' that hasn't even hit the news yet."

She says planners are now asking for emergency plans from hotels and convention centers, "and we're building in the ability to access those into agreements. That's something that we weren't always doing 10 years ago."

There are changes in terms of cyber security, too. "An attendee's personal information, and how it's managed by a hotel (and marketed to) is now a part of many of the contracts that I do," Peters says. "European hotels were the first to address this in contracts, largely due to European Union laws, rules and regulations. But as U.S.-based hotels have had personal and credit-card information compromised, many corporations are outlining specific measures they want taken to ensure that hotels are handling attendees' personal details with the utmost care, confidentiality and consideration."

Moreover, Peters adds, "The term 'security' transcends what you would traditionally think of when you hear that word. Attendees need to feel secure knowing that regardless of their skin color, religion or sexual preference, they're going to feel welcome in a destination and are

not going to be subject to harassment or to overt or latent discrimination. And clients," she adds, "are caring very much about making sure that 100 percent of their attendees are comfortable going to a destination. They want to make sure that all attendees feel included, at home and safe when they arrive."

Marcial also believes planners must consider security in ways they didn't previously. "Today planners are more conscious than ever about security concerns as they relate to their events, and they're looking for greater insight into venues' specific security plans," he says. "Depending on the type of event being planned, organizers should look to their partners for security guidelines that can be communicated with their staff and attendees, if appropriate and in the event of an emergency."

Maddock, however, says, "I don't encounter security questions with my clientele aside from them avoiding certain destinations."

No One Size Fits All

Marcial notes that planners should always keep their group and stakeholder objectives at the core of the site-selection process. However, stakeholders don't all want the same thing. When asked what corporate clients these days insist on or won't compromise on related to sites and venues, the answers cover a range of elements.

"No. 1: Location is still most important. No. 2: Clients hate resort fees and feeling nickel-and-dimed. No. 3: Clients want free Wi-Fi."

Maria Maddock
Manager, Global Accounts
HelmsBriscoe
Scottsdale, AZ

Some are very specific: "Meeting room Wi-Fi charges seems to set off my clients," Maddock says.

Connelly says flexibility with F&B is something her company requires and that impacts decisions on which hotels they will use. "Our guests work in food service so they're passionate about food and know exactly which cut of protein is being served and what brand plate it is being served on. We have to work with hotels that are willing to do something different on the menu to satisfy them."

For Peters' clients, budget is key. "Now, more than ever, planners are measured either on attendance or on how they complied with their given budgets, and both hinge on the numbers. A meeting has to make financial sense and come in on budget. If it doesn't, planners are risking their jobs in this current environment," she says.

In addition to being a big-picture item, budget is also about the details, and Peters says her clients are noticing. "They're sick of paying \$8 for a soft drink and \$150 for a gallon of coffee and aren't buying into it. They want concession flexibility and creativity that helps them manage around some of the new and creative revenue sources hotels are using to increase their ADR."

Peters says that staying on top of budget means having all the information. "Planners want to know every single potential impact to their budget, from the cost of a gallon of coffee to the hidden unexpected creative fees that hotels may come up with down the road to squeak out that extra bit of profit. Strategic sourcing truly is like firefighting now," she adds. "Clients want to know that they have any and all costs factored into their budget and that they aren't going to get hit out of left field with items that they (or we) never imagined. Half of my day is spent sourcing and contracting meetings, the other is pushing back on or trying to prevent attempts to impose unexpected fees in contracts before they get signed."

What Planners Wish Clients/Companies Better Understood About Site Selection

"It is not just about price, there are

many factors to look at such as room amenities, hotel location, spa/pool onsite, number of restaurants, the ambience/vibe of the hotel, what is within walking distance," Connelly points out. "These all impact the selection. I have been to many hotels that on paper seemed to be the right fit but when I got to the hotel and walked around or talked with the hotel salespeople I could tell it was just not right for our group."



Heather Connelly, CMP
Incentive Travel Manager
Gordon Food Service
Delta, BC

"Selecting a hotel is not just about the room rate. There are many factors to look at, and smart hotels know how to show off their property."

For Maddock, it's about a better understanding of third-party planners. "Using a third party is a complimentary service that will save clients time and money. It's also in their best interest to use a third party who can advocate for them when they run into problems with the hotel. Our top priority is to set the client up for success."

Peters' take is looking at site selection as a two-way street. "The hotel or destination isn't just selling to you. You must sell your meeting to the destinations you want because multiple groups may be vying for the same dates," she says — and you must be accurate.

"You wouldn't market your five-bedroom house as a two-bedroom house and expect to get the right price for your home. That's essentially what you're doing if you undersell your meeting by not disclosing your full F&B budget or don't contract the proper amount of room nights or guarantee your shoulders accurately. It's dangerous to under-guarantee your minimums and peak room nights as you'll quickly find your attendees angry when you run out of the group-rated rooms, or your budget impacted when you have to pay more for the rooms you add in an addendum. You cannot be angry at a hotel for selling rooms or space you haven't contracted as it is their job to fill their hotel and that's how they're measured and rewarded. You need to contract the rooms and space you know you will or may need, and protect yourself in the contract terms and/or with insurance in the event you don't perform."

Beyond that, she says, planning far out is more imperative than ever before if you want first choice of hotel and dates. "If you are looking for September or October, contract even further out or consider rethinking meeting dates. Holiday compression and weather-related issues in coastal areas have made these two months absolute insanity to attempt to contract. The larger your block, the further out you need to book."

While the basics of site selection and evaluation do not change, planners must remain on top of trends and the specific but changing requirements their groups have based on the makeup of the group and the industry it's in. Add to that volatile economic and security factors and site selection is anything but "same old." It's an element of planning that requires intelligence, vigilance, flexibility and creativity. **C&IT**

Destination



Credit: Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau

Southwest

HOT SPOTS

Desert Vistas, Mountain Ranges and Spectacular National Parks Make for Perfect Meetings Destinations

By Sophia Bennett

Meetings and incentive trips in the Southwest provide attendees with stunning scenery, great hospitality and outdoor adventure. Each state in the region has different characteristics and benefits. Arizona is an excellent destination for people seeking warm weather and great entertainment. New Mexico provides rich cultural experiences unlike any other place in the U.S. Oklahoma is a centrally located destination that provides plenty of amenities at an affordable price. Here's our guide to what you need to know about some of the hottest spots in the Southwestern U.S.

Arizona

Phoenix

"Greater Phoenix is home to dozens of world-class resorts that offer golf, spa, tennis, horseback riding, motorcycle tours and just about anything you can imagine," says Ronnie Collins, director of sales for Visit Phoenix. "For the groups looking for engaging activities, rappelling, off-road Segway tours, Tomcar desert tours, skeet shooting, glass-blowing classes and white-water excursions are just some of the few that Phoenix offers."

Phoenix is a hub for both Southwest and American Airlines with flights from more than 80 domestic cities. The airport is only 10 minutes from downtown. The light-rail system can deliver visitors to the city center for a \$3 fare.

Once visitors arrive, they'll find the area easy to navigate and full of entertainment options. The downtown is highly walkable. Pedicabs and Grid Bikes, in addition to the light rail, serve people who need transportation between destinations. The University of Arizona and Arizona State University both have a presence downtown. There are dozens of good places to eat, of which 95 percent are family-owned and operated. Planners looking for offsite venues can choose from multiple theaters, museums, science centers and sports facilities (Chase Field, home of the Diamondbacks, has a reception hall that can hold 600 people).

The Phoenix Convention Center has a 312,500-sf exhibit hall and reception capacity of 12,000. The Hyatt Regency Phoenix is adjacent to the convention center and has 693 guest rooms. The nearby Sheraton Grand Phoenix, Westin Phoenix Downtown, Palomar Phoenix Cityscape, Renaissance Phoenix Downtown and other downtown hotels offer more than 2,000 additional sleeping rooms. A new Hampton Inn & Suites will open in downtown in May.

Scottsdale

Sunny Scottsdale is located a stone's throw from Phoenix and boasts many of the same amenities: warm weather, beautiful scenery and plentiful opportunities for recreation. It's a great place for people interested in all kinds of outdoor adventures. There are 200 golf courses within driving distance. "Attendees seeking a little bit of adventure can explore the wonders of the Sonoran Desert with a sunrise balloon flight, a night-vision Hummer tour or even a self-driven (literally) adventure in a Tomcar," says Kelli Blubaum, CMP, vice president of sales and services at Experience Scottsdale.

Accommodations in Scottsdale are plentiful, and range from luxurious spas to state-of-the-art hotels. Hotel Adeline, a new property with nearly 10,000 sf of event space and 213 guest rooms, opened last fall. The JW Marriott Camelback Inn is constructing its own state-of-the-art conference center that will bring the resort's meeting facilities to 95,000 sf. Royal Palms Resort and Spa is upgrading all 119 guest rooms as well as its event and outdoor spaces. The Phoenician is currently building an athletic club that will include tennis

and basketball courts, a fitness center, activity center, and dining and shopping options.

Last year Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain Resort and Spa finished a \$2 million renovation of its casitas (apartments) and suites. The rooms were updated with modern and luxurious furnishings and decorations. The resort has also added the Spa House, a 3,500-sf home designed to pamper groups of up to 16. These guest rooms provide luxurious accommodations for groups who visit the resort for meetings. The resort has a 3,200-sf ballroom that can host up to 250 people



At Riversport Rapids "You can bring any size group you want and spend an afternoon on the white water."

**Dennis Johnston, CDME, VP of Sales
Oklahoma City CVB, Oklahoma City, OK**

with theater seating or for a stand-up reception (or can be broken down into five smaller spaces). There are also two small boardrooms. To make the most of Arizona's beautiful weather, groups can plan outdoor events on one of several patios, lawns or other outdoor spaces.

Maribeth Nash, trade show and event planning associate with Origami Risk, a risk management software company headquartered in Chicago, chose the Omni Scottsdale Resort & Spa at Montelucia for her company's annual colleague conference, bringing 115 of the company's onsite and remote workers together for a three-day planning and relationship-building event.

