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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

Out-of-the-Box Meeting Places

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TABLET VERSION**

Attendees explore the Sonoma Serengeti at
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Plaza of the Generations, Front Entrance.

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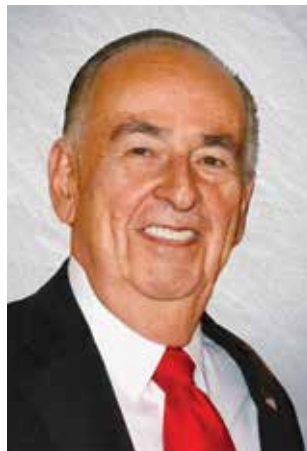


The Hôtel de Glace in Quebec City is entirely made of ice and snow — the perfect setting to have a unique winter event. **PAGE 40**

Publisher's Message

Reawaken the 'Wow'

Having just returned from MPI's World Education Congress (WEC18) in Indianapolis, I feel a renewed sense of appreciation for the power of the event experience to reawaken the "wow" in all of us. I was overcome by just how fabulous the places and people of Indy really are. The opening night celebration in White River State Park, America's only cultural urban state park, was an event for the senses, with music by the amazing a cappella group Straight No Chaser — originating from Indiana University — savory tastings from Indy's culinary hotspots, creative activation stations, and many happy sightings of industry friends and colleagues



against the beautiful backdrop of the Indianapolis skyline. I had lunch on the field at Lucas Oil Stadium and joined the block party at Monument Circle. Finally, how much more memorable can it get than a closing night celebration at the famed Indianapolis Motor Speedway, where you can take a lap around "the Greatest Race Course in the World" with a professional driver, "Kiss the Bricks" and stand on Victory Podium! Even education sessions were moved out of the classrooms and into experiential WEC Villages, which featured interactive environments to spark engagement and innovation. Turn to page 10 to see some WEC18 snapshots.

As all of this illustrates, meetings are critical vehicles for reigniting the passion and inspiration we need to do our best work day after day. And unique venues, like those in Indy and beyond, can be the catalyst. In "Inspiring Spaces" on page 28, we showcase a broad range of memorable off-site gems, starting with Safari West (pictured on our cover) in Northern California. Safari West was just the sort of out-of-the-box venue planner Brenda Alvarez was looking for to shake up her company's leadership and teambuilding meeting. "Being able to listen to wildlife in the evening is something you don't normally discuss as part of a 'leadership meeting' so that was definitely a unique perk for the team," Alvarez relates. Maria Geller, meeting and event manager at Special D Events, sums it up: "Events are all about the experience and are becoming more innovative each year, so shouldn't the spaces we hold them in reflect this change? Traditional venues are becoming stale and clients are searching for venues that allow for more creativity and provide attendees with an 'out-of-the-box' experience they aren't expecting."

This issue features many more ways to reawaken the wow, from international cultural immersion excursions on page 34 to the experiential destinations of Canada, page 40, Orlando, page 48 and the Pacific Northwest, page 56.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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Sea Island Launches New Classic-Yacht Experience



Sea Island Explorer features three decks of options for customized private events.

SEA ISLAND, GA — Sea Island, a Forbes Five Star resort on the coast of Georgia, recently welcomed Sea Island Explorer, a new 71-foot custom-built passenger yacht, reminiscent of classic yachts of the 1930s. The three-level vessel gives guests and club members the opportunity to explore the rivers and salt marshes that abound among Georgia's barrier islands. Accommodating up to 49 passengers, the yacht features a double living room on the main level, a covered top deck, a prep kitchen and additional event space on the bottom level, making it ideal for scenic nature tours, pre-dinner cocktail cruises, customized private events and more. Food and beverage can be customized for each occasion. Clay Fordham, a naturalist and Sea Island captain with more than 10 years of experience in local waters, will lead all operations aboard Sea Island Explorer. Sea Island is currently celebrating its 90th "Emerald" Anniversary. www.seaisland.com

Julie Calvert to Lead Cincinnati USA CVB

CINCINNATI, OH — The Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau has named Julie Calvert president and chief executive officer. Calvert is currently the founder and executive director of Source Cincinnati and returns to the CVB where she served as a senior executive from 2001–2016.

She succeeds former CEO Dan Lincoln who retired in December. As president and CEO of the CVB,



CALVERT

Calvert will seek to maximize the economic impact of the region's convention and meetings industry, leading an award-winning team to attract high-volume, high-impact groups to Cincinnati. Calvert will work closely with local civic, corporate and hospitality industry partners to further establish and promote Cincinnati as a world-class meetings and tourism destination. www.cincyusa.com

New Orleans CVB Rebrands as New Orleans & Company

NEW ORLEANS, LA — The New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau (NOCVB) has been rebranded and is now officially known as New Orleans & Company. The former CVB led the development of the city's multibillion-dollar convention and meetings business, grew the visitation of leisure visitors to unprecedented levels and played a key role in New Orleans' ascendance as the world's greatest sports championship destination. New Orleans & Company will focus in its new iteration not only on growing the cultural economy and hospitality enterprises, driving dynamic, sustainable business growth and career-oriented job creation, but also will focus on continuing its evolution as a thought leader, collaborative convener and partner to the workforce, local government and all citizens. www.neworleans.com

Omni Boston Seaport Hotel Breaks Ground

BOSTON, MA — Set to open in late 2020 at the corner of Summer and D Streets, the Omni Boston Seaport Hotel will be a catalyst to the development in the Seaport District. The hotel will feature 1,055 guest rooms inclusive of 52 suites that will top out at 21 floors. Culinary experiences will include an all-day restaurant and collaborative workspace, lobby lounge, entertainment lounge, French brasserie and boulangerie as well as an elevated pool bar and grill. The hotel will house approximately 100,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space that includes the largest hotel ballroom in Boston's Seaport District, along with breakout rooms, outdoor and prefunction spaces. Guests will have access to an urban rooftop pool deck located on the fourth floor. The pool deck will have an optional space which will allow guests to host year-round events featuring views of Boston's skyline. www.omnihotels.com

PCMA Names 2018 Global Meetings Executive of the Year

FRANKFURT, GERMANY — Ben Goedegebuure was named PCMA's 2018 Global Executive of the Year at



GOEDEGEBUURE

the IMEX Gala Dinner for his three decades of generosity and passion for the business events industry. Goedegebuure is global general manager — EMEA for Maritz Global Events. He was honored by Sherrif Karamat, president and CEO of PCMA (Professional Convention Management Association). "Ben Goedegebuure leads by example. Throughout his career Ben has worked across all business event disciplines, consistently chartering new trails and innovating how business is conducted," Karamat said.

Goedegebuure, has been a passionate industry leader for over 30 years and worked on all sides for the business events industry — from associations, to PCOs, venues and agencies. Throughout his career he has built a remarkable reputation and sphere of influence.

Industry colleagues know him as generous, always willing to share his knowledge, and as nurturing to those new or transitioning in the industry. He has shown a strong commitment to association service, now as an active member of the PCMA EMEA Advisory Board. Previously, he chaired PCMA's International Task Force, served on the PCMA Board of Directors (as the first non-U.S. board member) and chaired the PCMA Global Advisory Group.

Goedegebuure leads Maritz Global Events' global expansion in EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa). In this role he is a well-respected trailblazer, innovating how business events are conducted and how partnerships among companies, suppliers and vendors drive successful events globally. www.pcma.org

Tips & Trends

SITE Launches New Certification Program

By Pádraic Gilligan, Chief Marketing Officer, SITE

Way back in the 1980s, Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) created the Certified Incentive Travel Executive (CITE) designation as a means to recognize incentive travel professionals whose knowledge of the industry was uncommonly deep and wide, who had conducted personal research into niche aspects of the industry and who had C-suite level immersion in the industry.

Then, in 2013, SITE launched the Certified Incentive Specialist (CIS) certification as an entry-level program designed to provide incentive travel professionals with the elements and rudiments of the trade and accelerate their on-boarding into the industry. Today, more than 1,300 professionals from 48 countries are CIS certified.

SITE is completing its career-spanning certifications by launching Certified Incentive Travel Professional (CITP), aimed specifically at mid-level planners of incentive travel programs in corporations and agencies, but open, too, to senior managers on the supplier side — DMOs, CVBs, DMCs, hotels, cruise companies and venues.

The CITP designation is awarded upon successful completion of a two-hour test designed to measure and validate the candidate's performance against typical requirements of an incentive travel professional — strategic case-making around the business benefits of incentive travel, finance and budgeting, operations and execution, program design and delivery, CSR and sustainability.

The CITP test may be taken by any incentive travel professional who can demonstrate (a) five years fulltime employment in the business events/MICE industry and (b) 40 hours of Continuous Professional Education (of which 25 percent must be specifically produced by SITE and related to incentive travel).

While there is no specific preparatory course for the CITP certificate, SITE will be offering candidates access to an extensive range of online modules designed to help candidates validate or supplement their existing knowledge and expertise. In addition, relevant content may be found at Motivate, the online knowledge repository powered by the SITE Foundation.

The program will be offered in the following ways:

- I. Once candidates fulfill all proctoring requirements, companies may sponsor and stage the delivery of the test to a closed, qualified group of their own invited candidates (internal staff or clients, for example) during a company meeting, conference or event.
- II. Companies may also sponsor and stage the delivery of the test to an open qualified group of incentive travel executives and managers during an industry conference exhibition, trade show or networking event.
- III. Upon fulfillment of the qualification criteria, individuals will have the opportunity to take the test under proctored supervision at regional locations throughout the year if and when the test is offered to an open audience by SITE or a local SITE chapter.

For more details, visit www.siteglobal.com/page/certification.

Gaylord Texan Resort Opens \$115M Expansion

GRAPEVINE, TX — The sprawling Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center has opened the doors of its \$115 million, all-new Vineyard Tower, which adds 303 guest rooms to the resort's current 1,511 room inventory. It also includes 86,000 sf of carpeted meeting space, bringing Gaylord Texan's total meeting space to approximately 490,000 sf.

The tower features 30,000 sf of carpeted breakout space, generous prefunction space that is open to the second floor, and a corridor to the existing portion of the resort.

On the second floor, the tower features expansive prefunction space as well as another large outdoor terrace

overlooking the shores of magnificent Lake Grapevine. The second floor also hosts the new 30,000-sf Tate Ballroom, named in honor of Grapevine's current mayor, Mayor William D. Tate. The décor in the Tate Ballroom pays tribute to the Texas Longhorn, which is seen in the glass-blown horns found inside of impressive chandelier and wall lighting. www.marriott.com



The new Vineyard Tower (right) adds 303 guest rooms and 86,000 sf of meeting space to the Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center.

Bally's Las Vegas Completes Resort Tower Renovation

LAS VEGAS, NV — Located in the center of the action on The Strip, Bally's Las Vegas has completed a \$125 million redesign of 2,052 guest rooms and suites in the new Resort Tower. Nearly every guest room at Bally's Las Vegas has been renovated within the last four years. The latest redesign features neutral, dark wood tones and striking pops of red throughout decorative accents and fashionable wall coverings, with various geometric patterns that create a contemporary feel. The new rooms include USB charging stations, chic lounge furniture and reimagined bathrooms with spacious glass-enclosed showers. The recent Bally's Las Vegas renovation followed the completion of the Jubilee Tower rooms and suites in early 2014. Caesars Entertainment donated more than 2,000 rooms of furniture from Bally's Las Vegas — more than \$1.1 million in estimated value — to Habitat for Humanity Las Vegas, hurricane relief efforts in Houston, Texas, and other non-profit agencies. www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com

Atlanta Marriott Perimeter Center Begins Multimillion-dollar Transformation

ATLANTA, GA — This summer, the Atlanta Marriott Perimeter Center will complete a multimillion-dollar renovation encompassing numerous exterior cosmetic changes and major improvements to all 344 guest rooms. The Grand Ballroom, will be completely overhauled; the Junior King and Queen Ballroom will feature floor-to-ceiling windows; and prefunction space will be added. The renovated hotel also will have an updated boardroom, three private meeting rooms, the intimate Augusta Room and an outdoor pavilion with 3,000 sf of space. Other improvements include an all-new lobby; a newly renovated Outdoor Terrace, featuring more than 1,500 sf of al fresco dining with lounge chairs and a completely reimagined Greatroom. www.marriott.com

Waldorf Astoria Las Vegas to Debut in August

LAS VEGAS, NV — Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts has announced plans to convert the Mandarin Oriental on the Las Vegas Strip to the Waldorf Astoria Las Vegas in August 2018. Waldorf Astoria will assume full operation of the property with plans to reimagine and renovate the hotel with brand touches and improvements.

With elevated offerings alongside Las Vegas' most sought-after attractions, the hotel will offer True Waldorf Service with Personal Concierges. Guests also can expect innovative dining concepts, spectacular views of The Strip from the hotel's exclusive 23rd floor bar, helicopter rides, spa retreats and more.

The property's proximity to all of the amenities of Aria Resort & Casino including a state-of-the-art gaming facility, offers guests convenient access to a signature Las Vegas experience while still providing the brand's iconic True Waldorf Service. www.waldorfastoria.com

Omni Hotels & Resorts Appoints Cara Banasch as VP of Sales

DALLAS, TX — Omni Hotels & Resorts has appointed Cara Banasch as vice president of sales. Banasch will



BANASCH

lead all field and global sales teams and will be responsible for creating and implementing revenue-generating strategies across the entire luxury hotel brand. Banasch will report to Daniel Surette, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Omni Hotels & Resorts.

"Cara's experience, dedication and passion make her well poised for success within the Omni family," said Surette. "Her exceptional record of accomplishments and extensive hospitality knowledge will bring tremendous value to the brand."

Prior to joining Omni, Banasch served as senior vice president of business development and strategy for the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau. She worked with a team of partners and professionals to grow business opportunities for the hospitality industry, and her leadership led to a record-breaking production performance. A long-term veteran of the hotel and hospitality industry, Banasch has held multiple leadership roles at properties in the Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide family, where she developed winning sales and marketing strategies in global sales for 16 new construction projects across multiple cities, and as an area director in the Northeast and Southeast regions.

Banasch holds a Bachelor of Commerce from the University of Alberta and an MBA in Global Business. She has served on several board positions throughout her career, including the PCMA Foundation Board. She supports local charities such as the Audubon Conservancy, the Louis Armstrong Jazz Camp and the Louisiana SPCA. www.omnihotels.com

Tips & Trends

What's in a Name Badge?

By Jane Scaletta, CIS

General Manager, Allied PRA Orlando

Most people don't realize that a name badge can mean so much more than a company's dress code, but it does! The badge is a symbol of who you are, where you're from and what you represent.

Who would have thought that donning your company's and your name on a badge would have so much meaning? A name badge is a white flag. Name badges are natural eliminators of conflict. They can personalize and humanize. Instead of being a nameless statistic or just another face in the crowd, now you have an identity, a name. It's that welcoming and professional first impression, making introductions easier and helping to build rapport. It certainly saves the dreaded embarrassment of not remembering a name. A name badge is a permission slip to talk to strangers. If you say hello to a random person, it's going to be fine. This person might actually be nice and cool, and even interesting. It's a simple act of self-confidence and comfort. It's like walking around saying, "All right world. Here's who I am. This is ME. I'm proud of who I am and what I represent."

Wearing a name badge is a conversation advancer and engagement tool. The hardest part about conversations is getting the ball rolling. That's why names are so great. They are THE basic building block of conversation. A name badge reduces psychological distance. Simply stated, names reduce the distance between people. A name badge is honest. In a world of mistrust and dishonesty, it's refreshing to see even a small symbol of truthfulness.

Statistics have shown that name badges improve customer service. Name badges make it easier for customers to give feedback because they know the employee's name. It's an essential form of identification and a fantastic tool to spread your brand. You can market your logo on name badges. Not to blow your mind or anything, but the possibilities are endless. It is a great marketing tool if done well. Ben and Jerry's incorporate their staff member's favorite ice cream flavor into their badges. Ritz-Carlton's staff members list their hometowns. This approach gives a more relaxed feeling to the company and one in which the staff are very involved with the company's product.

With today's technology, the types of badges are changing to accommodate sustainability, security, access control and attendee data management — from seed paper recyclable badges, to high-tech wristbands, satin stick-ons, RFIDs (Radio Frequency Identification), NFC (Near Field Communication) tags and even cloud-based badges. You can create, deliver and track every single credential; have real time control; turn passes on or off; or grant access to secure areas or flag VIPs. These types of badges can enhance your ROI as you can search for people, vote on aspects of an event and redeem prizes/vouchers. The badges can even include a wearable two-way beacon that tracks attendees' movements.

By way of self-disclosure, by way of forgoing anonymity, wearing a nametag LITERALLY causes you to "stick yourself out there." So wear your name badge proudly knowing it reduces psychological distance, disarms people, builds comfort and confidence — and it works!





Credits: MPI

Approximately 2,200 enthusiastic attendees roared into Indianapolis June 2-5 for three days of celebration, networking, education and innovation at MPI's redesigned 2018 World Education Congress (WEC). From the Opening Night Celebration at White River State Park overlooking downtown, to the Closing Night Celebration at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, the city of Indy had plenty to brag about. From pep rallies, to a block party at Monument Circle in the heart of the city, to lunch on the field at Lucas Oil Stadium, attendees had plenty to cheer about.

Some fast facts about WEC18:

- Planner to supplier ratio was split about 50:50 with 49.6 percent planners and 50.4 percent suppliers. About 77 percent were MPI members.
- There were 249 chapter leaders in attendance thanks in part to the 2018 MPI Chapter Business Summit, which was held in conjunction with WEC this year.
- The mix of attendees represented 35 countries — with the majority being from the U.S. (89 percent), followed by Canada (5 percent).
- MPI Hosted Buyer Program had 203 planners and 138 suppliers, who conducted just over 1,800 business appointments in two days.
- 158 suppliers exhibited throughout the WEC Villages.
- More than 80 total education sessions allowed attendees to earn up to 11 clock hours.

WEC19 will be held June 15-19 in Toronto.



By Sherry A. Marts, Ph.D.

#MeToo at Your Meetings

Your board has a policy stating the commitment of your organization to diversity and inclusion. You have created a meeting which reflects that commitment. You worked hard to put together a diverse group of content leaders. The images in your marketing materials reflected the diversity of your membership. At registration you asked attendees about their dietary needs, accommodations for disabilities and even their preferred pronouns.

You invited a distinguished member of your profession to present an after-dinner talk. The opening slide of his talk includes an image of a racist stereotype combined with a sexually objectified woman.

You have a Twitter hashtag for your meeting, and on the first full day of the meeting, this appears: "My friend told me she was sexually harassed at last night's opening reception. #meetinghashtag" followed by "This, and the lackadaisical response of colleagues makes me question my continued presence at #meetinghashtag." The thread continues, eventually adding up to more than 100 responses and retweets.

What Do You Do?

Both of these have happened. In the first instance, no one on the staff or among the volunteer leaders who were at the dinner took any action in the moment, and the slide stayed up for more than 20 minutes while dessert was served. Several people walked out. The following morning, the association issued an apology. The incident was talked about on social media for weeks afterward.

In the second instance, staff were able to locate the woman who had been harassed, a witness to the harassment and the harasser. He was asked to leave the meeting immediately.

What made the difference? The association that responded to the disturbing tweet had recently adopted a code of conduct for their meetings, and staff were trained on what to do if an incident occurred.

Sexual harassment "come-ons" and gender harassment "put-downs" occur at professional meetings. A 2016 survey asking scientists about their experiences with harassment at meetings found that 60 percent of the more than 200 respondents — which included people who identified as men, women and transgender — had experienced sexual or gender harassment at a scientific meeting. The harassment included experiences akin to "street harassment" — verbal harassment (catcalling, comments on appearance, calling someone an en-

dearment); leering or staring; touching, groping or grabbing; following or stalking; or purposely trapping or blocking the path of the target.

Less frequent, but still common, were incidents similar to workplace harassment: moving conversation from professional topics to more personal topics, eventually leading to a request for sexual favors; escalating physical contact such as touch that moves from less intimate areas (hand or arm) to more intimate areas (knee, thigh, shoulder, breast); isolating the target from others by insisting they go "somewhere quieter," or share a cab; and hinted or stated "quid pro quo" demands. Less common, but not unknown, are incidents of sexual assault, including the use of date-rape drugs.

Harassment at meetings goes on in many settings: presentations that include sexist or offensive images or language; areas that are crowded and noisy (poster sessions and exhibit halls); at social events; any time alcohol is served; at offsite or ancillary events; and when attendees socialize away from the meeting venue.

The impact of harassment reaches far beyond the initial incident. Targets of harassment go out of their way to avoid their harassers, sometimes by leaving the meeting at which the harassment occurred. They become concerned about their safety at meetings, give greater thought to what they wear and avoid social events at meetings. In other words, all the work you do to make your meetings engaging and to encourage participation is destroyed, sometimes in a matter of minutes.

And that impact doesn't stop with the target. A single incident of harassment has this effect on those who witness it, and those who hear about it later. Harassers poison the atmosphere at your meetings.

In the 2016 survey, the results were very clear. Seventy-seven percent of respondents want associations to ban repeat and known harassers from meetings. Seventy percent want associations to adopt and enforce a code of conduct that specifically addresses behavior at meetings.

What Can You Do? You Can Prepare, Take Care and Do It There

Prepare by adopting a code of conduct, and have procedures to publicize and enforce it, including:

- A definition of harassment.
- Examples of unacceptable behavior.
- Potential consequences of the behavior, including being asked to leave and being banned from future meetings.



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- A simple reporting process for targets and witnesses of harassment, preferably with a single contact point.
- Wide visibility at the meeting, including signage, announcements, publication and mobile app.

Take care by training staff to handle reports of harassment incidents with sensitivity and compassion. The individual who takes incident reports must put the wants and needs of the target first, and let the target decide what actions to take. Even in the event of an assault, unless there is an emergent threat to the safety of others at the meeting, let the target decide whether and when to involve security or law enforcement. Ask permission to check in with the target later, and have a plan to debrief staff who may have witnessed or heard about the incident.

Keep incident reports as confidential as possible. Targets are reluctant to report harassment out of fear of retaliation

reported the incident (if they were not the target) and possibly event security.

Sanctions against harassers should be proportional to the incident and the harasser's attitude on being confronted. If it seems the harasser is just socially awkward or inept, it may be enough to review the code of conduct and get their agreement that they will stop the behavior and avoid the target for the rest of the meeting.

If you have any reason to believe the harasser will not stop the behavior, particularly if they do any of the following, their credentials for the meeting should be revoked and they should be asked to leave the meeting immediately.

- Insists that the target "got it all wrong" and claims that they were not harassing the target.
- Expresses no remorse or understanding that what they did was wrong.

"The impact of harassment reaches far beyond the initial incident. And that impact **doesn't stop** with the target."

and damage to their careers. Ensuring confidential reporting will encourage targets to come forward.

For the safety and comfort of all meeting participants, act on the assumption that what the target reports is what actually happened. The incidence of "false reporting of harassment in the workplace (where stakes are much higher) is very low and the likelihood of a false report of harassment at a meeting is most likely even lower. Often, the target will not know the identity of the harasser when reporting an incident, either because the incident was so distressing that the target never thought to look at the harasser's name badge, or because the harasser deliberately hid their badge.

Do it there by handling incidents decisively and quickly, preferable while at the meeting, to protect the safety of your attendees. Decisions should be made by one or two people. Decisions are best made by staff, as volunteer leadership are more likely to find themselves conflicted when the harasser is a friend, colleague or important figure in their field.

Outcomes should be communicated only to those who need to know — the harasser, the target, the person who

- Refuses to accept the consequences of their behavior and continues to defend it.
- Has a pattern of unacceptable behavior in the past.
- Egregious harassment may require banning the harasser from future participation in the meeting. These include: groping, stalking, physical contact and real or implied threats of physical harm, threats of professional or financial consequences, or promises of professional advancement in return for complying. Incidents that violate professional codes of ethics may require the association to activate procedures for removing and banning the harasser from association membership.
- The good news is that harassers have an impact disproportionate to their numbers. The vast majority of your attendees treat each other respectfully and professionally. Eliminating the small minority who are unwilling to change their behavior will go a long way to creating meetings that are fully inclusive and engaging.

Prepare, take care and do it there, and your attendees will thank you.

C&IT



Sherry A. Marts, Ph.D.,

is a skilled trainer, writer and speaker. Her background includes careers in research, science advocacy and association management. She provides consulting on diversity and inclusion, harassment and bullying, and workplace communication. Her interest in ending harassment arises from her experiences as a woman in science and her training as a self-defense instructor. Marts is the author of "Open Secrets and Missing Stairs: Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment at Scientific Meetings" (S*Marts Consulting LLC, February 2017). <http://bit.ly/osmmpdf>

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Site Selection

Golf & Spa Resorts

Premier Properties Where Every Attendee Can Find Something to Love

By Christine Loomis

The new Streamsong Black, one of three golf courses at Streamsong Resort, Bowling Green, Florida.

Whether you make golf part of your corporate program or simply give attendees time to play or practice on their own, a golf resort has the power to drive attendance. Ditto spas, which offer healthful therapies and break options that not only make attendees feel better but may even increase meeting engagement.

IN THE WEST

Loews Ventana Canyon Resort & Spa, Tucson, Arizona

Stephanie Franco, CMP, owner of SpotOn Events in San Francisco, booked a client's sales kickoff event at Loews Ventana Canyon. The February meeting drew 330 attendees.