"We do the event in the first quarter, so we're looking for somewhere warm," says Nash. Once she'd narrowed her choice of cities to Scottsdale, she picked the Omni at Montelucia for its quality, amenities and price. "The Montelucia has that destination feel. You felt like you were at a resort somewhere exotic. My goal is always to make our colleagues feel like they're on a rewarding trip."

The event began with a welcome reception on a terrace overlooking Camelback Mountain. Monday and Tuesday morning were dedicated to meetings. On Tuesday afternoon attendees were treated to a half-day rafting trip organized by Camelback Adventures. Buses drove guests to the Salt River, where they piled into rafts and floated over rocks and gentle rapids. Afterward they had dinner under the desert sky while a band played. The gathering concluded with a half-day of meetings on Wednesday.

Nash was pregnant and unable to fly to last year's colleague conference. Because of that, "I had to really make sure the staff...was going to be amazing because I wasn't going to be there. I needed to trust them, and I needed them to be proactive. If something was wrong, I needed them to not wait for someone to tell them but work to fix it. My executive



Panoramic view of Sanctuary Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa (above) and intimate meeting space in the Jade Bar (right).



Credits: Sanctuary Camelback Mountain

managers came to me after the event and said, ‘They could not have done a better job. They were on top of everything.’”

Flagstaff

In some ways, the northern Arizona city of Flagstaff feels worlds away from Phoenix and Scottsdale. The small community sits along Highway 40 surrounded by the pines of the Coconino National Forest. It’s close to Humphreys Peak, Arizona’s highest point, making it a destination for ski and snowboarding enthusiasts.

All of this showcases an exciting and different side of Ari-

“Albuquerque is a bucket-list destination, where the experiences are truly unique and hard to replicate anywhere else.”

Kristin McGrath, V.P. Convention Sales Services and Sports, Visit Albuquerque, NM



zona than people are used to seeing. Flagstaff has more of an Old West feel than many other Arizona cities, which means there are interesting historical sites to check out, such as: touring Navajo National Monument (nine miles away), the cliff dwellings of Walnut Canyon National Monument (10 miles), Petrified Forest National Park (25 miles) or the Grand Canyon (80 miles).

“With spacious rooms and attentive service, Flagstaff offers accommodations to suit various needs and preferences,” says Meg Roederer, communications specialist for the Flagstaff Convention and Visitors Bureau. Top meeting destinations include the High Country Conference Center, Little America Hotel and Doubletree by Hilton. There’s also a new Fairfield Inn and Suites. The Hampton Inn and Residence Inn Marriott were recently renovated.

Sedona

The small, artsy community of Sedona is located about an hour south of Flagstaff and two hours north of Phoenix. It’s known for its stunning red rock formations, abundance of artists, and pampering resorts and spas. These qualities

make it ideal for incentive trips and meetings where you need a quiet getaway.

“Sedona is host to hundreds of meetings and tours annually with more than 3,300 rooms, flexible meeting space up to 33,500 sf and over 50 restaurants,” says Leslie Brearley, sales manager for the Sedona Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau. “The brand new Posse Grounds Pavilion offers participants a venue that’s off the beaten path. It’s surrounded by numerous trail systems, a sports complex and nearby community pool. Offering spacious festival-style seating for up to 300, the Posse Grounds Pavilion will wow participants with views of the famous Sedona Red Rocks.”

Now is a good time to visit Sedona because there are multiple new and renovated hotels. The new Courtyard by Marriott Sedona has 115 rooms. L’Auberge de Sedona, Enchantment Resort, Hilton Sedona Resort and Arabella Hotel Sedona are among the properties that have gone through renovations to guest room and/or grounds in recent years.

Guests will have to rely on the Phoenix or Flagstaff airports for air transportation, but once they arrive in Sedona, almost everything is within walking distance.

Sedona has a number of great restaurants and more than 80 art galleries and shops. If ground transportation is needed, groups can charter a trolley or bus.

New Mexico

Albuquerque

“Albuquerque is a bucket-list destination, where the experiences are truly unique and hard to replicate anywhere else,” says Kristin McGrath, vice president of convention sales, services and sports for Visit Albuquerque. “The opportunity to attend a meeting in an authentic destination that provides immersive, interactive experiences and a world-renowned culinary scene provides truly memorable events for attendees. With more than \$300 million in hospitality investments reshaping the city’s skyline — including a renovated convention center, new downtown entertainment district and increased air service at the International Sunport — there’s never been a better time to connect with Albuquerque.”

Planners will find a lot of impressive venues in New Mexico’s largest city. The convention center has 167,000 sf of meet-

ing space along with a 2,300-seat auditorium. The DoubleTree Hilton Albuquerque just wrapped up a \$7 million renovation to its guest rooms, fitness center, public areas and grounds. The Hyatt Regency Albuquerque and Albuquerque Marriott Pyramid North have been updated in the past few years.

Planners seeking a more intimate space can check out the newly renovated Los Poblanos Historic Inn and Organic Farm or Nativo Lodge, which showcase interesting aspects of local culture. The Albuquerque Museum, Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum, Indian Pueblo Cultural Center and National Hispanic Cultural Center are among the interesting venues available for off-site gatherings.

The Albuquerque airport is less than a 10-minute drive, and the city just opened a rapid transit system with the nation’s first fleet of electric buses. It will make 19 stops along a nine-mile corridor within the city. People staying downtown will find it highly walkable. Remind meeting-goers that they can get their kicks along Route 66, which runs through a portion of the city.

Isleta Resort and Casino on the outskirts of Albuquerque has provided a warm and welcoming place for several shows sponsored by Ben E. Keith Co., a food and alcohol beverage distribution company. “I’d done convention centers and exhibit halls, and the issue with them is they’re pretty cold — both in temperature and feeling — because you’re dealing with a giant warehouse space,” says Kim Snitker, the company’s marketing and design manager. “We decided to go with Isleta because it’s a much warmer atmosphere.”

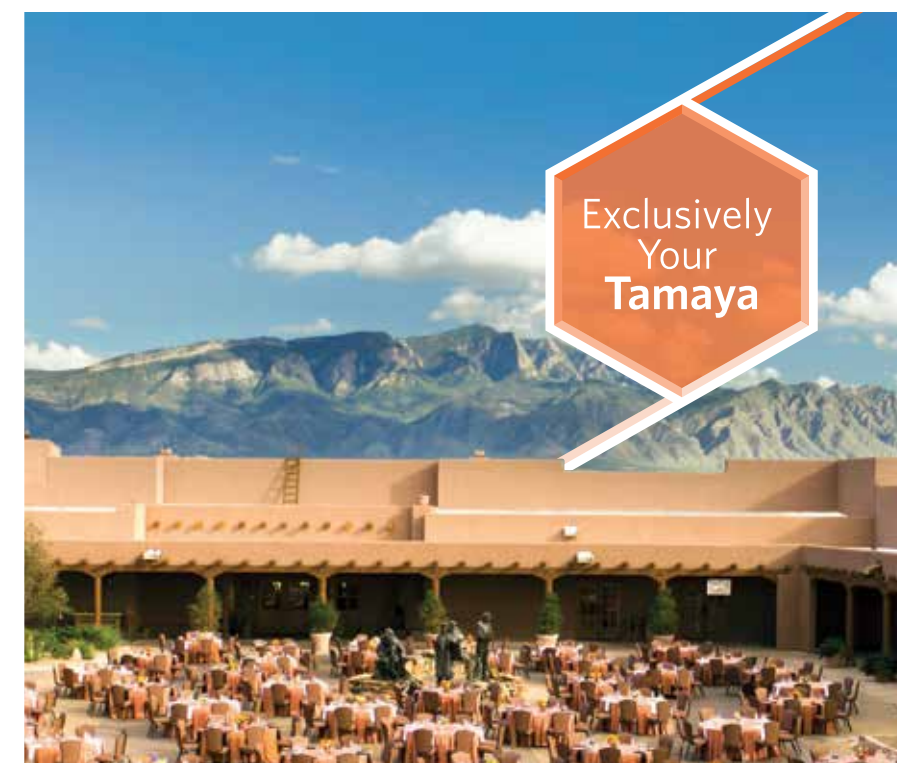
Ben E. Keith’s main food show kicks off each March with a party for vendors and customers. “We showcase products that will be at the food show but in a more casual atmosphere with music and dancing,” Snitker says. For the next two days, attendees can check out booths with food vendors, equipment, and paper and cleaning products. The event draws about 120 vendors and 400 customers.

“The location is perfect because it’s close to the airport and has great views,” Snitker says. “A lot of the appeal to coming to New Mexico is our vistas. You can see the mountains and the volcanoes. They have the ballroom situated so it’s perfect for sunsets, which can be pretty

spectacular. It’s near the highway but set back far enough that you don’t feel like you’re right on the highway.”

One of the things that’s kept Snitker coming back to Isleta is that they showcase local products. “Since it’s part of the Isleta Pueblo, they featured all Isleta artists,” she says. “Everything has a story behind it and is connected to the space. They’re also really good about featuring local beers and food, like green chile and fry bread and things people can’t get even if they’re coming from southern Colorado.”

Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa, a luxury resort located on the Santa Ana Pueblo, recently completed a multi-



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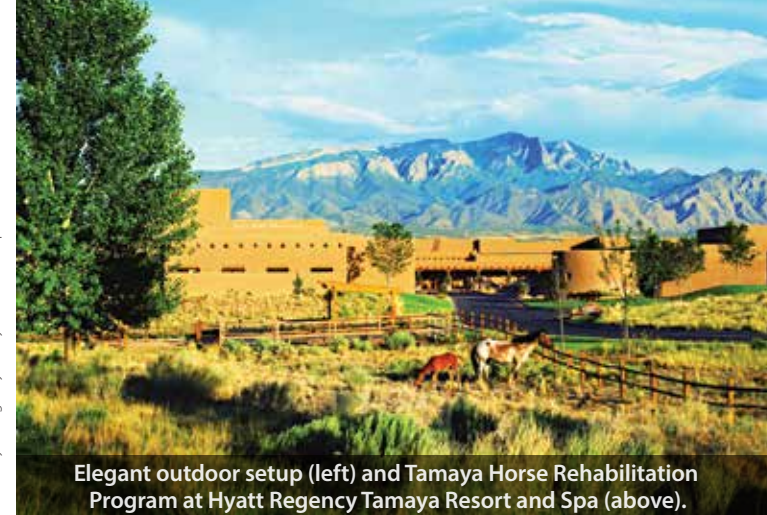
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Credits: Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa



Elegant outdoor setup (left) and Tamaya Horse Rehabilitation Program at Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa (above).

million-dollar guest room renovation providing meeting and group guests with updated and modern accommodations that encompass the serene and authentic feel of the Native American Pueblo-based property.

“What makes this area really special is we have this incredible mix of cultures here,” says Jolene Mauer, marketing and public relations manager for the Hyatt Regency Tamaya. “There’s the native culture from the pueblo people who were here first, but we have such an amazing Hispanic culture. Later the Anglos came from the east. That wonderful combination of the native, Spanish and Anglo coming together is the biggest draw for this part of New Mexico. Whether that’s the art or the food or the architecture, it makes for a completely unique experience.”

Hyatt Regency Tamaya is designed to provide an inspiring group experience with state-of-the-art meeting facilities and one-of-a-kind activities for guests. The property features 29,000 sf of indoor and 25,000 sf of outdoor meeting space including the Tamaya Ballroom, a 12,000-sf space that can be partitioned into eight separate rooms, and the Wolf and Puma rooms, offering floor-to-ceiling windows that open directly to a patio with panoramic views of the Sandia Mountains and cottonwood forest.

Located on more than 550 acres, the resort is home to several unique and exciting activities for groups including its Tamaya Horse Rehabilitation Program non-profit organization. The program provides shelter, care and rehabilitation to neglected and abandoned horses in New Mexico. Groups can arrange for interactive experiences with the horses, take part in teambuilding and volunteer activities, or sponsor a horse on behalf of their company.

Additionally, the property features culturally inspired group experiences through its Srai Wi program including art and activity classes led by members of the Santa Ana Pueblo, horseback rides that traverse the Southwestern terrain and explore the banks of the Rio Grande, world-class golf at the Twin Warriors Golf Club and restorative treatments at the award-winning Tamaya Mist Spa. Hyatt Regency Tamaya also offers excursions including hot-air balloon rides which take off from the resort’s onsite launch pad, hiking and biking trails, rafting and jeep excursions, fine dining at the Corn Maiden restaurant and much more.

Santa Fe

Culture, history, art and cuisine combine to make Santa Fe a destination unlike any other. That authenticity is just part of the appeal of meeting in the state capital. “Santa Fe is a very affordable city,” says David Carr, director of sales for Tourism Santa Fe. There are more than 2,000 hotel rooms within walking distance of the convention center, and most are reasonably priced. The city has its own airport and the Albuquerque airport is only an hour away. The downtown is small enough that it’s walkable, and planners can contract transportation for any out-of-the-way events.

The city’s high elevation means it’s more temperate than other places in the region. “A lot of people, when they think Southwest, they think Arizona, but we are not Phoenix,” says Mauer. “We do not get to 100 degrees. It gets really cool at night when the sun goes down.” Summertime temperatures average in the mid-80s with no humidity. Snow is possible in the winter.

In addition to the convention center, downtown Santa Fe has over a dozen hotels with meeting space. The Eldorado Hotel and Spa, which can accommodate groups of up to 700, and La Fonda on the Plaza, which can hold up to 600 people, are among the largest.

When it comes to offsite events, there are numerous good options. The four museums on Museum Hill can host large groups inside and out. The Santa Fe School of Cooking can teach participants to make mole, green chile sauce, tortillas and other Southwestern foods. “For people who are more adventurous, there’s Bandelier and Puye Cliffs, where you can hike through ruins,” Carr says.

Oklahoma

Oklahoma City

There are plenty of reasons to say “OK” to Oklahoma City as you consider future meeting or incentive trip destinations. The community is an affordable destination and has lots to offer in terms of meeting space, transportation, food and entertainment.

Oklahoma City is in the process of building a brand new convention center. The facility will have 200,000-sf of exhibit space and 125,000 sf of additional meeting space, all built

to LEED standards. The space is expected to open in 2020. A 600-room Omni hotel will be attached. Across the street will be a 70-acre park that connects the convention center to the Oklahoma River.

Oklahoma City is divided into districts. Bricktown is the entertainment district and is home to a number of the city’s great restaurants. The Asian District is home to one of the country’s largest populations of Vietnamese immigrants and is also a hot foodie destination.

Within the Boathouse neighborhood is Riversport Rapids, one of only six indoor white-water facilities in the country. “You can bring any size group you want and spend an afternoon on the white water,” says Dennis Johnston, CDME, vice president of sales for the Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau. “In addition, you can do paddle sports like canoeing, kayaking or racing in dragon boats.”

Current meeting spaces include the Cox Convention Center and adjoining Renaissance Oklahoma City Convention Center Hotel, Embassy Suites by Hilton and 396-room Sheraton Downtown Oklahoma City. New as of last year were an AC Hotel, Hyatt Place and Hilton Garden Inn Edmond/Oklahoma City North.

Jasco Products Company, which designs and develops home and mobility products, is based in Oklahoma City and regularly hosts meetings, receptions and dinners at the 21c Museum Hotel. The boutique property is housed in a former

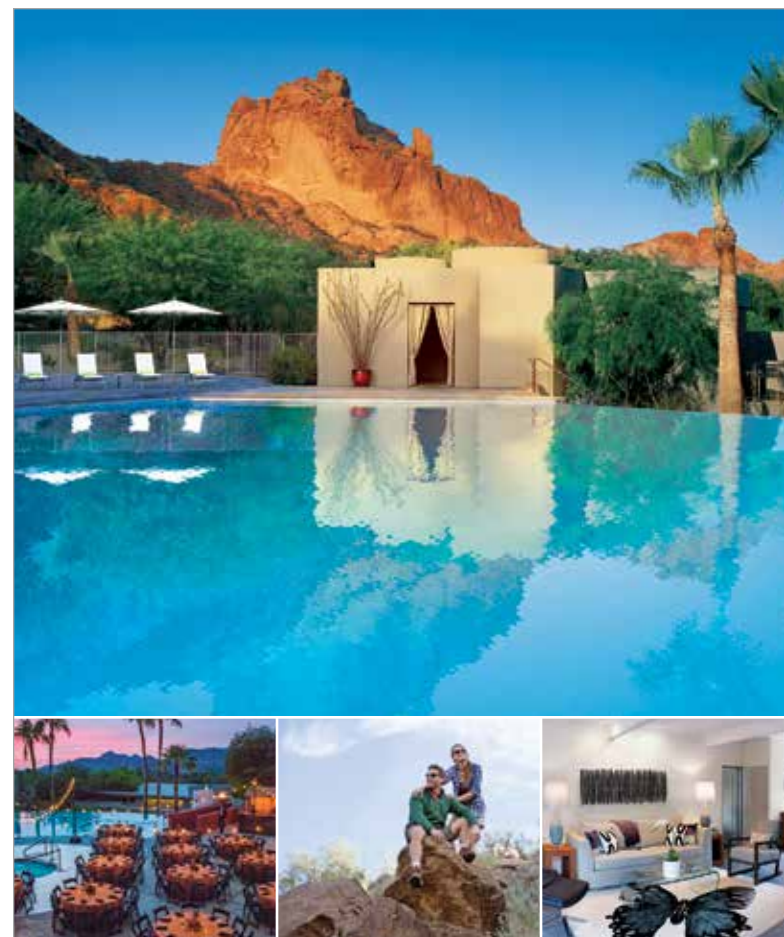
Ford Motor Company manufacturing plant, which gives it some real character.

Marketing coordinator Kearsten Howland has high praise for the hotel. “It’s always been the best place for having a great atmosphere and accommodations right in the heart of Oklahoma City,” she says. “There’s so much new happening downtown, and the 21c is really close to everything. That location also has really competitive pricing and a great staff to work with.”

The event and sales folks always offer feedback and suggestions designed to make Jasco’s events even more successful. They’re extremely accommodating and work hard to make sure guests have everything they need. “There was a time we were hosting an event on the rooftop, and we were worried about the cold front coming in that evening because our event was supposed to be outdoors,” Howland says. “When this was discussed with the staff, they orchestrated the purchase of some heaters and installed them, so that really saved the day.”

At a different event an executive mentioned that he was missing a game with his favorite sports team. “The staff brought a television up to the rooftop and connected it and rearranged the room so the group could watch that game while dinner was being served,” Howland says.

Arizona and the Southwest offers something for every planner: desert vistas, luxury accommodations, mountain ranges, rich culture and spectacular national parks. **C&IT**



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Bahamas & Caribbean Comeback

Make No Mistake, Most Island Destinations Are Going Strong and Ready to Welcome Groups

By Christine Loomis

Irma and Maria tore across the Caribbean in September and October of 2017. The damage to some islands was catastrophic, with full recovery still many months away. Other islands were completely untouched by the hurricanes. For them, bright sun and tranquil blue seas bring business as usual. And for a few islands, it's a mix.

What stands out most in the aftermath of Irma and Maria is the resilience and heart of the people of the Caribbean. The stories told over and over about the hurricanes are of hotel workers staying in the hotels without water, power and little food to help the guests stranded there — even while their own homes were destroyed. The stories emerging now about the rebuilding of resorts, hotels, airports, cruise ports and other venues are how the people of these islands manage to see this as a gift, a chance to upgrade and improve, in order to better serve the visitors to come.

Tourism, including groups and conferences, is the lifeblood of this region and the truth is there is no reason to cancel many of the 2018 programs already booked. Much of the region is up and running. Even Puerto Rico, which suffered unimaginable devastation from Maria, has already welcomed its first conference of 2018.

True, not every hotel has reopened. But they will. The Caribbean is ready to welcome planners, to show them how things have already improved and how things will be even better in the months to come. Here are a few islands to consider.

Aruba

Well below the region's traditional hurricane belt, Aruba had no physical impact from Maria or Irma. Planners



Credit: Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino

All is well on Aruba, where the Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino boasts beautiful island event setups on the expansive beach.

can expect their 2018 experience to be very much what it has always been.