Franco calls Tucson "a warm, beautiful, unique smaller city that not everyone knows. And everyone was friendly and helpful, from the CVB and hotels to offsite venues."

Golf and spa were not part of any

core functions but attendees had access on their own.

Franco says the size of the hotel, newly renovated guest rooms, and flexibility and availability of meeting space were all ideal. "And they offered a great rate," she notes.

"Staff was always ready to say yes to our needs and help walk us through the nuances. For example, we wanted menus to feature a particular food item each day. The chef ran with the idea and developed impressive menus. Our convention services manager, Brandy White, was confident, attentive, detailed and genuine. Our Loews DMC contact, Natalie Marchioni, was very helpful, pulling in the right vendors to help us."

The hotel is spread throughout the canyon, so Franco says planners should allow time for transferring between sessions if functions are in two different locations. "Outside event areas abound, and you should plan for umbrellas dur-

ing the day and heaters at night," she says. "The in-house DMC has the pulse on the best vendors for the space and enhancing events with beautiful decor. We had the most amazing yurt and custom bar in the Coyote Corral at our celebration dinner."

Franco offers high praise for the food and the resort's dining venues. "The food that chef Ken is producing is beautiful and amazing. The banquet staff and hotel staff are wonderful," she adds, "and the lobby bar is excellent for attendee networking."

The group also had a function outside the resort at local restaurant Culinary Dropout, which they bought out. "It was a phenomenal atmosphere and phenomenal food and drinks," Franco says. "Most impressive was the attention to all the details while planning. Our sales-and-operations manager was stellar from start to finish. Thanks Adam Lippe!"

The one challenge Franco faced was a bit unusual. "We had to figure out how to bring in a 40-foot sheep from Burning Man that lights up. We had numerous meetings with the hotel, client, production company and BAAHS (Sheep Collective) to sort out the details, and it went off without a hitch. It was one of the most successful collaborations I've ever had the joy of being part of and the end result was spectacular."

The Boulders Resort & Spa, Scottsdale, Arizona

Another famed Arizona resort was the perfect setting for a national sales meeting in January with 110 in atten-

dance. "A key stakeholder had previously been at The Boulders for a leadership meeting," says Michelle M. Robinson, CMP. "He loved it and wanted his entire group to experience it."

The resort was a good fit for the 2018 sales meeting. All meals were on property, including a dine-around. Robinson calls the spa a stand-out, along with great service and great food. Staff across multiple departments also earned her praise.

Robinson used the Tohono Conference Center for meeting space. "It's great because it's self-contained," she says. "I was able to host my general session, breakfast, lunch and coffee breaks there. It even has a patio. My 'work' room and a boardroom for pop-up meetings was also there."

Golf and spa were among the optional onsite activities. "I had roughly 30 golfers," Robinson says. "I heard the course was somewhat challenging but a great time was had by all. At the spa, attendees could choose between a massage, facial or manicure/pedicure. It's a very nice spa."

Overall, Robinson found The Boulders to be ideal. "The size of the property made us feel as though we had the entire resort to ourselves," she says. "The secluded nature of the resort gave the feeling of an incentive even though we were there for a business meeting. The resort staff was amazing and the landscaping lent itself to beautiful outdoor events, most notably at Promise Rock."

The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Situated at the gateway to the Colorado Rocky Mountains in Colorado Springs is the venerable Broadmoor, which recently completed updates as part of the resort's ongoing Centennial Celebration. The hotel's 100-year-old main lobby has been expanded to include more seating with sofas and gas fireplaces. The resort's Broadmoor Main rooms and suites have been refreshed with new colors, furniture and carpeting.

The Golf Club now has a new, welcoming experiential lobby area for guests and members that celebrates the 100 years of golf history with photos, displays and descriptions. Also new at the Golf Club is The Grille, with signature dishes, a classic bar and Colo-



The newly renovated Fireside lobby in The Broadmoor's world-renowned Golf Club, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

rado mountain views. And in Broadmoor Main, Café Julie's has opened with a design reminiscent of the finest classic Parisian patisseries.

The Broadmoor campus has 784 rooms, suites and cottages, 185,000 sf of function space, three golf courses, a Forbes Five Star spa and fitness center and 10 restaurants, including the Forbes Five Star restaurant Penrose Room.

Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa, Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico

Located between Santa Fe and Albuquerque, the resort sits on 550 acres on the Pueblo of Santa Ana and offers 350 guest rooms and 54,000+ sf of flexible meeting and function space. In addition to its 18-hole championship golf course, Hyatt Regency Tamaya also offers a spa, stables and the Tamaya Cultural Learning Center. In October, the resort announced the completion of a multimillion-dollar renovation to guest rooms, and there's a new spa menu specifically for groups, including pop-up hand treatments and "appreciation circles."

IN THE EAST

Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort, Destin, Florida

Meredith Wade, executive assistant with Coca-Cola Bottling Co. United, says what was paramount for the group's

ULCC 2018 meeting in March was, "the ability to never have to leave the resort."

Additionally, she says of the Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort, "Our choice was based on a property that is also one of our customers'. It has hotel and meeting room availability for our group of about 600, offers extra entertainment and shopping within walking distance to rooms, and the quality of the resort and banquet staff is high."

Specifically, she notes, "We could not have been successful without the help of Brian Lamonica. He was physically present or a phone call away at all times. The banquet staff...were always one step ahead and worked tirelessly to make sure our events went off without a hitch. ...Louise

Lara also needs to be mentioned because she was kind, gracious and patient with our attendees and the spa schedule. The recreation and golf staff also did a great job with the difficult task of organizing all guests and their requests for activities."

The group used the Bayside rooms, which Wade calls "spacious and convenient in terms of distance to meeting facilities, restaurants and shops," adding, "the resort transportation system is well organized for those wanting to reach the nearby Linkside Conference Center or beach, and parking is easy."

Finally, Wade says, "This staff is one of the best in the industry. They're organized, knowledgeable about the property and the surrounding community, and they won't say no. They always do their best to accommodate the customer."

Sea Island Resort, Sea Island, Georgia

The historic Sea Island Resort in Georgia, which opened in 1928, is situated along the scenic five miles of beachfront on the southern Georgia shore. The resort, a sister property to The Broadmoor, is comprised of the 265-room Cloister, 85-room Inn and the AAA Five Diamond, Forbes Five Star Lodge, with 43 guest rooms. There are also 130 cottages on Sea Island available for rent. The Cloister houses more than 40,000 sf



Kickoff event with 300 attendees, at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort & Spa in Tucson, Arizona.



Credit: Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa

Twin Warriors Golf Club at Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico.

of function space overlooking the Georgia coastline, including 7,800-sf and 5,000-sf ballrooms. The Sea Island Golf Performance Center offers an indoor video studio, 300 yards of teeing area, target greens, short-game areas and an exclusive club-fitting service. Sea Island Golf Club includes three 18-hole championship courses: Seaside (par 70), Plantation (par 72) and Retreat (par 72). And the resort's spa is truly world class: The Forbes Five Star Spa at Sea Island spans 65,000 sf and includes a 5,000-sf strength and cardio studio, indoor lap pool and three squash courts.

Last fall Sea Island announced plans for a \$25 million enhancement program at The Lodge at Sea Island, which will include six new cottages, a new state-of-the-art Golf Performance Center, an ocean-front pool and pool house, and a new putting course. These new additions are expected to debut in November 2018 in time for the RSM Classic, an official PGA Tour event held annually at Sea Island Golf Club. Additionally, in December 2018, Sea Island's Plantation Course will undergo a full renovation under the direction of Love Golf Design, reopening in October 2019.

Streamsong Resort, Bowling Green, Florida

The three golf courses at Streamsong feature a rolling, dune-like landscape unlike any other golf experience in the Sunshine State. The property's third course, Streamsong Black, debuted just last year along with a new clubhouse and restaurant. With the addition of Streamsong Black, the resort is the only location in

the world where guests can enjoy three distinct courses designed by four legendary architects, including Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw of Coore & Crenshaw and Tom Doak of Renaissance Golf Design. Streamsong Resort features 228 guest rooms, 25,000 sf of indoor and 40,000 sf of outdoor meeting and event space, five dining options, conference and event facilities, the grotto-style AcquaPietra Spa and infinity pool, as well as bass fishing, sporting clays, nature trails and tennis.

Grand Hotel Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa, Point Clear, Alabama

For Margaret Jaques, manager of events for a health services organization in the Southeast, The Grand Hotel Marriott Resort was the right choice for three meetings held between March and May.



Margaret Jaques, Manager of Events
New Orleans, LA

"The driving distance for our attendees is perfect. We ask attendees to drive in the morning of day one, which is typically a Monday. Our meeting begins with lunch. This means we are not taking time away from our attendees on the weekend and it's cost effective for us because we don't have to pay for rooms the night prior to our meeting. It's win-win for our attendees and our organization."

Moreover, she notes, the resort has a stellar reputation for impeccable service and delicious food, and the grounds

are breathtaking. All events were held on property.

"One of our primary goals is attendee networking," Jaques says. "By hosting all of our events at the hotel, we're able to maximize the amount of time our attendees spend together. The Grand is the perfect spot to accomplish this goal because of the various activities offered. There's really no need for us to go elsewhere while we're there because we're provided with so many wonderful options, impeccable service and delicious food."

Although there are many things Jaques believes planners should know about the hotel, one is of particular note. "The Grand Hotel makes you feel at home. We are not treated like business, we're treated like family. Our attendees have come to know many of the employees and the employees have come to know us. We're welcomed back time and time again and each time is better than the last. As a planner, I feel at home as well; the team there is like my family."

"The Grand Hotel has truly mastered the trifecta (collaboration, partnership and professionalism) for creating memorable experiences for our attendees."

Not only do I consider this team family, but there's a level of collaboration, partnership and professionalism that I don't experience with any other venue.



Credit: Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort

Aerial view of Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort, Destin, Florida.



Credit: Sea Island Resort

The Lodge at Sea Island will soon undergo a \$25 million enhancement.

The Grand Hotel has truly mastered the trifecta for creating memorable experiences for our attendees."

That's thanks in part to the resort staff. "In the transactional hotel world in which we have all come to operate over the last several years, they still take time to learn, ask questions and listen. They have mastered the difficult task of doing what's right for their hotel while advocating for their customer. Only someone who truly understands both sides of the equation can accomplish that and consistently win," Jaques says.

"The professionals who work at the Grand Hotel take pride in delivering an experience that is comfortable but not intrusive, friendly yet professional and most importantly memorable, leaving everyone with a desire to return again and again."

In terms of logistics and services, Jaques says the hotel is big yet it all works well. "While the resort is comprised of many different buildings that house guest rooms and a separate conference center, no guest room is too far from the conference center when you consider the picture-perfect grounds that surround you as you walk from one building to the next. Most meeting rooms are located in the conference center with some space also in the main building. Using both," she adds, "is not a challenge."

Jaques notes that the meeting space is gorgeous, the table linens beautiful, banquet chairs are comfortable and everything is well maintained.

Although the group does not host a golf tournament, there is a volleyball tournament every year. "The recreation department owns it and executes it for us. It's a tradition and we love it."

Jaques says attendees are on their own for arranging spa visits. "The spa

is the perfect getaway from the all-day hectic meetings and our attendees enjoy the opportunity to visit the spa. The staff there is very professional and accommodating."

With much of the hotel under construction during the last event, Jaques says it shows just how responsive and creative the hotel is. "There were unexpected delays in the conference center, which resulted in the space not being 100 percent complete. The hotel came together as a team, met with contractors, devised a plan and put measures in place that resulted in the flawless execution of our event. Not one person commented in

our post-event survey that they noticed anything out of sorts. Our attendees were so blown away by the service and experience at the hotel that they didn't notice the paint on the wall. Kudos to the entire team, especially Sam, director of engineering, for the teamwork they displayed to make our event a success."

Jaques adds, "Take advantage of the wonderful activities on property. There are so many teambuilding activities, free-time activities and relaxing things to do; there's something for everyone."