Kimberly Findlay, senior account manager with SDI Meetings & Incentives, brought a group of 110 from the Northeast United States to Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino in April 2017 for a premium incentive program. She mentions

Aruba “is friendly, Dutch, and has great food and drinking water. There are big, beautiful beaches and the palapas are a big hit.”



Kimberly Findlay, Senior Account Manager
SDI Meetings & Incentives, Chicago, IL

the quality airlift, nightlife, beaches and food as top reasons for choosing Aruba.

“The island is friendly, Dutch, and has great food and drinking water,” she says. “There are big, beautiful beaches and the palapas (thatched-roof tiki huts) are a big hit.”

In addition to functions at the hotel, the group also experienced dine-arounds and traveled on the island’s amusingly distinctive Kukoo Kunuku buses. She calls it all “exceptional.”

The resort gets excellent marks from Findlay for both price and location, but she also notes that it offers an abundance of ocean-view rooms, ideal for incentive participants. She really liked the “complimentary white-washed, family-style tables” they used and adds that, “The sushi bar and Starbucks were both big hits.”

Findlay says there were no real challenges in planning and executing a meeting on Aruba or at the Marriott. In terms of personnel, she says Jessika Panneflek, event manager on property, stands out. To other planners considering the Marriott she suggests, “Get some reserved palapas in your contract. Get as many oceanview rooms as possible in your contract. Don’t do all-inclusive as there are so many great restaurants on the beach and surrounding area that you should try while you’re there. Definitely,” she adds, “do the Kukoo Kunuku buses — they’re so fun for people. Also, do the tattoos and party hats, and try kite surfing.”

Barbados

Sandy Lane in Barbados falls into the legendary category and has long upheld its reputation for quality, exclusivity and service, making it an ideal destination for incentives. Gai A. Spann, founder and “travel artist” at SPANning the Globe Tours and a consultant for a meetings and incentive company, has high praise for the property and the island.

“For incentive groups, a unique, luxury destination is desirable. Barbados provides an upscale Caribbean experience and boutique luxury accommodations. The island has an ex-

cellent culinary reputation, amazing natural beauty and options for activities.”

She notes that the island and hotel lend themselves well to smaller groups. Recently she brought 30 incentive qualifiers from a U.S.-based pharmaceutical company to Sandy Lane. “You’re able to privatize experiences, meaning entire hotel buyouts, private restaurant dining and setting up beautiful tented events. All work well with a group not too large,” she says.

One off-property highlight is a function at a rum distillery on this island that claims itself as the birthplace of rum. “The facilities were gorgeous and unique as it’s set in what feels like a forest,” Spann says. “The staff, food and service were personalized and extraordinary.”

Sandy Lane’s attributes include, “the level of service, quality and location,” though Spann notes that planners should not be surprised that “everything is a la carte.”

She points out that most of the hotels on Barbados are small to medium size, so there’s rarely an issue with distance from guest rooms to meeting space. Shipping, however, can be an issue and Spann encourages planners to “make sure you send items ahead of time with enough time to clear customs.”

She has two other recommendations. “For catering, it’s good to include local cuisine in the offerings,” she says. “And definitely use a local DMC and start early in your planning cy-

“Barbados provides an upscale Caribbean experience and boutique luxury accommodations. The island has an excellent culinary reputation, amazing natural beauty and options for activities.”

Gai A. Spann, Founder & Travel Artist
SPANning the Globe Tours, Atlanta, GA

cle. Our DMC, Nicholas Alleyne from Blu Isles, made planning much easier. As a local business, I was able to have him on island to confirm certain requests. His knowledge of the island and relationships with key players made our experience VIP.”

Beyond that, Spann adds, it’s a good idea to visit Barbados early on to find out if offsite locations will work for your group or not.

Alleyne wants meeting planners and their groups to know that Barbados has even more to offer. “Barbados represents the best in authentic Caribbean charm, expertly blended with state-of-the-art conference facilities and an ever intriguing repertoire of attractions and events. This unique combination of a timeless je ne sais quoi, the warmth of its people, advanced development, high amenity value and the island’s security make Barbados a leading choice for the North American market,” he says.

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San Juan National Historic Site Castillo San Cristóbal and the Condado Beach area.

He points out that Barbados is well connected in terms of airlift with direct flights from across the United States and Canada. "Once you get here, the quality mix of leading global brands and local hoteliers provide a range of options from the luxurious to the more traditional. The island," he adds, "expertly blends modern amenities with an authentic Bajan experience."

Just as important, Alleyne says the government is very supportive to the meetings industry. "There are duty waiver programs for incentives as well as other concessions."

"Puerto Rico literally has something for everyone — sun, fun, adventure, culture, history, amazing gastronomical experiences."

Christopher de Medeiros, Account Manager
Destination Puerto Rico, San Juan, PR

Blu Isles curates a range of diverse, culturally rich and fun experiences for groups, from culinary excursions to breakfasts with George Washington (sort of) who once visited Barbados to extravaganzas in the island's evocative caves and more.

"We know the state-of-the-art facilities, the legal and economic concessionary infrastructure, financial planning, and the range of support services needed to flawlessly execute your conference. Details matter," Alleyne says. "Leave them to us."

Puerto Rico

Images of Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Maria were heartbreaking, and the road back has been challenging. But it has not broken the spirit of the island, and it's important to note that parts of Puerto Rico are already welcoming visitors.

"Puerto Rico is open for business and ready to receive groups and conventions," says Alma Pedrosa, CDME, acting president and CEO of Meet Puerto Rico. "Most of our hotels and tourist attractions are available to welcome group delegates, as our international airport and port, as well as other attractions, have been operating normally for a few months."

Pedrosa notes that some hotels are still undergoing renovation, and will eventually open with something new to offer visitors, but emphasizes that major conventions are already returning. The first of 2018 was the Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association Marketplace at the end of January. "In March, we will welcome the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN); and, we are proud to report that many of our clients have rebooked their business for 2018 and beyond," she says.

"We feel proud of our people, our offerings and our determination. Puerto Rico

continues to position itself as an ideal destination for meetings and conventions, offering the Caribbean's largest and most technologically advanced convention center, a wide variety of hotels for all types of budgets and groups, together with a sophisticated business meeting destination.

"Puerto Rico has always been one of the most desirable meetings and conventions destinations," she says, "and we look forward to the future with enthusiasm. We are moving into a new phase with astounding opportunities for our clients and we are thrilled to have them come and rediscover Puerto Rico!"

Christopher de Medeiros, account manager with San Juan-based Destination Puerto Rico, a DMC Network Company, points out that easy airlift is one of the island's assets for North American groups. He worked with a group of 50 last March, based at the San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino.

"San Juan PR was the perfect destination for this group. It offered easy airlift for the participants that flew in mostly from the Northeast. It was a warm break in their winter to enjoy culture, adventure, history and great gastronomical experiences. The San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino was the perfect property for this young group with plenty of restaurants, shopping and nightlife right outside their front door, and an amazing beach behind the property. The resort also has great meeting and function space with an amazing F&B department."

One off-property function was a dine-around in Old San



It's all about the view at the San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino, where the beach beckons meeting-goers.

Juan, where participants branched off to the restaurant of their choice in small groups. "We tied the evening together ending with a party in one of the plazas in Old San Juan where they met for their return transfer to the Marriott," de Medeiros says.

"Puerto Rico literally has something for everyone — sun, fun, adventure, culture, history, amazing gastronomical experiences — all amid the true gem of the island, its happy and hospitable people. We are a territory of the U.S., use U.S. currency and no passport is required."

Among the properties to announce opening dates is the Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Puerto Rico Golf & Beach Resort. In January, the hotel announced that it would reopen on March 1, 2018 following a multimillion-dollar renovation and refresh. Best of all, one dollar of every room night booked by all guests in March and April will be donated to the El Yunque Rainforest Restoration Fund.

The El San Juan Hotel is now scheduled to reopen on October 1, after a renovation of guest rooms, villas, pools, public spaces and landscaping. Since the hurricanes, the property has been hosting first responders and aid workers.

U.S. Virgin Islands

The USVI were among the hardest hit, and many of the larger group-friendly hotels will not open until late this year or even next year.

In September, Marriott International established a resource line for those looking for information about impacted hotels. Among the USVI properties closed are The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas, with an expected reopen date of January 2019; Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort, which hopes to reopen December 2018; and The Westin St. John Resort Villas, closed at least through January 2019. Call 866-211-4610 for more information.

The Renaissance St. Croix Carambola Beach Resort & Spa on St. Croix is still closed, but as of October, reservations were cancelled only through May 2018. That could be revised as work continues.

Caneel Bay on St. John will be closed for the entire 2017/2018 season and there's no current reopen date.

On the good news front, The Buccaneer on St. Croix welcomed guests back November 1, and Emerald Beach Resort on St. Thomas reopened in November as well.

The Cayman Islands

The three islands in this group were among those that saw no impact from the 2017 hurricanes. Conferences and incentive programs booked here will have no issues.

Looking forward, Hyatt announced in February that it will soon be returning to Grand Cayman. The 352-room Grand Hyatt Cayman Hotel & Residences, set on the island's famous Seven Mile Beach, is slated to open in 2020.

St. Lucia

Like many islands in the Southern Caribbean, St. Lucia was not at all impacted by the two hurricanes. "Our hotels and

businesses are all open and ready to welcome visitors," says Prime Minister Allen Chastanet.

JetBlue currently has nonstop flights to the island from New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, and a handful of other carriers offer connections through Miami.

St. Kitts

In November, Hyatt announced the opening of the first Park Hyatt hotel in the Caribbean. Park Hyatt St. Kitts Christophe Harbour debuts with 78 rooms, 48 suites, three restaurants, a Miraval Life in Balance Spa and indoor and outdoor private event spaces ideal for incentive groups. The resort has a deep focus on wellness and a commitment to local experiences.