But perhaps most of all, she notes, "Be prepared to make it an annual meeting. Your attendees will want to return." **C&IT**



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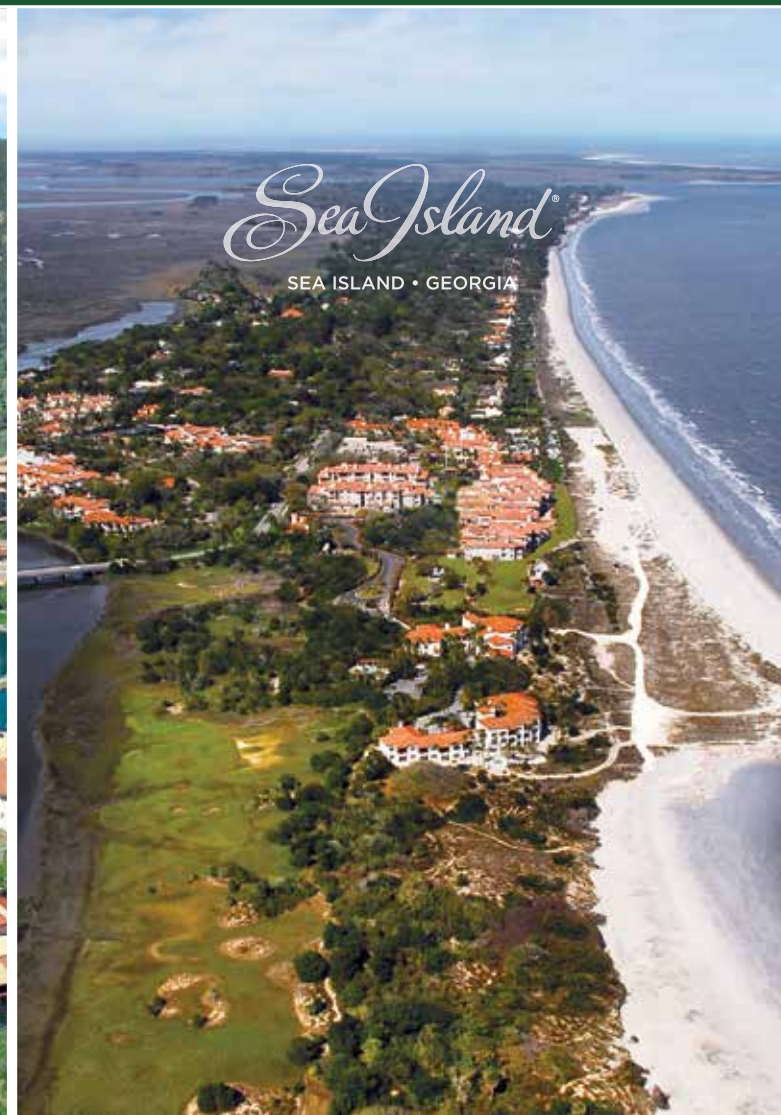
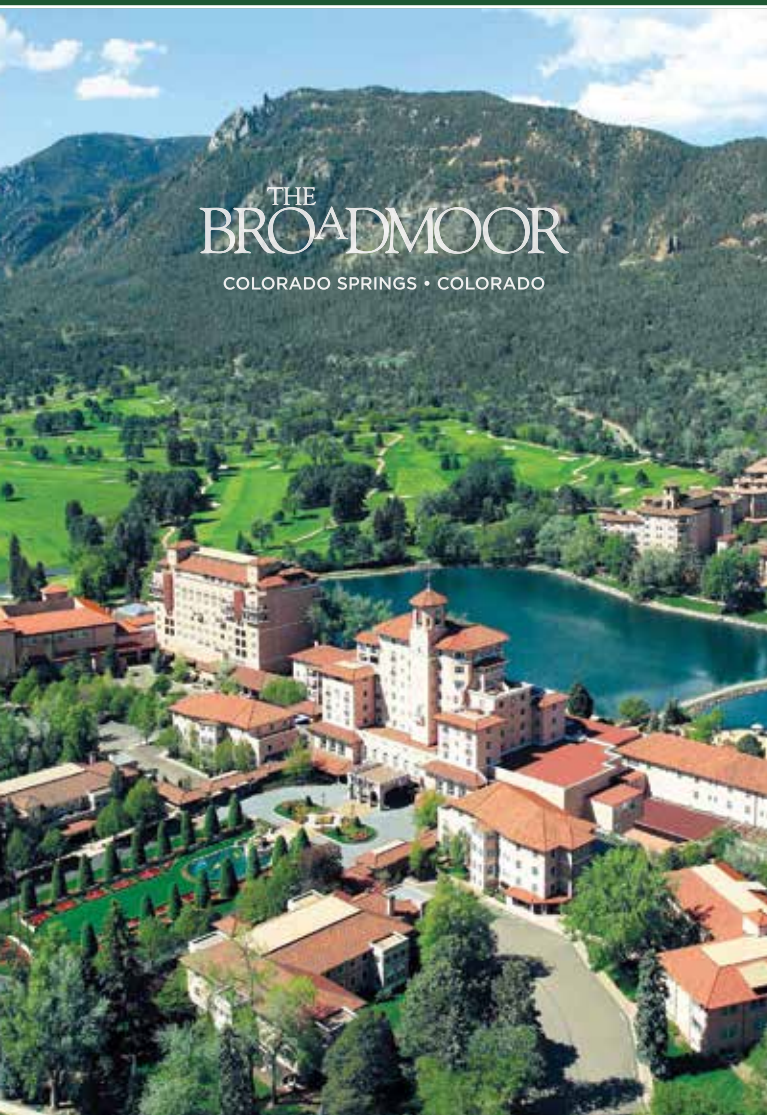
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Activities— Variety

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Accommodations— Choice

Our 390 rooms and suites ensure we have a room type to meet your needs from The Cloister, nestled between the Black Banks River and the Atlantic Ocean to The Lodge, surrounded by two of our golf courses to The Inn, our select-service property. Or for those seeking outdoor adventure, we offer Broadfield, our 5,800-acre sporting club.

Technology

Hotel TECH Trends

Revolutionizing the
Guest Experience



Credit: Saviok

Answering the hotel room door in a robe became a little less revealing with Saviok's new Relay Robot delivering your bath towel.

New hotel technologies promise to improve attendee experiences in guest rooms and meeting spaces by personalizing services, amenities and activities. Technology also will also improve planning efficiency with software that manages myriad functions, including room blocks.

Experts say that hotels will use new technologies to collect customer data and create profiles of guests and groups that include information such as preferences, habits, interests, booking dates, who stays, length of stay and reasons for traveling. And the more often guests re-

turn and the longer they stay, the more information hotels can gather and the more they can personalize profiles and experiences. Hotels will use the data to tailor pricing and booking deals to specific groups and individuals, upsell services and promote guest loyalty programs.

But the adoption of new technologies doesn't happen overnight. Says Beth Faller, vice president of meetings and events at Colorado-based Christopherson Business Travel, "We do seem to be in a bit of a crossover time where hotels are still boosting or incorporating their accommodation of new tech-

nologies. But hotels that can't keep up will eliminate themselves from the game." According to a recent *Hospitality Technology Magazine* survey, 84 percent of hotel operators plan to adopt mobile technologies within the next 18 months.

Gradual Adoption

Brandt Krueger, owner of Richfield, Minnesota-based Event Technology Consulting, says that hotels' adoption of new technology is proceeding unevenly. "It's really catch as you can at this point, and I have to admit, not all that well implemented in some properties I've stayed at," Krueger observes. "I was

recently at an incredibly expensive, upscale property that had tablets in each room. Other than telling me what the TV channels were, they were pretty useless, and couldn't even tell me when the gift shop closed."

On the other hand, Faller says, luxury properties are among the earliest adopters of guest-personalization technology.

"Luxury properties have done a great job capturing personalization data," says Faller. "With the advancements in data collection software — in both the volume and variety of information you can now collect — I find that hotels outside of the true luxury brands are also now able to increase their personalized guest services at a lower expense. Even

eventually combine all of their own customer-centric systems. These include artificial intelligence (AI), keyless entry systems, virtual concierge, in-room voice technology and robots. "When I look at that list, I don't so much see a bunch of different technologies, but rather a blueprint for a customer service experience system," says Krueger. "Each one of the technologies plays a role in customizing the guest experience, and there are lots of ways they could interact with each other to improve it."

Krueger offers a scenario to illustrate how various technologies could interact to provide services to someone traveling to a meeting. "Artificial intelligence noticed that your flight was three

Mobile Apps

Many hotel companies are introducing their own branded mobile apps that guests can use to create individual profiles to handle a range of functions including bookings, check-ins and check-outs, television, room access, wake-up calls, spa appointments, room service, temperature and lighting, newspaper deliveries and providing feedback to hoteliers.

Hilton's Connected Room platform, for example, allows guests to use their Hilton Honors app and mobile devices to customize room experiences. Guests can use the platform to control temperature, lighting, blinds, television and other functions. The platform also allows



"When I look...I don't...see a bunch of different technologies, but rather a **blueprint** for a **customer service** experience system."

Brandt Krueger

Owner, Event Technology Consulting, Richfield, Minnesota

simple personalization and awareness of preferences enhance the attendee experience. It always feels nice when hotel staff call you by name or send personalized amenities."

The extent to which hotels will share personalized guest data and profiles with planners isn't clear. But one thing is evident, says Krueger: "If planners are allowed to apply the knowledge they have about their attendees, and are allowed to tap into hotel systems, the guest experience can be enhanced even further. The ability of the planner to help customize the onsite experience would open up many more possibilities for hotels to surprise and delight their guests."

Merged Systems

While hotels may not merge their technologies with planners, they may

hours late and sends you a notification with the opportunity to check in using the hotel's mobile app and unlock your door by phone," says Krueger. "Once onsite, you're guided by the app to your room via an online map."

Krueger continues: "After unpacking, you ask the room's voice interactive system whether the bar is still open. The system says the bar is closed and offers to suggest nearby nightlife options. But you don't feel like walking anywhere, so you ask the system to order drinks. You continue unpacking and realize you left your toothbrush at home. You ask a mobile digital assistant for a toothbrush. By the time you finish unpacking, a small, waist-high robot brings two cold beers and a toothbrush."

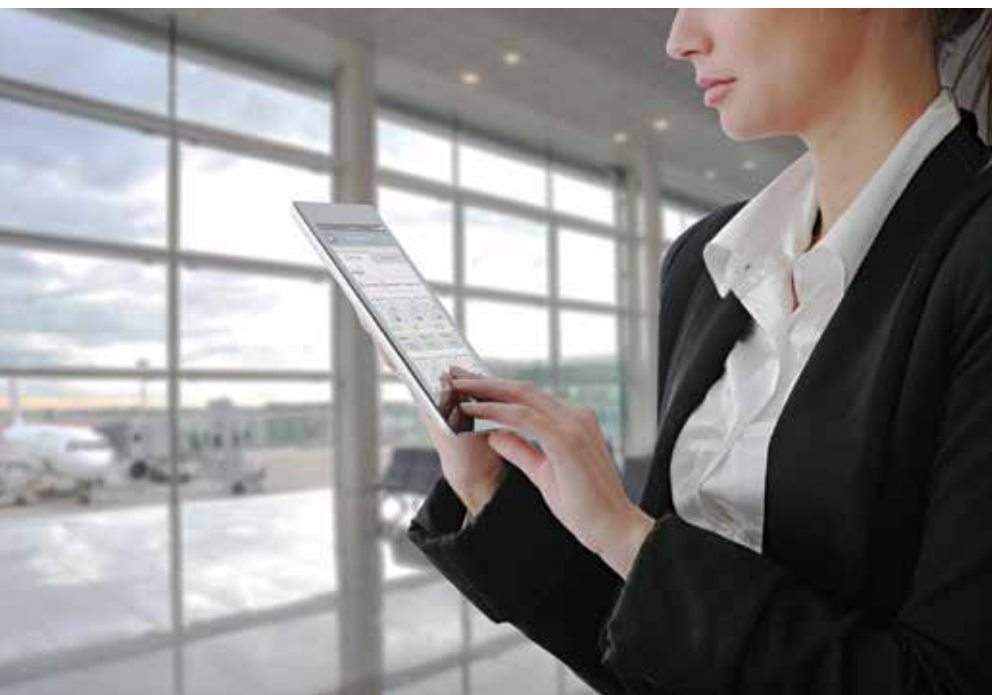
Following are examples of technologies that promise to revolutionize hotel services.

guests to load streaming media and other accounts into the room's television, upload photos and artwork to display in rooms, and control room access.

MGM Resorts International has partnered with StayNTouch, a mobile hotel property management system, to install smartphone-enabled check-in and check-out systems at all of its properties. The cloud-based mobile platform also allows MGM to track guest preferences and upsell hotel services.

Some Hilton and Holiday Inn properties have implemented The AavGo mobile- and tablet-based hotel system, which allows guests to do everything that once required a phone call or visit to the front desk, including room service, communicating with staff and accessing any information about the hotel and its services.

Radisson Hotel Group plans to



Hilton Honors app provides for digital check-in as well as providing guests access to their hotel rooms, fitness center and other areas requiring a key, all via their smartphones.

launch a technology platform named Emma that will encompass business analytics, property management, revenue management and more. Emma will include an integrated customer relationship management tool that uses data about past guest stays to personalize customer experiences.

Planners also are creating their own apps to customize the experience within hotel spaces. Kathy Miller, CEO of Schaumburg, Illinois-based Total Event Resources, says she proposed to a recent group that they create a networking café and app in a hotel that allowed guests to customize their coffee/drink orders and pick them up. "This is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of our ability to customize attendees' experience in hotels," says Miller. "Although we didn't end up implementing the idea, it was one of extreme interest to both the hotel and the client."