St. Maarten/St. Martin

The dual Dutch/French island suffered significant damage but recovery is well underway. As of October 10, 2017, the Princess Juliana International Airport has reopened. Although



The River Course at Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Puerto Rico Golf & Beach Resort — the resort reopened March after an extensive renovation.

the main terminal is not scheduled to open until some time in 2018, American Airlines and other carriers have already resumed flights to the island. The Dr. A.C. Wathey cruise terminal is also now reopened and the first cruise ships began to arrive in December.

Unfortunately, The Westin Dawn Beach Resort & Spa, St. Maarten, is still closed and has no current opening date. Riu Palace St. Martin, formerly the Radisson Blu, may reopen as early as April 2018.

Trinidad & Tobago

The tourism authorities for Trinidad and Tobago want meeting planners and others to know that these two islands sit below the hurricane belt and are fully able to welcome groups.

But there has been a change in how the islands will be marketed in the future. In January, the islands' minister of tourism, Shamfa Cudjoe, announced the launch of a new newsletter,



Credit: Grand Hyatt Baha Mar

last spring with the opening of the Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, The Baha Mar Convention, Art and Entertainment Center and The Royal Blue Golf Club, featuring the only Jack Nicklaus-designed course in The Bahamas. The SLS Baha Mar opened last November and Rosewood Baha Mar is slated to open this summer.

Grand Hyatt Baha Mar's two towers house 1,800 guest rooms and 230 suites featuring views of the beach, golf course, resort pools and fountain shows. Grand Hyatt Baha Mar manages The Baha Mar Convention, Art and Entertainment Center, the destination's 200,000-sf indoor and outdoor convention facility, and connects directly to Baha Mar Casino, the largest casino in the Caribbean. Twenty various bars and restaurants will open in the Grand Hyatt under the leadership of executive chef Brent Martin.

On Paradise Island, Atlantis continues to evolve, refresh and reinvent itself. The resort suffered no significant damage during the 2017 hurricane season. The Coral, one of the resort's five distinct properties, was reopened in 2017 after a \$20 million transformation. Resort-wide, Atlantis has put a renewed focus on programs that connect guests to Bahamian culture — such as the weekly Junkanoo Bahamian Fest & Feast and Art Walk in the new Marina Village that showcases the work of local artists and designers. Atlantis also announced the opening of five new outposts of popular Bahamian restaurants featuring fresh ingredients from local farmers and fishermen. The resort offers more than 500,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting and event space including the Atlantis Conference Center, with two ballrooms at 50,000 sf and 25,000 sf.

In December, Atlantis announced a new program that elevates the already ultra-luxury offered at The Cove, another of the Atlantis properties. It includes guests' arrival via luxury, private wheeled or seaplane flights from Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach and the Miami Seaplane Base. No traipsing through crowded airports. This service includes private departure lounges and private SUV pickup in the Bahamas, followed by VIP check-in service at The Cove, all perfect for incentive programs.

Finally, the resort has a menu of new experiences at Dolphin Cay, including paddleboarding, kayaking, and snorkeling — often in the company of the resort's resident bottlenose dolphins. More programs are in the works, some appropriate for small groups.

The Caribbean and Bahamas remain a viable and important destination for North American groups, even as recovery moves forward. Planners have every reason to look toward these hospitable islands for 2018 bookings and beyond. **C&IT**

The Baha Mar Convention, Art and Entertainment Center is managed by the Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, which opened last spring.

Things Tourism, to serve as the new source of news related to tourism and development on Trinidad and Tobago. The former Tourism Development Company Limited has also been split into two new entities to market and promote the islands: Tobago Tourism Agency and Tourism Trinidad Limited, both new resources for planners and their groups.

Among the properties to consider: The 423-room Hyatt Regency Trinidad. In November, the property completed an extensive upgrade that included guest rooms, lobby, the spa, dining venues and its 43,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space. Guest rooms feature useful workspace and multifunction areas. The overall design enhances the hotel's connection to Trinidad and the local community of artists.

The Bahamas

Paradise Island and New Providence Island escaped damage from 2017's hurricanes. The good news is that there are still deals to be had in part because of the perception that the entire region was affected, and in part because Baha Mar resort is new, having finally opened with two of its three hotels after long construction and legal delays.

The expansive Baha Mar resort's first phase debuted



Credit: Atlantis Paradise Island

Atlantis Paradise Island, which escaped damage from hurricanes Maria and Irma, offers a variety of cultural experiences for groups.

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Destination



Credit: Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club

The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club has undergone more than \$50 million in enhancements over the last few years including renovation of the championship golf course.

Need a Little Slice of Paradise?

Florida Meetings Never Fail to Deliver

By Derek Reveron

Florida is in a class by itself for several reasons, not the least of which is its unique geographical configuration: As a peninsula, it is the only mainland state with eastern, western and southern coastlines. It boasts the world's most famous collection of theme parks and distinctive city, coastal and resort properties that continually upgrade and improve to remain attractive in one of the country's most highly competitive tourism markets. Ahh, and then there's the weather...

No wonder so many groups return to Florida year after year, some planning several different types and sizes of meetings in the state in a single year.

The Emerald Coast

The Panhandle's Emerald Coast — Destin, Fort Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island — is distinguished by its beachy ambience with sugar-white sand beaches and the stunning, emerald-green Gulf.

Planners and attendees love the world-class golf resorts, too, including the 602-room Hilton Sandestin Beach, the largest full-service beachfront property on North-west Florida's Gulf Coast. The property offers 40,000 sf of meeting space and six restaurants, including the Emerald Coast's only AAA Four Diamond steakhouse. And at Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort in Miramar Beach, the 15,000-sf Linkside Conference Center is undergoing a multimillion-dollar renovation.

The Emerald Coast Convention Center (ECCC) in Fort Walton Beach, which boasts 35,000 sf of multiuse space, attracts its share of repeat groups. Andromedia Systems Inc.,

a Virginia Beach-based provider of technology services and solutions, planned its fourth meeting at the ECCC for March 2018, booking rooms at the Holiday Inn Resort and three other hotels.

Value was a prime reason for choosing the ECCC. "We held meetings in the ECCC's main ballroom and in several breakout rooms," says Sarah Rollins, Andromedia's business development and proposal planner, and meeting planner.

"The ECCC is very reasonable compared to hotel and resort meeting spaces. I researched them all and this was the best price for our group. They have reasonable catering costs."

The ECCC also was convenient for other several reasons. "They have first-class facilities and up-to-date AV," says Rollins. "They are located in close

proximity to several nice hotels. This location has a convenient airport, with flights from DC, Charlotte and Atlanta. And the ECCC is well managed and meets all of our needs. I suspect the visit in March won't be our last."

The Fort Worth, Texas-based Acme Brick Co. chose Destin over other destinations for its annual sales meeting in February of 83 employees, executives and their guests. "We have

The Henderson has "an amazing rooftop deck where we can hold the cocktail reception during sunset. ...We anticipate lots of wonderful selfies will be taken by our guests."

Barbara Lewis, Executive Assistant, Sales
Acme Brick Co., Fort Worth, TX

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The infinity pool at The Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood. The iconic resort recently completed a \$100 million transformation that encompassed guest rooms, and indoor and outdoor public spaces.

offices in three cities in our Southeast division, so we looked at those places,” says Barbara Lewis, executive assistant-sales and meeting planner. “Two of those other cities have great activities and ambience, but were very expensive compared to Northwest Florida, with higher hotel and airfare rates.”

So Lewis considered Destin. “Someone in the office suggested Destin as an alternative,” says Lewis. “The person had attended a convention in Destin the previous year and had really enjoyed it. Destin has great beaches and resorts, and a large variety of activities for our attendees to enjoy.”

Following a site visit, Lewis selected the new Henderson, a Salamander Beach & Spa Resort, which opened in 2016. “The resort hosted the Acme Brick vice president and me, and was very attentive,” says Lewis. “They made sure that we were able to not only experience the rooms at the hotel, but also the food, the onsite spa and the private beach during our stay.”

It will be the first time that Acme has held its annual sales meeting in Destin, and the Henderson’s value played a key role in the decision. “The hotel was very flexible working with us to meet our budget on hotel and food costs,” says Lewis. The property has the quality of food that our group expects. Also, the resort provides concierge car service for its guests so we were able to save on the cost of rental cars, taxis and Uber for our group.”

Lewis was impressed with the Henderson’s meeting space. “The ballroom has the perfect ambience for our awards banquet, elegant, but not too formal,” says Lewis. “They have an amazing rooftop deck where we can hold the cocktail reception during sunset. We are excited to have access to such great views during this reception and anticipate lots of wonderful selfies will be taken by our guests.”

The Henderson, adjacent to a coastal nature preserve, features a dedicated meeting wing with 30,000 sf of indoor/

outdoor meeting and event space, a nature-inspired spa and Gulf-to-table cuisine.

Northeast Coast

Jacksonville isn’t — but should be — among the first destinations corporate planners consider in Florida.

One reason: Travel guidebook publisher Lonely Planet ranked Jacksonville No. 9 in its Best in Travel 2018 list as one of the world’s Top 10 Best Value Destinations. Jacksonville was the only American city on the list. The guidebook cited Jacksonville’s beaches, park system, family-friendly food scene and affordable hotel rates.

More hotel space is coming: Hyatt Place Jacksonville is under construction and is scheduled to

open late this year at The Strand at St. Johns Town Center, a new 45-acre development with retail outlets, restaurants and apartment homes. The five-story property will include 160 guest rooms and 3,000 sf of flexible meeting space.

South of Jacksonville, the 200-room Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach is slated to open in early 2018 with 20,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, including some with views of the Atlantic Ocean. The property is Daytona Beach’s newest beachfront hotel and the fourth Hard Rock Hotel in Florida.

The Gold Coast

Miami

Planners find that Miami offers everything needed for memorable meetings, including event-friendly hotels such as the Hilton Miami Downtown, which has completed a property-wide, \$35 million renovation. Located downtown near the Wynwood Arts District and Design District, the 527-room property offers more than 45,000 sf of meeting space including a 17,000-sf ballroom and 19 meeting rooms.

The Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC) is undergoing a multimillion-dollar, state-of-the art renovation with sustainability in mind — the MBCC is on track to receive LEED Silver certification when it debuts in September. The project includes exterior fin-shaped structures lining the building’s sides and entrance that provide shade to reduce energy use by 20 percent when combined with natural sunlight. Other energy-saving efforts include LED bulbs, solar panels above the parking areas and electric-car charging stations. The new MBCC will offer more than 500,000 sf of exhibit space, 180,000 sf of meeting space, a new 60,000-sf ballroom and 20,000-sf junior ballroom.

The Marriott Marquis Miami Worldcenter Hotel & Expo Cen-



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ter, developed by MDM Group, is scheduled to break ground in the third quarter of 2018 with an estimated completion in the first half of 2022. It will feature approximately 1,700 hotel rooms and 500,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space. Amenities will include an expansive pool deck with views of Biscayne Bay, the American Airlines Arena and the downtown Miami skyline, as well as an 80,000-sf outdoor event deck.

Hollywood

Just north of Miami is the city of Hollywood, home to Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, which is undergoing a \$1.5 billion expansion that includes construction of a guitar-shaped hotel tower. The project encompasses an additional 806 guest rooms and suites, including 638 in the guitar hotel tower as well as 168 new rooms and suites in the seven-story Pool Tower. The Seminole Hard Rock's expansion will add 60,000 sf of new retail and restaurant space, and provide a new \$100 million redesigned and rebuilt Hard Rock Live arena that will replace the 5,500-seat venue with a state-of-the-art facility that seats 7,000 theater-style. The expansion will premiere in mid-2019.

Another iconic Hollywood property, The Diplomat Beach Resort, is emerging from a \$100 million transformation that includes 1,000 reimagined guest rooms and suites, and indoor and outdoor public spaces.

The Diplomat's repeat customers include a customer service company that held a meeting for 1,400 employees, managers and executives last year. "This was the fourth large program the company operated at the hotel," says Jill Bartholomay,

may, lead buyer, event purchasing and industry relations, ITA Group. "We continue to return because the destination is promotable to our employees and because of the hotel's flexibility and great operational history."

Bartholomay cites several reasons, including location, as to why the Diplomat is so popular with the group's attendees. "There is great airlift with the flexibility to use both Fort Lauderdale and Miami airports," says Bartholomay. "The hotel offers a beachfront location, extensive meeting space and experienced staff that understand the needs of corporate groups. The renovations look great."

The Diplomat's 209,000 sf of function space — the 50,000-sf Great Hall, four ballrooms and the 20,000-sf Grand Ballroom — fit the group perfectly.

"The Diplomat is an ideal property for large meetings and incentive programs based on the flexibility of the space," says Bartholomay. "With multiple ballrooms, our evening events can flow between rooms, allowing for multiple themes and food and beverage options. During the day, there is the flexibility to hold meals outside for large groups, with indoor backup."

The group also enjoyed meals at The Diplomat Landing, a restaurant venue across the street from the Diplomat accessible via pedestrian bridge. Attendees enjoyed The Landing's restaurants and large outdoor patio with views of the Intracoastal Waterway.

Bartholomay says meetings at the Diplomat are always a hit. "A survey of attendees was conducted following last year's," she says. "The hotel scored a 93 percent overall satisfaction and the overall program received a 98 percent overall score, a great success."

Palm Beach

Some might be surprised at the variety in Palm Beach County, which includes 39 cities and towns as well as 15 tourism districts in 2,200 square miles. The area features chic shopping, fine dining, 160 golf courses and opulent resorts.

Seven resorts and two hotels were named among the "Top Resorts in Florida" by the *Condé Nast Traveler* 30th annual Readers' Choice Awards. The two hotels were the Chesterfield Palm Beach (No. 3) and the Brazilian Court (No.5). In the resorts cat-

"The Diplomat is an ideal property for large meetings and incentive programs based on the flexibility of the space."

Jill Bartholomay, Lead Buyer
Event Purchasing and Industry Relations
ITA Group, West Des Moines, IA



An inviting lawn event setup at the Forbes Five Star Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa.

Credit: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

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egory, the Palm Beach Marriott Singer Island Beach Resort & Spa was ranked No. 4.

And two Palm Beach County resorts — Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa and Four Seasons Resort Palm Beach — earned five-star ratings in the Forbes Travel Guide 2018 Star Award Winners.

Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa, formerly The Ritz-Carlton, Palm Beach, is set on seven oceanfront acres on tony Palm Beach island. The hotel features 309 guest rooms and suites in three towers, the 42,000-sf Forbes Five Star Eau Spa and more than 30,000 sf of meeting and event space. Unique spaces include Stir terrace, which faces the Atlantic Ocean and features a firepit with seating nearby; Breeze Ocean Kitchen, an oceanfront restaurant that also can be used for private receptions and dinners; and the Self-Centered Garden at Eau Spa, a lovely outdoor space ideal for receptions.

In January, the Boca Raton Resort and Club hosted a meeting for 100 executives and customers of Georgia Pacific. It was the group's fifth meeting at the resort.

The Boca Raton Resort's value is a top reason why Georgia Pacific returns to the property, even when rates may not be the lowest. "Granted it was peak season in the area, and rates were higher than what's seen during other times of the year, but we forecast for that and for a luxury property, and prices were comparable to other resorts," says Wil Bates, CMP, manager, GP Events.

Flexibility is also a factor. "During the sales and contracting phase, the hotel is always willing to be flexible with us and



Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate underwent a \$40 million expansion that added pool deck space, a new villa building, 100,000 sf of new space at the Osceola Conference Center, and more.

do what they can to help us achieve the goals and objectives of the events we hold there," says Bates. "The meeting space was fantastic."

Attendee feedback is always good. "We received feedback from event stakeholders and attendees that the event was very well executed," says Bates. "We have contracts signed for two other events at the Boca Resort over the next two years."

Corporate meeting attendees are among the growing number of visitors to Palm Beach County. According to data research company STR, between January and October 2017, room nights sold grew by 4.2 percent and average daily rate (ADR) grew one percent. RevPAR grew 3.3 percent.

Room inventory will increase if a new hotel and convention center are built on Florida Atlantic University's campus in Boca Raton. According to reports in the *Palm Beach Post*, FAU is considering partnering with a private developer to build the complex, which could include a 30,000-sf convention center, apartments, stores and restaurants.

Central Florida

Florida's crown jewel destination is known for its vast array of more than 450 properties, including the Margaritaville Resort Orlando, scheduled to open by the end of this year. The highly anticipated \$750 million resort is inspired by the lyrics and lifestyle of singer Jimmy Buffett. The 187-room Margaritaville Resort will feature 30,000 sf of function

space, 200,000 sf of retail space and a dining and entertainment district. The project also will include 1,000 Margaritaville-themed resort vacation homes, cottages, villas and timeshare units.

The venerable convention property Rosen Centre Hotel has renovated all of its 1,024 guest rooms. Upgrades include new furnishings, new teal color scheme and technology upgrades aimed at business travelers and families. Rosen Centre guests can charge all of their devices simultaneously on a new multi-outlet connectivity bar containing one ethernet and two USB ports. Additional outlets and USB ports are on the desk lamps, nightstand lamps and headboard panels.

Boca Raton Resort "is always willing to be flexible with us and do what they can to help us achieve the goals and objectives of the events we hold there. The meeting space was fantastic."

Wil Bates, CMP, Manager
Georgia Pacific Events, Atlanta, GA

In addition to the technology upgrades, Rosen Centre offers 150,000 sf of meeting and event space that includes a 35,000-sf Grand Ballroom, 18,000-sf Executive Ballrooms, 14,375-sf Junior Ballroom and 35 breakout rooms.

In 2017, Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate underwent a \$40 million expansion project that added 23,000 sf of additional pool deck and recreational space, installation of Kissimmee's only resort wave pool and a new 93-room

property villa building. The resort's Trevi's Restaurant was redesigned to include an outdoor garden terrace and bar. The expansion also added 100,000 sf of expanded event lawn and conference center space at the Osceola Conference Center. The 862-room resort offers a total of more than 248,000 sf of meeting space, 36 holes of championship golf, the David Leadbetter Golf Academy, the Mokara Spa, multiple dining options and more.

Disney is adding 500 rooms to its Coronado Springs property by the end of 2020. The Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort has renovated all of its 2,267 guest rooms and 329,000 sf of meeting space at both properties.

Universal Orlando's five on-site hotels — Loews Portofino Bay Hotel, the Hard Rock Hotel, Loews Royal Pacific Resort, Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort and Loews Sapphire Falls Resort — offer a total of 5,600 rooms. The number will rise to 6,200 rooms when Universal's 600-room Aventura Hotel, scheduled to open in August 2018, is combined with the 400-room ongoing expansion of the Cabana Bay Beach Resort. The Loews Meeting Complex — comprised of Loews Sapphire Falls Re-



The Loews Meeting Complex at Universal Orlando capitalizes on Florida's exceptional weather with 97,000 sf of outdoor space, including this open-air event pavilion at Loews Royal Pacific Resort.

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The expansion at Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate features new indoor and outdoor meeting and event space, studio suites, a market-style restaurant and expanded pool areas—including Orlando's only resort wave pool.

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Gulf-front event space at Sundial Beach Resort and Spa on laidback Sanibel Island.

sort and Loews Royal Pacific Resort, which are connected by bridge — offers groups and planners 295,000 sf of indoor meeting space and 97,000 sf of outdoor space.

DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel at SeaWorld recently added 20,000 sf of ballroom space and 20,000 sf of outdoor courtyard space, bringing total indoor/outdoor event space to 100,000 sf.

Southwest Coast

This area's beachside properties, activities and restaurants are drawing more visitors than ever. During the 2017 fiscal year, which ended September 30, Tampa Bay's hotel revenue increased 5 percent to \$670 million over 2016, according to Visit Tampa Bay. Average daily rate (ADR) increased 4.2 percent while RevPAR rose 3.1 percent.

According to Santiago Corrada, president and CEO of Visit Tampa Bay, "As we wait for new hotel inventory and anticipated developments to come online over the next few years, we are working hard to make the most of the availability we have for both leisure travelers and convention groups."

Tampa-area beach meeting properties include the 343-room Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach, which opened last year with 22,000 sf of meeting space. Nearby, The Hilton Clearwater Beach completed a \$20 million renovation that includes transformation of its 35,000 sf of meeting space, a new restaurant and new spa.

Inland from Tampa Bay, sits Streamsong Resort, one of Florida's top group golf destinations. Streamsong opened its third golf course, Streamsong Black, last year along with a new clubhouse and restaurant. The course was named the Best New Course of 2017 by *Golf Magazine* — the latest of several honors that Streamsong's golf courses have received since the property opened about five years ago.

South of Tampa and just across the causeway from Fort Myers, Sanibel Island's Sundial Beach Resort and Spa is perfect for planners and meeting-goers looking for a laidback,

beachfront site for their 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's Sanibel Island capable of accommodating up to 300 guests. Dining options include a daily breakfast buffet and a new restaurant, Shima Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar, that can be used for private group events.

Farther south on the Gulf side is Paradise Coast — Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades — offering 30 miles of beaches,

trendy stores, outdoor adventures and some of Florida's top resorts including the AAA Four Diamond Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club, which offers 83,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting and event space. Events in the oceanfront venues or on the beach are accentuated by the spectacular Gulf Coast sunsets.

The 319-room resort has undergone more than \$50 million in enhancements over the last few years including renovation of the championship golf course, the only on-property golf course at a beachfront resort in Southwest Florida.

In addition, Naples Beach Hotel's "Welcome to Paradise" promotion offers perks for groups that book new meetings from April 15, 2018 to October 31, 2018. Bookings must include a minimum of two peak nights Sunday–Thursday and a signed contract by September 30, 2018.

Paradise Coast properties have bounced back from hurricane Irma with renovations and improvements.

LaPlaya Beach & Golf Resort in Naples reopened in November following an \$8 million renovation and a two-month closure due to Hurricane Irma. Upgrades include transformed guest rooms in the Gulf Tower, a refreshed lobby and a new look for Baleen, the property's signature restaurant.

Naples Grande Beach Resort reopened in December after closing for more than three months due to Hurricane Irma. Upgraded areas include meeting space, notably the Vista Ballroom, as well as 474 newly refreshed guest rooms, public spaces and pools.

The JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort will complete \$320 million in improvements this year that encompass 716 renovated guest rooms, new dining options, a reimagined lobby and the new adults-only Lanai Tower with 94 guest rooms and new meeting space.

Whether returning to a tried-and-true resort or trying someplace new, meetings in Florida can be depended upon to deliver a little slice of paradise for all who attend. **C&IT**



Tracy T

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Destination

For their meetings on Capitol Hill, Solum Consulting attendees overnight in Alexandria, where hotels offer convenience and value.



Credit: Jill Wheeler, Syngenta Corp.

The Power Corridor

Washington Reigns, but Virginia and Maryland Offer Access at a Discount

By John Buchanan

No other meeting location in the U.S. can match the singular allure of Washington, DC. It is the world's premier "power" destination. Although the nation's capital does attract corporate meetings, it is much more frequently utilized for government and association meetings, as well as events and conferences staged by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and foreign governments and organizations.

That means that corporate planners looking for rates, dates and space on a typical budget often have to look outside the city's limits to find accommodations. Fortunately, northern Virginia and southern Maryland fill that need very well.

The Magic of Alexandria

Located just across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, Alexandria, Virginia combines a unique history that dates back to before the American Revolution with modern flourishes that have made it a stylish and sophisticated destination.

Steve Powell, president of Greensboro, North Carolina-based Solum Consulting, which plans educational and leadership conferences in the agricultural industry, has been using Alexandria for one or two meetings a year for the last decade.

"There are two key reasons why we are so loyal to Alexandria," Powell says. "The first is its proximity to Washington, DC. As part of our meeting agendas, we often go into the city for meetings on Capitol Hill with members of Congress or with



"Comparing Alexandria to Washington...for a meeting we hosted last November, we saved 20 percent on room rates."

Steve Powell, President
Solum Consulting, Greensboro, NC

For rather obvious reasons, the nation's capital is one of the most unique and fascinating destinations in the world. And its perpetual appeal to tourists from around the globe extends to meeting attendees.

Its vast hotel inventory, which represents virtually every brand in existence, is highlighted by a number of properties that symbolize the power and influence of the city. Among them are the historic Willard InterContinental Washington, located across Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House; and the new Trump International Hotel Washington, DC, located on Pennsylvania Avenue near the White House, which is a historic former post office building. In October, The Watergate Hotel, scene of the notorious break-in, announced a new signature guest room to capture the infamy and intrigue of one of the most famous guest rooms in the world: The Watergate Scandal Room 214, where on June 17, 1972, E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy, who helmed The Watergate break-in team, stationed themselves while the burglary at the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate Complex, adjacent to the hotel, was underway.

Among the city's newest hotels is the 278-room, LEED Silver-certified InterContinental Washington, DC, The Wharf, which opened last October. The hotel, which features 17,000 sf of meeting space, is among the anchors of the new and fashionable mile-long

waterfront neighborhood along the Potomac River known as The Wharf. The hotel's eclectic flagship restaur-

Washington, DC

ant is the Afro-Caribbean eatery Kith and Kin from Top Chef fan favorite Kwame Onwuachi, who serves as executive chef.

Among Washington's top attractions — aside from obvious draws such as the U.S. Capitol, Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial and Washington Monument — are the National World War II Museum, the Smithsonian Institution on the National Mall, the National Air & Space Museum and National Museum of Natural History. For art and performing arts-interested groups, the top draws are the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and National Gallery of Art. The Corcoran Gallery of Art, less well

known than the National Gallery, is also among the most spectacular art museums in the U.S.

Among the city's most famous old restaurants is the Old Ebbitt Grill, originally opened in 1856 and still serving fine American fare to politicians and dignitaries even though it has moved to a new location. Other time-tested eateries known for their famous and powerful clientele include Charlie Palmer Steak; Fiola, fabled for its Italian fare; The Source by Wolfgang Puck; and Bourbon Steak, located in the Four Seasons Hotel.

— JB



Credit: The Watergate Hotel



The Watergate Hotel recently debuted the new Scandal Room 214, detailed with artifacts and memorabilia from the infamous 1972 Watergate break-in.

staff at various federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Alexandria is very convenient. It's very easy to get from any hotel in Alexandria to any place you want to go in Washington in about 20 minutes."

The second factor that keeps bringing his events back to Alexandria is cost savings. "We also save money in Alexandria, which is a much more budget-friendly environment than Washington," Powell says. "We've done detailed cost research in comparing Alexandria to Washington, and for a meeting we hosted last November, we saved 20 percent on room rates. For food and beverage, we also saved 25 percent by staying in Alexandria. In addition, based on our F&B minimum, we got

our meeting space at no cost. No hotel in Washington would offer that. And that saved us even more money."

Such savings are particularly important to Powell because the budgets for his meetings are underwritten by Syngenta Corporation, a major crop science company that pays the cost of his events.

For last November's meeting, a four-day, three-night event for 22 agricultural industry executives, Powell chose the Kimp-ton Lorien Hotel & Spa in Old Town Alexandria as his hotel.

"We found the hotel thanks to the efforts of Visit Alexandria, the local CVB," he says. "I give all the credit to them. They made my job very easy. I contacted them very early on and told

The Hilton Baltimore “brought in local oystermen who harvest famous Chesapeake Bay oysters and we did a Maryland crab feast.”

Justin Haggart, Event Marketing Mgr.
Guest Supply, Somerset, NJ

them what we were doing and what we needed, and they did a fantastic job of helping us find the perfect hotel. They helped us put together our RFP and then they put it out to all of the hotels that they felt would meet our needs. Then we selected several finalists and finally narrowed it down to our choice of the Kimpton Lorient.”

Based on his experience and the feedback he got from attendees, Powell gives the Kimpton Lorient high marks. “The room product is excellent,” he says. “The bedding, the bathrooms and the lighting are all very good. The F&B is also excellent. The hotel also offers an intimate environment, which was perfect for such a small meeting. The staff was also excellent. They gave us tremendous and very personalized service. And that is very important to us, because in addition to wanting attendees to remember the content we present, we also want them to remember the experience they had. And the Kimpton Lorient and the other hotels we’ve used in the past in Old Town Alexandria have all delivered on that count.”

The Kimpton Lorient is currently completing a multimillion-dollar renovation.

Powell returned to Alexandria in February for a 35-attendee meeting at The Westin Alexandria, also located in Old Town. “I always use an Old Town hotel because the area has a great history, but also has a modern ‘cool factor,’” Powell says. “It’s a unique and sophisticated place. And there are nice dining options right down on the Potomac River, in historic old buildings that have been renovated. And places like that make the meeting memorable.”

Last May, Alexandria’s first waterfront hotel, the Hotel Indigo Old Town Alexandria, made its debut.

Given its singular history, Alexandria and its northern Vir-

ginia surroundings also offer a number of exceptional offsite venues. Among them are Gadsby’s Tavern Museum, where George Washington celebrated his birthday and Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and other famous early Americans dined and danced. George Washington’s Mount Vernon Estate is also available for corporate events. More modern popular venues include the Torpedo Factory Art Center, a former 1900s munitions factory that is now a working art studio for local artists, and Port City Brewery.

Yet another popular activity for groups is Potomac Riverboat Company aboard The Cherry Blossom or the Parisian-themed Nina’s Dandy.

Baltimore: Urbane Urban Appeal

Located an hour north of Washington, DC, Baltimore is another historic city that has undergone a modern transformation and gentrification that has turned it into a popular meeting destination.

Last August, Mark Fried, CEO and president of New York-based Vendome Group, a media company that produces major conferences, used Baltimore for a National Conference for Addiction Disorders, which drew 1,000 attendees from entities such as addiction treatment centers and drug testing companies.

Why Baltimore? “The evolution of Baltimore over the last few years, with things like the development of the Inner Harbor, and the gentrification of the destination in general, were major factors in our decision to go there,” Fried says. “And Baltimore today is also much more than just the Inner Harbor. There is a lot going on there. It’s just a destination that offers a lot of flexibility in terms of options, so it works very well for meetings in our markets. It’s a destination that has curb appeal for many of the markets we represent. The meeting infrastructure in Baltimore is also very good.”