Artificial Intelligence

The popularity of voice-automated systems such as Amazon's Alexa, Apple's Siri, Google Assistant, Amazon Echo, IBM Watson and Google Home are leading hoteliers to adopt voice-activated in-room interactive technology through smart speakers.

Best Western Hotels & Resorts has a mobile engagement platform in more than 600 hotels that allows it to communicate with guests via mobile devices and Amazon's smart-speaker platform. Together, the two technologies allow Best Western to message guests before they arrive, upon their arrival and throughout their stay.

Guests can use the Best Western platform to request information about basic hotel services such as dining and



Access all the features of Conrad Concierge from within the Hilton Honors app.

spas. Some specific requests such as late checkout are automatically sent via tablet to hotel staff, which responds by phone or in person.

Hotels also are starting to experiment with using smartphone apps to communicate with robots to handle services such as room service, snacks and items such as mouthwash, towels and toothbrushes. For example, a robot called Relay delivers basic services to guest rooms and is "smart" enough to operate elevators and navigate crowds.

Service Robots

According to Miller, "Once these robots and technology become more mainstream, the impact can be profound in many ways — directing attendees, providing customized user experiences such as directional information, and finding the nearest bathroom, hospital or FedEx facility. The robots could also provide signage."

Experts predict that voice-activated in-room technology eventually will be as common as televisions in hotel rooms. According to a white paper by hotel technology companies SiteMinder and Integrated Systems and Decisions Inc., hoteliers believe AI is the key to personalizing guest experiences in the future, but they also fear that properties could eventually be run by robots.

Still, AI promises to be a valuable



Unlock your hotel room door with just the tap on an app. (Above: Hilton Honors app.)

tool for planners. "From a meetings and events perspective, having this technology in a hotel is a definite benefit," says Faller. "We are always looking for ways to create a memorable experience for attendees, and this technology satisfies those who are used to it and 'wows' those who are not. If attendees return from a program talking about their new or different experience with excitement, it adds to the overall value of the meeting or event."

Miller agrees: "These 'intelligent' services can help meeting planners by streamlining the information process and saving on the amount of staffing required," says Miller.

She offers an example: "Currently, planners are building their own mobile apps with varied information for both a conference and its hotel," says Miller. "Perhaps there will be an opportunity for savings on the planner side to have hotel information readily available that planners can export into their customized apps, saving time and staff resources in recreating this information each time they build a mobile app."

Keyless Entry Systems

Hotel brands such as Starwood, Hilton and Marriott are turning to keyless entry systems, which allow guests to use mobile phones to access hotel rooms. Eventually, keyless entry will be one of a wide variety of hotel functions, services and products available via mobile devices and apps. Some keyless systems will allow the management of room blocks and other functions useful to planners.

According to Miller, "Keyless entry systems save time and frustration. Most attendees want to use their phones for convenience in as many ways as they possibly can. There would be no more lost keys or having to go back to the

than 6,000 rooms in Caesars Las Vegas properties, including Caesars Palace and The Linq Hotel & Casino.

Ivy allows guests to use mobile phones for dining, entertainment and spa reservations as well as maintenance and housekeeping requests. Ivy also surveys guests. Plans call for Ivy to be introduced to Caesars' remaining Las Vegas resorts by the end of this year. In addition, Hilton and Marriott include virtual concierge services in their hotel loyalty apps.

Virtual Reality

Marriott has introduced an in-room virtual reality headset program that allows guests to take virtual trips to other locations. Guests can share the experience with others on a VR content plat-

"Simple **personalization** and awareness of preferences **enhance** the attendee experience."

Beth Faller

V.P. of Meetings, Christopherson Business Travel, Greenwood Village, Colorado

front desk when your key isn't working. The check-in and checkout processes would be more efficient. All of this information would be provided to the hotel in advance and it creates a better customer experience all the way around."

Virtual Concierge

A 24-hour virtual concierge service would respond to requests such as those regarding restaurant dining on and off property as well as room service; housekeeping; room and travel reservations; maintenance requests; spa reservations; show tickets; and extra pillows.

Caesars Entertainment properties in Las Vegas recently introduced its personalized 24-hour virtual concierge service called Ivy, an automated guest engagement platform powered by IBM Watson. The system now services more

form called "VR Postcards," which are designed to encourage vacation bookings.

Wellness Technology

Guests desire more wellness amenities along with more technology, so hotels are starting to combine the two. The technology uses biophilic design, which offers sights, sounds, scents, and views of nature. Guests can use apps to control options such as wireless lighting, living green walls, hydroponics and temperature to create a natural, relaxing setting. An environmental system, Hilton's LightStay program, uses technology to analyze and manage energy consumption and performance in 4,500 of the chain's hotels to increase efficiency.

Experts predict that new hotel technology will, in one way or an-



Marriott's Internet of Things guest room will include devices and amenities that respond to individual guests and are customizable (lab prototype shown here).

other, eventually become essential to most guests no matter their current technology habits.

According to Faller, "For younger generations, mobile apps and AI are the norm and the expectation. For others, too much technology at a hotel may feel foreign. Then there are those in the middle who, though they may not know or use all the latest technolo-

Faller. "But as long as there is an easy way for hotel guests to turn it off if they don't want it, it could be a benefit for those who do."

Privacy Concerns

According to Tyra Hilliard, CMP, J.D., associate professor of hotel, restaurant and meetings management, University of Alabama, "The law is notorious about

Hilliard expects the hospitality and legal industries to eventually determine liability risks for hotel technology as regulations such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) take hold. The regulations streamline data privacy laws across Europe. The GDPR became effective in May and applies to organizations within the EU and any organization outside the EU that provides EU citizens with goods and services.

According to the Meeting Evolution Technology Solutions (METS) website, the technology provider for Irving, California-based Meeting Sites Resource, GDPR will impact meetings and planners in several ways including the following: Planners who run meetings in an EU country or where its citizens might attend need to provide all attendees from EU nations with an opt-in check box with a date/time stamp and a link to a GDPR compliance document that details how their data will be used and stored.

"These 'intelligent' services can help meeting planners by streamlining the information process and saving on the...staffing."



Kathy Miller

CEO, Total Event Resources, Schaumburg, Illinois

gies, are excited to try them. Regardless of where people fall on that spectrum, how technology impacts the way meetings are planned depends on the type of program and the needs of the client."

Challenges of adopting hotel technology include educating consumers and training staff on new systems, and security/privacy concerns, since every guest will have physical access to any of the voice-activated devices. "I would venture that some might not find these devices appropriate in a hotel room for security and privacy reasons," says

lagging behind technology, so one of the biggest legal issues that planners need to keep in mind is that there are likely to be gray areas around the legalities associated with the latest technology — meaning planners should tread with care."

Hilliard adds that "general legal principles such as reasonable care, privacy issues and negligence will apply, but specific doctrine may be slow to be developed and applied or may be extrapolated by courts from cases dealing with older technologies."

Meanwhile, guests are likely to demand even more from technology as it creates additional options for service and speeds up its delivery. However, no matter how sophisticated technology becomes, face-to-face engagement will remain essential. Technology will enhance, not detract from, personal engagement by hotel staffers because they will have more time for guests.

The bottom line for planners: New hotel technologies will provide more ways to enhance attendee experiences. **C&IT**



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Unique Venues



Inspiring Spaces

Memorable, Out-of-the-Box Meeting Places

By Maura Keller

At some corporate meetings and events, the chosen venue is a predictable affair — with the same types of facilities, same menu and same agenda being featured year after year. Brenda Alvarez, meeting planner at Reach Air Medical, a Santa Rosa, California-based company providing emergency air transport services for hospitals, sought an out-of-the-box venue to conduct the company's offsite leadership and teambuilding meeting.

Memorable Venues

Alvarez turned to Safari West in

Northern California as the ideal locale to offer company attendees an unusual meeting experience.

"We had heard that they offer meeting space but did not know they would help make it such a memorable experience," Alvarez says. "We wanted something different and new, and we certainly had that with Safari West."

Safari West allows guests to explore the Sonoma Serengeti on an African-style wildlife safari. While promoting conservation and environmental education concepts, guests can enjoy relaxing in a luxury safari tent under the gaze of

a graceful giraffe or exploring the area amidst herds of exotic wildlife.

Approximately 20 people attended the meeting with about half staying the night for the full Safari West experience.

"The opportunity to spend the night in their amazing tents was something the team members couldn't stop talking about," Alvarez says. "Being able to listen to wildlife in the evening is something you don't normally discuss as part of a 'leadership meeting' so that was definitely a unique perk for the team."

Sara Gorlick, vice president of events for Rakuten Marketing, also recog-

nizes the key role selecting a unique venue can play in a meeting's success. For every Fashion Week in New York City, Rakuten Marketing hosts an event for influencers and brands in the industry. The event is an opportunity for the company's guests to create partnerships as each brand has the opportunity to show off their products.

"Many influencers want to collaborate with the brands that they feel

passionate about and would support even if they weren't getting paid to advertise, so our event lends itself to making personal connections," Gorlick says. To add to the week's uniqueness, Rakuten Marketing hosted their event at Ramscale Studio, located in the former home of Bell Labs, where Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell both worked.

Located in the West Village neighborhood, Ramscale evokes the ambience of a hidden loft apartment in New York City.

"New York City real estate is so unique and each apartment has a story unto itself so the Ramscale is like walking into a secret location in the city that you feel lucky to have stumbled upon," Gorlick says. "Everyone has been in a conference room — it's either too hot or too cool and exhausts guests. Unique venues inspire. As event planners we are able to create perks for corporate workers and create experiences they wouldn't have if they didn't have a corporate job. It is a privilege to be able to give that to people and unique venues are the way to make it happen."

For Greg Jenkins, partner at Bravo Productions, a meeting and event planning company in Long Beach, California, choosing a unique venue that stands out in the minds of attendees is paramount to making a meeting or event a success.

"As an event and meeting planner based in Southern California, we have staged meetings and events at various unique venues," Jenkins says, including the Aquarium of the Pacific and Museum of Latin American Art in Long



Blue Whale Gala at Aquarium of the Pacific, Long Beach, California.

Beach, Hangar 8 in Santa Monica, and Union Station and Petersen Automotive Museum in L.A.

As Jenkins explains, these venues were selected for various reasons. For example, Hangar 8, an airport hangar that is also used for commercial and film shoots represented a blank space, where Bravo Productions could create a unique setting and accommodate many provisions.

"The Museum of Latin American Art was selected for its distinctive representation — it's the only museum in the United States dedicated to modern and contemporary Latin American art," Jenkins says. "Union Station is one of the greatest examples of Spanish revivals/art deco in the country — and still operates as a train station. It's just monumental in its scale and is centrally located."

Event types included networking events, customer/client appreciation

gatherings or private parties in conjunction with a conference.

"Unique venues (transport) guests to a different time and place, something most hotels cannot achieve without creating a big themed event," Jenkins says. "In addition, the unique venue might offer the only opportunity for the meeting and conference attendee to experience an outing outside of the hotel and convention center. This is even more important when the attendee

is from out of state and has limited time to experience the nearby area. Unique venues also tend to peak the attendee's sense of adventure and curiosity."

Making an Effort

More and more companies are taking notice of the unique venues available for their next meeting or event across the country. At the Harley-Davidson Museum campus in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the onsite Motor Bar & Restaurant offers customizable private dining and event options that really "wow" attendees — both motorcycle and non-motorcycle lovers alike. With the ability to play host to events with 10 to 10,000 attendees, the Harley-Davidson Museum offers a wealth of options for events of all types.

"Meeting and event planners should consider using unique venues intermittently to accommodate a change in production needs, to support a theme, to



Fashion Week gathering at Ramscale Studio, located in the former home of Bell Labs in the West Village, New York City.

highly motivate attendance, to entice an attendee base that may be bored, busy, receivers of many meeting offers, or have seen everything already," says Carolyn Davis, CMP, owner of Strategic Meeting Partners. "Unique venues offer attendees the opportunity to see and witness something new. It elevates creativity and clearer thinking among attendees. In

addition to the business purpose, the attendee also has personal curiosities that a unique venue may be able to capture. When the attendee has multiple invitation offers, it may help them make the final decision on which to attend."

Recently, Strategic Meeting Partners bought out unique venues within a Baltimore hotel for a 450-person, four-classroom, two-month training session. The spaces included one traditional meet-



"New York City real estate is so unique and each apartment has a story unto itself so the Ramscale is like walking into a secret location in the city that you feel lucky to have stumbled upon."

Sara Gorlick, Vice President of Events
Rakuten Marketing, New York, NY

ing room, a former hotel office, plus a restaurant and a cabaret club all located on the same floor.

"We needed meeting space, and the hotel could not give up its traditional meeting space for two months, due to prior bookings," Davis says. "We converted the unique settings into classrooms, however each space kept the flair of its original purpose that the attendees loved as they rotated through each during the two months."

While some attendees may enjoy a motorcycle-centered meeting venue, others may revel in attending an event focused on their favorite beverage. Enter repurposed breweries. These historic venues often offer a glimpse into the craft beer brewing process, while attendees can participate in taste testings. For example, Rochester, New York, is



Union Station is a beautiful example of Spanish revival art deco and still operates as an active train station in Los Angeles.

home to the 100-year-old Genesee Brew House. Here, meeting and event guests can mingle with the brewmasters, sip on some favorite suds in the delightful beer garden, and learn more about how Genesee beer is made.

Empire Farmstead Brewing, outside of Syracuse New York, offers a farm-to-table experience where participants can enjoy menu items sourced from the 22-acre working farm, and see where the

Empire's hops are grown. Trails throughout 216 acres of woodland in the adjacent Burlingame Area Trails provide a back-to-nature break.

A Lasting Impression

For nature lovers and adventure seekers, Basecamp Boulder, in Boulder Colorado, which opened in June 2016, offers a very unique experience throughout its mountain-themed interior designs. In addition to the outdoor firepit complete with s'mores-making ingredients aplenty, the hotel's indoor rock-climbing wall adds a unique flair to the space, while providing attendees a place to relax and unwind. And no one can resist Basecamp Boulder's "penthouse suite," which is complete with sunken beds surrounded by green turf carpet and an enormous mural of the beloved Flatirons.

According to Adam Sloyer, CEO, Sequence, a meeting and events agency in New York, specializing in production, strategic planning and design, the primary advantage to a unique venue such as Basecamp Boulder for attendees is excitement.

"People always want to experience something new or different, and a unique venue adds a level of intrigue," Sloyer says. "Unique venues also are more likely to generate event buzz, which leads to social marketing, sharing and promotion. Also on the cost side, unique venues may have built-in components that you'd otherwise need an outside company to bring in. Think of a nightclub with in-house audio-visual, or a museum with pre-existing décor or environment."

One prominent hedge fund that Sequence works with hosts their meetings at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. As Sloyer explains, the museum gives the event a certain cachet, and allows for an upscale ambience without spending big on décor or scenery.

"We also work with the American Red Cross on producing one of their galas at a Net Jets hangar," Sloyer says. "The hangar brings with it a great deal of limitations and red tape — along with requiring an extensive build-out — but the chance for guests to experience an event in such an unconventional venue is invaluable."

Indeed, the concept of "unconventional" abounds at Florida's Coldwater Gardens, a secluded agritourism destination for corporate groups. Offering more than 352 acres, Coldwater Gardens is situated in the Florida Panhandle and provides camping, glamping (aka, glamorous camping) and private cottages for groups. The glamping tents are popular for corporate and meeting attendees, offering the best of both worlds — a back-to-nature break from everyday life, but enough comfort that guests won't wake up with a sore back and covered in bug bites. In fact, amenities include hardwood floors, electricity, water boil-



"Unique venues (transport) guests to a different time and place, something most hotels cannot achieve without creating a big themed event."

Greg Jenkins, Partner
Bravo Productions, Long Beach, California

er, queen beds and stunning views of the pine savanna.

A fully sustainable retreat with gardens that span five acres, Coldwater Gardens also offers The Terrace, which includes a full commercial kitchen, a dining room that seats up to 80 and multiple fireplaces.

Work & Play

The adage, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" rings true for many meeting planners who work hard to integrate a fun, active atmosphere into a chosen venue.

"Events are all about the experience and are becoming more innovative each year, so shouldn't the spaces we hold them in reflect this change?" asks Maria Geller, meeting and event manager at Special D Events in Detroit, Michigan. "Traditional venues are becoming stale and clients are searching for venues that allow for more creativity and provide attendees with an 'out-of-the-box' experience they aren't expecting."

That's where The Escape Room Indy comes in. Just steps from the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis, The Escape Room Indy, housed in a central downtown building, boasts five game rooms, each designed to offer 60 minutes of competitive problem-solving fun. The ultimate team building experience, participants are locked in a themed room and provided clues and riddles in order to solve puzzles and discover keys and other combinations that will enable them to escape the room before time runs out. From Art Gallery to Bank Heist to Jail Break, the themed rooms are intricately designed to allow up to eight individuals to work together to escape.

Erin DeBernardi, associate consultant for the Center for Innovative Learning

at Eli Lilly and Company, orchestrated a company event at The Escape Room because her group was looking for new, innovative ways of conducting informal assessments of the sales professionals the company trains.

"Gamification and the use of competition in training has become a trending topic in learning and development," DeBernardi says. "We chose The Escape Room because they were a reputable, local organization willing to partner with us to customize their themed rooms and incorporate our training topics into clues and hints therein."

DeBernardi and her team worked with The Escape Room over the course of several months to customize many of the clues within their rooms to meet



Las Vegas' Sundance Helicopters terminal can fit up to 500 people and features a lavish pre-flight lounge. Sundance is located across from Mandalay Bay and the Four Seasons Hotel.

their training needs. The day of the event, approximately 120 sales professionals filled the lounge of The Escape Room in Fishers, Indiana. Teams were assembled and assigned to their rooms, while others who were waiting their turn enjoyed a catered meal, drinks and camaraderie. In order to escape, teams were required to not only work together and solve problems, but to remember the information they had previously studied and been trained on. And, being

salespeople, there was, of course, the element of competition — competition to see which rooms had been "harder" than others, which teams escaped and which didn't, and how much time it took.

"The feedback from this event was phenomenal," DeBernardi says. "Never before had a training team attempted to marry assessment and evaluation and team building in this way, and our sales professionals made sure we knew that. We received comments like 'best training event I've experienced in my 10+ years with the company,' and 'thanks for making this "test" so fun!' We've all been to corporate events at venues that are just as 'blah' as the office. Folks are looking at their watches trying to gauge 'I wonder when can I sneak away.' At The Escape Room, our colleagues were most definitely checking their watches, but checking to see if it was their turn yet, how their 'competitors' were faring against the shrinking clock, and predicting by how many minutes they could beat the team that just Escaped the Titanic."

One of the huge advantages of holding a corporate meeting or event

in a unique venue is to provide an opportunity to shake things up. In some cases, this includes taking attendees out of their comfort zone, and in others, to inspire them.

One of Karen Shackman's favorite examples of unique venue offerings include meetings she and her staff at Shackman Associates New York have held in historic bank vaults and renovated, old-school speakeasies.

"New York has multiple meeting, din-

ing and event venues that were old banks," Shackman says. "These buildings often feature majestic architecture both inside and outside, and in some cases historic components like bank vaults have been preserved to provide a truly unique dining or small event experience. Speakeasies also are getting more creative than ever, and with amenities like secret doors, they provide attendees an additional feeling of exclusivity.

"For meeting planners trying to do something completely wild, try holding a brainstorming session at an indoor sky-diving venue," Shackman says. "We have one within minutes of New York City."

Moving Venues

While hosting an event at a historic brewery or a refurbished train depot are ever-popular options, another unique venue combines wine and train travel. The Napa Valley Wine Train, which offers a 36-mile round-trip experience through California's wine country, is a very unique option for anyone hoping to create a productive and enjoyable environment. Complete with pre- and post-meeting areas, the Napa Valley Wine Train provides a unique setting for groups of all sizes. The train also can be tailored to meet a particular group's needs — whether it includes cozy tables for in-depth strategy sessions or a full railcar for 60 or the entire train for 300 people. Of course, attendees can enjoy the region's award-winning wines pre-

"Events are all about the experience and are becoming more innovative each year, so shouldn't the spaces we hold them in reflect this change?"

Maria Geller, Meeting & Event Manager
Special D Events, Ferndale, Michigan



dominantly from Napa Valley, along with a fine-dining experience.

Although train travel is conducive to many types of meetings, incorporating a helicopter ride into a meeting or event is another memorable option for today's meetings. In fact, Sundance Helicopters, based in Las Vegas, offers a distinctive event space at its terminal. Complete with a lavish pre-flight lounge, the terminal can host large groups and serve food and beverages while attendees wait their turn for helicopter tours during the function. Sundance Helicopters offers 25 state-of-the-art helicopters, each seating six people — so there's plenty of space for groups looking to enjoy breathtaking flights above the Las Vegas Strip, Grand Canyon, Lake Mead and the Mojave Desert.

What's Old Is New Again

Many owners and operators of historic venues are eager to share the history of their venue, while also providing modern amenities that work for corporate groups. For a stylish and distinc-

tive meeting and event experience The Transept, a historic, 202-year-old church in the revitalized historic neighborhood of Over-the-Rhine in Cincinnati, Ohio, has been transformed into a memorable venue for meetings, concerts, receptions and other social events. After a \$4.5 million renovation project, The Transept opened in 2015, and features stained glass, 50-foot vaulted ceilings and a wealth of classic design and architecture with modern amenities. The first-floor public bar is the ideal spot to unwind after a meeting held in one of the venue's rentable event spaces in the basement, first, second and third floors.

Cincinnati is also home to the Rhinegeist Brewery, a microbrewery housed within the walls of a historic and once-abandoned Christian Moerlein bottling facility in Over-the-Rhine. An ideal venue for intimate affairs, executive events and large soirées, this hip gathering place boasts two private event spaces totaling more than 8,000 sf. Groups will love the exposed brick walls, pine floors and open wood rafter ceilings with skylights. Both spaces offer access to the Main Brewery and Rooftop Deck. And, of course up to eight Rhinegeist beers are available on tap for events held in the space.

"Unique venues allow clients to create a space that fits the theme of their meeting as well as the goals and objectives," Geller says. "They lead to more original creative events that fit the client's culture. Clients are looking to give their attendees something they have never seen before — no more stuffy windowless rooms. Attendees are more likely to share on social media if their meeting is hosted in a vacant warehouse with exposed brick versus a stale conference room."

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The Transept, a historic, 202-year-old church in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood of Cincinnati, Ohio, has been transformed into a memorable venue.

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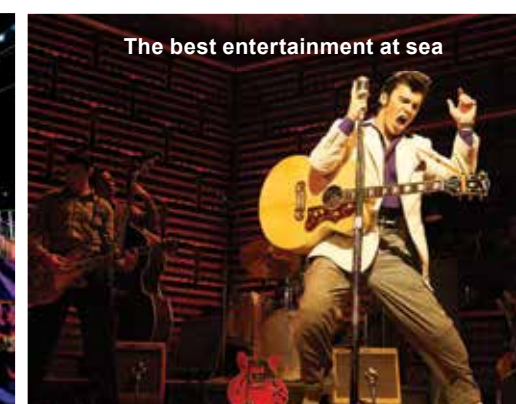
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Winterfell is the backdrop for HBO's "Game of Thrones" — filmed on the grounds of the 18th century Castle Ward, Downpatrick, Northern Ireland.

Attendees Crave Authenticity in International Travel Experiences

When it comes to experiences and interactions, authenticity has become key. In meetings and incentive programs, whether domestically or abroad, attendees want, even demand, authentic experiences that showcase local communities, food, drinks, activities and culture.

It's no longer enough for tourism offices and DMCs to provide the standard tourist experience, however tried and true an activity or attraction may be. Today's travelers want a deeper dive into local culture, even when traveling for business. They want an experience that gives them real insight into a destination, from its history, food and people to its very essence. DMCs and

incentive providers are front and center in the effort to provide exactly that.

Belfast History Lesson and a Taste of Wicklow

Experiential authenticity doesn't necessarily equate to pretty or easy. Some authentic experiences challenge travelers to examine tumultuous periods of history and political conflict, as 100 attendees from a U.S.-based multinational conglomerate found during an incentive program in Ireland.

Michael Dalton, CIS, director of sales with Irish DMC Moloney & Kelly, brought the group to Belfast. There they embarked on a Black Taxi tour of neighborhoods affected by "the Troubles."

By Christine Loomis

"The tour delves into the political past and what life was like for locals on both sides of the conflict and shows how this shaped Belfast to become the vibrant, buzzing city it is today," Dalton says.

In addition, they had a range of experiences that showcased different aspects of the country's culture, past and present. Among them was an offsite dinner in Winterfell Castle, home to HBO's "Game of Thrones." "Everyone got in costume and participated in activities such as archery, and they had their photos taken in the Iron Throne," Dalton notes. "The local destination experience continued with a visit to the queen's residence in Northern Ireland for afternoon tea on



Credits: Tourism Northern Ireland

her very own fine china. On arrival at Hillsborough Castle, the bugler sounded the arrival and guests were treated to a VIP tour where they had the opportunity to peruse family photos of the British Royal Family while enjoying some royal treatment themselves."

And then there was immersion in a more modern aspect of culture. Just outside of Dublin in County Wicklow, known as "the garden of Ireland," the group visited Powerscourt House and spent a day at celebrity chef Catherine Fulvio's Ballyknocken Farm. In addition to being immersed in the postcard-worthy lush green countryside, they experienced local food and music via hands-on experiences.