Another factor in Baltimore’s favor was its airlift. “We had people that used all three of the area airports — Baltimore/Washington, Dulles and Washington National,” Fried says. “And multiple airport options meant both convenience and cost-effective fares from around the country.”

As his headquarters hotel, Fried chose the Baltimore Marriott Inner Harbor at Camden Yards. He used the same hotel,



Credits: Visit Baltimore

Signature local experiences in Baltimore include cracking your way through a Maryland crab feast and exploring the Inner Harbor.

located adjacent to the stadium where the Baltimore Orioles play at Camden Yards, several years ago when he hosted his first-ever conference in Baltimore.

“The quality and configuration of a hotel’s meeting space is always a major consideration for us in selecting a hotel,” Fried says. “We need a large ballroom for general sessions. We also

“Baltimore today is also much more than just the Inner Harbor. There is a lot going on there. It’s just a destination that offers a lot of flexibility...so it works very well for meetings in our markets.”

Mark Fried, CEO and President
Vendome Group, New York, NY

need a fairly large exhibit hall. And we do breakout sessions. And I happen to like ‘stacked’ space, so the Marriott Inner Harbor was a natural choice for us. And it’s an excellent property. Both the room product and the food and beverage were excellent. We were very pleased with the property.”

The local dining scene, especially in the Inner Harbor area, earned rave reviews from his attendees, Fried says. “There’s a wide range of dining options, including within easy walking distance of the Marriott hotel,” he says. One common denominator when it came to food: Maryland’s world-famous crabs. “Whenever you talk about Baltimore and food, you’re going to talk about crabs,” Fried says. “There are crab restaurants that range from casual to fine dining. Almost every single person I spoke to at the meeting was either going to have crabs at the hotel or was planning to go out for crabs somewhere well-known.”

The overall attractions of the Inner Harbor area also generated a lot of positive feedback from attendees, Fried says. “They really enjoyed the Inner Harbor scene, including the restaurants and entertainment



options. They also enjoyed the fact that there is the walkway around the harbor, which makes exploring easy and fun.”

Among the top attractions are the Maryland Science Center, which features an IMAX Theater; the National Aquarium; the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine; and the historic battleships now housed in the harbor, including the USS Constellation, USS Torsk and USCGC Taney.

For meeting planners considering Baltimore as a destination, Fried also highly recommends working with local CVB Visit Baltimore. “I rate them very highly,” he says. “Too often, we as meeting planners find that CVBs are either very passive or not reactive at all. And Visit Baltimore was great. They helped us with our collateral materials and other practical aspects of the meeting. It was a pleasure to work with them.”

Because of his success in Baltimore last year — the conference was the second most well-attended in Vendome’s history — Fried is going back next year. “Baltimore is just a destination that leads to a successful meeting,” he says.

Another meeting planner who has discovered the appeal of Baltimore is Justin Haggart, event marketing manager at Somerset, New Jersey-based Guest Supply, a Sysco company.

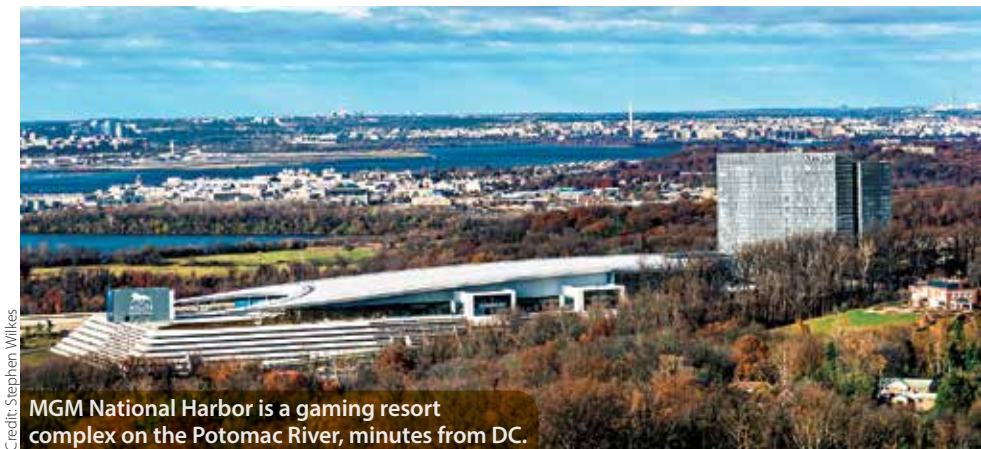
For the last two years, Haggart has used Baltimore as the destination for Guest Supply’s annual July five-day, four-night sales conference, which draws 500 attendees. The company will return this July for the third consecutive year.

“The reason we keep returning is simple,” Haggart says. “Bal-



(Above) King Street in Old Town Alexandria; (Left) Gadsby’s Tavern Museum, frequented by early American presidents.

Credits: K. Summerer for Visit Alexandria



MGM National Harbor is a gaming resort complex on the Potomac River, minutes from DC.

Credits: Stephen Wilkes



Rendering of the Presidential Suite at Maryland's Live! Casino Hotel.

timore is a very good meeting destination. There are a lot of things for attendees to do in their spare time."

Like Fried, Haggart and his attendees like the fact that Baltimore also offers three major airports as logistical options.

Guest Supply's hotel is the Hilton Baltimore, located in Inner Harbor, across the street from Camden Yards and connected to the Baltimore Convention Center. Why such loyalty to a single hotel?

"The ballroom space at the Hilton is a very good fit for us," Haggart says. "We take over the entire Key Ballroom, which is about 25,000 sf, and also the entire Holiday Ballroom, which is 15,000 sf. We use the Key Ballroom for exhibit space and the Holiday Ballroom for general sessions and dinners. We also use a lot of breakdown rooms. So the space at the Hilton is just perfectly suited to us. The F&B is also great. The team that we work with at the hotel is excellent. They have been wonderful partners. The hotel also has enough rooms so that as our meeting grows, they can still accommodate us. There are also lots of convenient opportunities outside the hotel, including offsite venues."

Haggart has especially appreciated the hotel's creative F&B options. "Two years ago, they brought in local oystermen who harvest famous Chesapeake Bay oysters and we did a Maryland crab feast," he says. "Last year, we did a barbecue outside that included burgers and sausages. They really work with us to change up the menus and do fun things."

Last year's meeting also featured a baseball game-style tailgate event. Afterward, the group went across the street and attended an Orioles game.

Haggart encourages meeting planners who have not experienced Baltimore to investigate it. "Baltimore is very convenient, especially in terms of its three airports, for people coming in from the East Coast," he says. "It also offers a lot of opportunities to get away from the hotel. For example, when I was there recently, I toured Sagamore Distillery as the possible venue for a dinner event this year. And new options like that mean you can keep going back to Baltimore, but also have enough options for

doing something different from last year so that you can keep your event fresh."

Two major meeting properties located in southern Maryland, just outside Washington, DC, are two of the country's most acclaimed meeting properties: the MGM National Harbor and Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center.

MGM National Harbor, located just minutes from the heart of Washington, DC, on the banks of the Potomac River is a sprawling gaming resort complex that includes a state-of-the-art theater that hosts big-name entertainers and is also a meeting and conference venue. Among its critically acclaimed restaurants are Fish by José Andrés, and Voltaggio Brothers Steak House.

Tap Sports Bar is also popular with groups. The resort's meeting facilities, which total 50,000 sf, include ballrooms, VIP suites and boardrooms, as well as the theater for general sessions.

Marriott's Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center, also located in National Harbor, Maryland, is just 10 miles from the U.S. Capitol. Noted for its dramatic 19-story atrium, the resort's flagship restaurant is the Old Hickory Steakhouse. The complex also offers a popular and casual sports bar. Gaylord National offers 546,000 sf of meeting and event space, including 89 meeting rooms and the 24,000-sf RiverView Ballroom. Amenities include an indoor pool, fitness center, spa and salon.



Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center's new 24,000-sf RiverView Ballroom overlooks the Potomac River and Capital Wheel.

Live! Casino Hotel Maryland, located in the Washington, DC, Baltimore corridor, boasts one of the country's largest casinos, as well as world-class dining and entertainment. Opening this spring is Live! Hotel, a 17-story tower adjacent to the casino with 310 guest rooms, including 52 suites. Live! Hotel will offer more than 20,000 sf of customizable event space, including a large ballroom with six breakout rooms, expansive prefunction space and an executive boardroom. Live! Hotel also will house a grand event center; 1,500-seat concert venue; built-in performance stage; and banquet seating for up to 800 people. **C&IT**

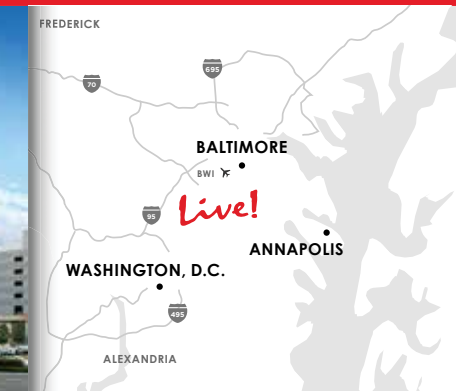
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Omni Louisville Hotel has named Eamon O'Brien as DOSM. He was DOSM for the Louisville Marriott Downtown.

Nicole Considine was named DOSM for Delta Hotels – Marriott Dallas Allen & Watters Creek Convention Center, opening in 2019 north of Dallas. She was DOSM for the W Dallas Viceroy Park.

Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson has appointed David Toler as DOSM.

He was DOSM at Westward Look Wyndham Grand Resort & Spa in Tucson.

The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, Miami has named Martin Jakubczak as director of sales. He was associate director of sales at The Westin Fort Lauderdale Beach.

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A nighttime photograph of a city street with tall buildings and palm trees. Long, horizontal light trails from cars create a sense of motion across the middle of the image. The lights are primarily yellow and orange, reflecting on the wet pavement.

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