"Here they learned to make Irish scones and how to play the bodhrán, an Irish drum," notes Dalton. "They participated in an Irish dancing lesson and also learned the art of sheepherding. One of the evening events involved a local farmer's market experience at Powerscourt House. The event was designed as a bespoke Taste of Wicklow experience, complete with artisan food, beverage and local craft producers."

Dalton believes that splitting the program between two locations gave attendees a richer cultural experience. "Showing two cultures within one destination offered unique perspectives to attendees. While Ireland is a somewhat small island compared to any state in North America, we have extensive variety throughout each of the regions. Doing a split program in two locations gave the attendees the opportunity to experience more culture and clearly see the differences between our localities."

The program exposed the incentive group to what Dalton calls "a full immersion of local food, drink, song, dance, history and culture. It provided attendees with a well-rounded destination experience that afforded



Credits: Tourism Northern Ireland



A must-do for visitors to Northern Ireland is Belfast Black Taxi's historical mural tour.

their own passionate stories of life, travel and experiences with others."

In terms of the bottom line, he notes, "For planners it's important to understand that hotel rates include breakfast, Wi-Fi and all taxes and charges. Resort fees and additional taxes or charges do not exist here. This is important when comparing with other cities," Dalton says.

"Also, there are practical financial supports in place for such things as site inspections and FAM trips. You can typically expect support to the level of 2,000 euros toward a site inspection for a program consisting of 50 people or more staying a minimum of three

them the opportunity to learn something new, be it a new talent, taste or even simply uncovering a new hidden gem of knowledge."

That said, Dalton notes, "I firmly believe that in any destination, it's the people and the characters that visitors come across that make the difference.

When guests get to hear the stories of the Black Taxi drivers or



"The tour delves into the political past and what life was like for locals on both sides of the conflict and shows how this shaped Belfast to become the vibrant, buzzing city it is today."

Michael Dalton, CIS, Director of Sales
Moloney & Kelly DMC Ireland, Belfast, Ireland

William from Winterfell Castle or chef Catherine Fulvio, they learn so much. These individuals have enormous passion for their trade, their location and their communities. It gives attendees a sense of fulfillment to learn from these enthusiastic ambassadors and allows them to return home recharged, energized and eager to share

As a DMC, we complete the paperwork as a complimentary service and the money is transferred directly to the meeting planner."

Among the hotels Dalton chose for this group were Culloden Belfast and Powerscourt Hotel.

"Culloden Belfast was a former bishops' palace and the setting is beauti-

ful. Given the locations that attendees were likely to come from, the client wanted to do a split program in and out of Dublin. Belfast was the perfect location being just 90 minutes from Dublin Airport, or as we sometimes call it, Belfast South Airport.

Powerscourt gave the charming countryside element, stunning spacious bedrooms and reduced the airport transfer on the return journey. Both hotels offer unique settings, styles and locations, which was a perfect mix for this client's program," Dalton says.

In fact, the hotels themselves provided part of the cultural immersion. "The Culloden is owned and operated by the Hastings family, who are extremely supportive of local farmers and businesses in the area. For example, every morning at breakfast guests have a little booklet that tells them exactly which orchard the apple juice comes from or which farm supplied the sausages and bacon. And given its location near the oldest working whiskey distillery in the world, guests will always find a bottle of Bushmills whiskey beside the porridge so they can put a little kick in their step each morning."

Dalton points out that Powerscourt Hotel is set on the grounds of the incredible Powerscourt Estate. "The hotel was designed to feature as many local elements as possible, including numerous nods to the locality, estate and Dublin's Georgian architecture. This is evident through the Georgian doorways on guest rooms, hot air balloon chandeliers (a nod to the filming of the Count of Monte Cristo in the estate) and the stunning gardens and views from the property."

While approximately 50 percent of the attendees had been to Ireland previously, Dalton says that almost none had been to Northern Ireland and thus were very excited for the new experience. "It exceeded all expectations and the meeting planner was thrilled with the reaction from the attendees. With quite a number of people having

visited Ireland before, the key here was presenting something unique that they had not seen. The major comment that came out from attendees was, 'Wow I didn't know this was here. We never knew about this last time.'"

By infusing culture, art and creativity into the experience in both destinations, Dalton says it enhanced the attendees' overall experience. And he believes that DMCs are best able to provide the knowledge, expertise and local characters that groups want and that planners probably would not be able to find on their own.

"Don't ever be afraid," he says, "to push the boundaries and embrace fusion between two unrelated industries or activities to create a one-off option that will surprise and delight."

Indigenous Interactions in the Outback

Catherine Jones, CMP, CMM, CITE, MA, MBA, owner of The Edventive Group, a custom travel consultancy focused on innovative programs, recently took 46 medical profession-



"Accor Hotels has invested heavily in the Uluru area and runs a training program for indigenous peoples in their hotels."

Catherine Jones, CMP, CMM, CITE, MA, MBA, Owner
The Edventive Group, Dallas, TX

als to Australia with a goal of giving them not only an authentic cultural experience, but specifically, an authentic dive into Australia's medical culture and community.

Jones says Australia was "an amazing fit for this group" thanks in part to adequate airlift, overall cost and quality of lodging. But that was just the start.

"For many Americans, Australia represents the trip of a lifetime. The opportunity to explore the country's culture, abundance of natural riches, exotic animals and the opportunity to explore the training of its medical professionals were lures for the client," Jones says. "The examination of the training



The Royal Flying Doctor Service provides medical care in the remote Australian Outback.

of professionals as well as the delivery of medical care, especially in remote areas, were of interest."

The group got to interact with and learn from members of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS), which provides medical care in the Outback.

"The RFDS faces many of the same challenges that medical providers face in states with rural populations such as Texas," Jones says. "As is the case at

home in similar areas, the RFDS often relies on nurse practitioners rather than doctors to shoulder some of the burden of care in sparsely populated areas, and this was of particular interest to this group. To assess formal training, the group benefited from a symposium and tour that we arranged at the University of Sydney. Additionally, during our time in Cairns, we toured the Daintree forest with an aboriginal guide and learned about some of the complementary medical treatments long used by aboriginal people."

The group also experienced some of the country's non-medical attractions. "While in Uluru, we participated in ac-



The Field of Light Uluru installation by artist Bruce Munro is at Ayers Rock Resort through 2020. The 50,000 lights cover more than seven football fields.

tivities such as the Field of Light art installation and a sunrise tour of Uluru, as well as a walking tour of Katja Juta," Jones notes. "And we spent time with naturalists and oceanographers on our day at the Great Barrier Reef."

This client has a long history of cultural immersion trips, Jones says, "And in fact the point is cultural immersion. The official description of this program is to 'focus on the development of the medical professional in the role of citizen and professional in a global society.'"

To that end, the group chose the Desert Gardens Hotel at Ayers Rock Resort because it's a training hotel for the Accor brand. "Accor Hotels has invested heavily in the Uluru area and runs a training program for indigenous peoples in their hotels," Jones says.

Staying there gave the group special opportunities for interaction with, and provided insight into, that indigenous culture. "Being located in Uluru in a hotel staffed mostly by indigenous people offers an amazing experience," Jones says.

"With four official languages, modern contemporary sites, medieval villages, lakes, mountains, glaciers and palm trees, we can truly identify ourselves as diverse."

Renato Grieco, Director of Sales
Ovation Switzerland, Satigny-Geneva, Switzerland

She calls Australia a spectacular location for meetings, conferences and incentives. "The opportunities for cultural deep dives abound.

From the exploration of aboriginal culture to the opportunity to explore the country's rich wildlife, Australia is unmatched. The country's DMCs are amazing and Tourism Australia has proven to be an invaluable partner for the various programs that I have planned over the years."

As different as Australia may be, the similarities to areas of the United States and to populations served by medical professionals are readily apparent, and that was a huge benefit to this group. "The feedback from this experience was amazing," Jones says. "For this group, the similarities in providing health care to remote areas is an issue that they face on a daily basis. The exploration of indigenous cultures was beneficial as many of the topics that were discussed were similar to providing health care to our Native American populations."

Jones says the key for planners to providing a meaningful experience for groups is to first understand your client's goals and aims for their program. "Once you have a deep understanding, you are able to work to construct a truly meaningful experience for your groups, one that is not superficial."

Swiss Splendor

Sometimes, it's the internal workings of the country itself that give groups opportunities for cultural immersion. Switzerland's famously punctual and well-integrated transportation system isn't just a means to get from one place to another. It's integral to the fabric of Swiss society as well as a portal to the heart and soul of Swiss culture, which in large part is defined by the nation's eclectic geography. There are French, German and Italian regions, and mountains, lakes and urban landscapes — all defined by the singular cultures within them and connected by an extraordinary transportation system.

Renato Grieco, director of sales with Ovation, a DMC, recently worked with a group of 100 from a company for its annual meeting. "A good incentive in Switzerland is successful when a com-



The Hotel Royal Savoy in Lausanne, Switzerland, near the shores of Lake Geneva.

bination of mountain and lake resorts is selected, such as Lucerne and Interlaken or Zurich and Zermatt or Gstaad and the Lake Geneva Region," he says.

"Accommodation opportunities in Switzerland are huge — maybe not in terms of hotel size, but definitely in terms of choice," he notes. "You can go from historical and luxurious properties to charming, family-owned pensions. There is a solution for everyone. Distances from major international airports such as Basel, Geneva and Zurich are quite short, and a transfer in Switzerland is a full-discovery experience."

Authentic culture, he adds, is simply a given. "Let's be realistic. It is unlikely an incentive will take place in Switzerland without infusing a local Swiss touch into the program. Sometimes simple things such as a chocolate workshop or a tasting cheese fondue dinner or a visit to a local winemaker can create a rich cultural experience. For this specific client, aspects that were important were innovation and technology, and Switzerland is rich in opportunities when it comes to those areas."

Grieco believes that cultural immersion elevates a program and Switzerland is easily able to offer that. Guests visiting Switzerland, he says, want to experience what Switzerland is known for, starting with the travel system, which, among other things, allows



Credits: Ovation Switzerland

even less experienced hikers to explore iconic mountains — think of the great rail experiences, for example, such as the Bernina Express, Jungfrauoch and Glacier Express.

"With four official languages, modern contemporary sites, medieval villages, lakes, mountains, glaciers and palm trees, we can truly identify ourselves as diverse. Another aspect of the country is its well-known neutrality, which also translates to safety. Even though the Swiss pride themselves as truly international," Grieco says, "with over 30 percent of its residents being foreign, the nation itself is neutral and has always been neutral."

This group was based at The Hotel Royal Savoy in Lausanne. "The Royal Savoy is a historic hotel in Lausanne, featuring an impressive, magnificent building that has been totally restored and brought to its initial splendor," Grieco says. "And Switzerland is known for its legendary hospitality legacy. If you combine those two ingredients, you are obtaining a genuine, unique and high-end experience."

Additionally, he adds, it offers

a "high level of services, is the perfect size and on top of all is good value for money."

Beyond the hotel and transportation specifics, attendees can access cultural immersion in multiple ways, including through activities such as golf on a glacier, discovering how to blow into the traditional massive Alphorn, yodel instruction and enjoying a farewell dinner in a medieval castle on the shores of Lake Geneva.

Perhaps most important, groups comprised of a diverse membership will quickly understand and embrace the inherent culture in Switzerland defined by respect for nature, respect for traditions and legacy and respect for diversity itself.

To planners considering Switzerland, Grieco says, "Try to step into a process where you can be a little bit flexible with dates. There can be strong differences in cost if you have

the ability to move the event a few days. Also, please be aware that certain cities in Switzerland offer free local public transportation cards when you are staying in a hotel there. This creates enormous economic benefits for group leisure time or activities. And remember that transportation in Switzerland is an experience; it is not, as in most destinations, just a means to go from point A to point B. Traveling by panoramic express, cable car or cogwheel train provides a cultural experience rather than simply a functional need."

Planners looking for cultural immersion for their groups can find it across the world. But it does take a bit more time and effort to provide the kind of cultural experience that truly elevates an experience and provides true insight into a country and its people.

There are quick options to be sure, such as tasting local food and local drink. But today's attendees want more than that. The good news is that with the help of local tourism offices and DMCs, it's easy to find those deeper, more meaningful experiences. **C&IT**

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Destination



Panoramic view of the Quebec City skyline.

Whether it's Vancouver's mountain-ringed harbor, Calgary's cowboy culture, Montreal's music and food-scape, Quebec City's historically French setting or the metropolis of Toronto and all that the country's largest city entails, Canada is a treasure trove of destinations.

So varied, so vast, so extraordinary is this region to our north that in reality the biggest problem for planners may not be where to go and what to see, but rather where not to go and what not to see, for it's chock full of meeting appeal.

Makeup Meetings

"Canada is important to our brand because it began in Toronto and we always try to stay connected to our roots," says Jennifer Rondinelli, director of meeting planning with MAC Cosmetics, Global Education. An acronym for Makeup, Art and Cosmetics, MAC was founded in 1984 by marketer Frank Angelo and Frank Toskan, a photographer and makeup artist. The company's goal was to meet the cosmetic needs of the contemporary woman. Three-plus decades later MAC is a top global makeup brand.

Having conducted MAC's June 2017 Education Leadership Meeting and its March 2016 Trainer Academy in Toronto (both consisting of 100 company leaders from North America, Asia, Europe, U.K., Ireland and Latin America), Rondinelli describes

the events: "Our meetings are focused on training initiatives and strategy, artistry and seasonal makeup collections and collaborations."

Having often partnered with The Ritz-Carlton Toronto, Four Seasons Hotel and Residences Toronto and Park Hyatt Toronto, luxury is the name of MAC's meetings game.

Home to the largest convention center in Canada, Toronto's facility also ranks among the top 10 largest continuous-space convention centers in North America. Its award-winning Metro Toronto Convention Centre — featuring 442,000 sf of exhibit space, 77 meeting rooms, multi-purpose ballrooms and a theater — has added 11,000 sf of dedicated meeting space.

Toronto also has two airports serving 200 global destinations in 55 countries. "In choosing a destination we look for easy airlift and city center locations," explains Rondinelli. "Our main destinations are Miami, Orlando, San Francisco and Los Angeles, in

addition to Toronto."

However, another of the cosmetic company's Canadian destinations is Vancouver, site of the January 2017 MAC Global Sales and Training Meeting for 250 attendees from North America, Asia and Latin America. With The Fairmont Waterfront as the home base, general sessions were conveniently only steps from the Vancouver Convention Centre.

O Canada!

From Culture to Cowboys, this
Welcoming and Diverse Land
Beckons U.S. Planners

By Cynthia Dial

Gearing up for its busiest convention year to date, Vancouver will welcome 33 citywide conventions and events in 2018 — in no small part due to its convention center's appeal. Its iconic West building has been awarded the LEED Platinum certification, recognizing its living roof and seawater heating and cooling system. Coupled with its 2010 Platinum certification for new construction, the center is the world's first double LEED Platinum convention center. Together the West and East buildings have 466,500 sf of function space.

"The meeting facility at the Vancouver Convention Centre was fantastic. We used the main room on the ground floor that offered great views of the water and mountains. The entire team at the convention center was helpful, organized and professional," says Rondinelli.

"We typically have an evening event, but we don't plan anything else so that our attendees can explore the cities on their own," says the planner of this city that offers such uncommon choices as floatplane tours to whale watch or to attend a Canucks NHL ice hockey game, complete with exclusive access, high-end dining and meet and greets with the players.

To promote MAC's meetings the company uses a meeting website, most recently Attendease (which is based out of Vancouver). The planner explains that they use surveys, Q&A and polling features in the app to measure results.

"Vancouver was always a destination on our radar and I think that most attendees have never been to the city, so it was a new experience, destination and culture," Rondinelli says of Canada's westernmost big city.

Another Vancouver fan is Jeff Richards, CMP, vice president of Gavel International (a North American meeting and incentive company), who planned the February 11–15, 2018, Regional Leadership Conference for 275 attendees of a global manufac-

turing firm. Its purpose: to align the global teams on strategy, vision and execution moving into 2018.

Vancouver and the JW Marriott Parq Vancouver (one of two luxury and lifestyle hotels under one roof) were a match for a multitude of reasons. "Vancouver was selected, in part, due to its geography and available lift from global destinations. In addition, the gain on currency was also an influencing factor." With respect to the recently debuted hotel in a city of 13,000 downtown hotel rooms, the Gavel executive explains: "Being a new property and having all of the function space on one level



Kendra VanVelzor, Event Content Specialist/Events Team
Kumon North America Inc., Teaneck, NJ

were attractive to my client. In addition, the proximity to many restaurants and shops — all within walkable distance — was a deciding factor."

Located in the heart of the city's energetic entertainment district, dine-arounds took place one evening featuring 10 restaurants — including such notables as Blue Water Café, Chamber and Hawksworth.

Conceived by two-time James Beard Award nominee Elizabeth Blau, Parq Vancouver restaurants and lounges number eight. "The banquet staff did an excellent job, especially for a

"We didn't know much about (Calgary) before visiting but found that it really does have a lot to offer — great food, beautiful nature and hospitable people."



Credit: Calgary Stampede

At the annual Calgary Stampede, don your white cowboy hat and enjoy the Chuckwagon races.

new opening,” adds Richards of the banquet space which is led by JW Marriott Parq Vancouver. “The presentation was unique, and the team took the time to make sure each event was impactful. The quality of the food was also excellent.”

The planner has accolades for the typically behind-the-scenes staff. “The internal AV team supported the multiple breakouts throughout the week. They were professional, responsive and genuinely wanted to partner and ensure a successful event. This is not always the case with internal AV providers.”

Aside from its being new and centrally located, the hotel and its sister property, the Douglas, an Autograph Collection Hotel, offers a 30,000-sf rooftop park, gaming space, 62,000 sf of meeting and event space (including the city’s largest hotel ballroom), 329 rooms (including 188 at the Douglas). And, if that weren’t enough, the hotel is also being built to apply for LEED Gold certification — sure to appeal to those planning green meetings.

How does Gavel’s Richards rate the meeting facilities of Canada’s first JW Marriott? “It’s a new hotel, hard not to give it five out of five.”

Have an Open Mind

“Come to Calgary with an open mind,” says Kendra VanVelzor, event content specialist/events team of Kumon North America Inc., a network of children’s learning centers, which for the first time is hosting its annual KNA Instructors Conference for 1,200 Kumon franchisees July 19 – 21, 2018 in Alberta’s best-known town. “We didn’t know much about the location before visiting but found that it really does have a lot to offer — great food, beautiful nature and hospitable people.”

A bit of background. Kumon North America has franchisees of children’s learning centers from the U.S., Canada and Mexico, with its conference rotating among the three countries. “We had already been to Toronto and Vancouver. Calgary offers a walkable downtown area, nearby natural beauty and good value.” Though the group typically holds its conference in a single hotel, the Calgary conference is large enough to use a variety of downtown hotels — Hyatt Regency Calgary, Calgary Marriott Down-

town Hotel, Fairmont Palliser, Delta Hotels by Marriott Calgary Downtown and Hotel Arts — all within walking distance of the Telus Convention Centre and all offering a variety of price points.

Piggybacking on the Calgary Stampede (ending mere days before Kumon’s arrival), several elements will be incorporated into the conference — a mechanical bull for photo ops, a private rodeo and dancing at the Agrium Centre in Stampede Park, visits from a Stampede queen and princess to interact with guests and white hats for everyone. Initial promotion of Calgary began when the Kumon team integrated the city’s prestigious white hat ceremony into the closing of its 2017 general session.

For VanVelzor, however, the icing on the Calgary cake may have been experienced earlier on. “During site visits all the Meetings Calgary staff (Marlise Stewart, Mike Miller and Jennifer Principalli) were excited to take us around and show off the city they love.”

Here are some highlights of Canada’s most popular cities.

Toronto Is a Tony Town

Frequently compared to New York City (it’s Canada’s largest city and North America’s fourth largest city behind Mexico City, New York and Los Angeles), Toronto has it all — from luxury lodging to live theater to one-of-a-kind attractions — and is within a 90-minute flight for more than half the U.S. population.

Known for its dramatic diversity, Toronto has been called the world’s most global city, with 50 percent of its population born outside the country and approximately 130 languages spoken — all of which is reflected in its neighborhoods and F&B offerings.

“The presentation (at JW Marriott Parq Vancouver) was unique, and... each event was impactful. The quality of the food was also excellent.”

Jeff Richards, CMP, Vice President
Gavel International, Vernon Hills, IL

New on the Toronto scene is the reopening of the Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto Canada. A 55,000-sf area located in a heritage-designated building formerly known as the Tower Automotive Building, it covers five floors and is five times larger than its former Queen West location.

Additional news for this city of 36,000 hotel rooms in more than 170 hotels include Kimpton’s soon-to-open 13-story, 189-guest room hotel in 2018 (becoming Toronto’s first of the brand) and the debut of Canada’s first Canopy by Hilton. New York’s Library Hotel Collection has opened the 30-story, 406-room Hotel X. The only hotel on Toronto’s Exhibition Grounds adjacent to the Beanfield Centre, this newest addition to the Library Hotel Collection features panoramic views from its rooftop Falcon SkyBar, as well as 83,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space. Undergoing an extensive transformation is the historic Fairmont Royal York (where the British Royals stay when in town), which is capable of hosting meetings and

Out of the Boardroom and Onto the Rails

Imagine a corporate meeting beginning just as an animal sighting is announced. “Bear on the right!” ripples through the train — more specifically the Rocky Mountaineer — creating an infectious excitement.

A luxurious rail-journey operating between Vancouver on Canada’s west coast and Jasper or Banff/Lake Louise, both snugly ensconced within the Canadian Rockies, this is a two-day opportunity for groups looking to host indoor meetings surrounded by an extraordinary and ever-changing outdoor setting.

This on-the-rails venue offers more options than dramatic panoramas. A buyout of a custom-designed Rocky Mountaineer SilverLeaf or GoldLeaf

dome car (think premium versus premium-plus) includes transfers, culinary service and gratuities. Another possibility is the exclusive use of a lounge car equipped with presentation screens, a large meeting table and lounge-style couches — a flexible setting for the perfect meeting environment or as a purely social space.

Two words best describe what can be next for an out-of-the-box-thinking planner in a country whose corporate and incentive programs annually generated more than 1 million travelers and 1 billion dollars in revenue:

All aboard!

— CD

Rocky Mountaineer provides spectacular scenery as the backdrop to an intimate meeting.



Credit: Rocky Mountaineer

events for 1,670 guests. In late 2018 the luxury-boutique Adelaide Hotel Toronto will become Canada’s first St. Regis Hotel, a designated AAA Five-Diamond property.

Toronto has been designated a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts and its attractions are many — from Casa Loma, a historic mansion and garden in midtown Toronto, to CN Tower soaring above the skyline. And in theater arts, the Broadway-acclaimed “Come From Away” (a show about a small Newfoundland town and its role in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, tragedy) has returned to the Royal Alexandra Theatre through September 2.

Montreal’s Many Offerings

The city is a collection of communities begging to be explored — dish by dish and festival after festival. So, whether it’s enjoying poutine, bagels or smoked beef (it’s known for these foods) during a walking tour, a fine-dining meal at a chef’s table, a dine-around through its ethnic neighborhoods or perhaps swaying to the music of Chris Botti during the Jazz Festival (one of more than 100 annual festivals), there’s no shortage of entertainment.



Credit: Tourism Toronto

Metro Toronto Convention Centre, North Building, features 442,000 sf of exhibit space.

New-to-the-scene hotels in 2018 and beyond are Hotel Monville (steps from the Palais des congrès); AC Marriott Hotel Montréal Downtown (the first on Canadian soil); Four Seasons Montréal Hotel, a \$400 million project (2019); Hotel Birks, a 120-room luxury lifestyle property with a high-end boutique and bistro and Humaniti Hotel Montréal, a four-star, 193-room hotel (2020).

Complementing the hotelscape are such new restaurants as Iberica (a stylish, trendy downtown Spanish restaurant), Île Flotante (serves up a new high-end tasting menu in Mile End) and Pastel Rita (also located in Mile End).

Along with an assortment of activities, at the tiptop of the list is Old Montreal’s 196-foot-high Montréal Observation Wheel (aka, ferris wheel), featuring views of the St. Lawrence River and the city. Open daily, it is always comfortable — air-conditioned cabins in summer and heated ones in winter. In celebration of Montreal’s 375th anniversary, Aura is a luminous experience at Montreal’s Notre-Dame Basilica (the architecturally spectacular church setting of the state funeral of former prime minister Pierre Trudeau and the wedding of Celine Dion and Rene Angelil). Old Montreal’s Cité-Mémoire presents a loosely based history of the city through a cast of characters, music and images. And among popular group activities are jet boating, rafting, cruising, even surfing the St. Lawrence River, as well as learning to play hockey or curling with a local coach.

Calgary’s White-hat Welcome

If you travel to this Alberta city during its annual Calgary Stampede, you’ll be greeted by a sea of locals in white cowboy hats. And should you visit any other time of the year, your welcome will be equally as warm.

Offering 14,000 guest rooms in more than 80 hotels (with 4,000 rooms in the downtown core), possibilities range from such brands as Starwood, Marriott and Hilton to stylish boutique hotels in Calgary’s most chic neighborhoods. Soon adding 2,000 more guest rooms to its inventory are a variety of new

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Beautiful Québec City | Photo: Emmanuel Coveney

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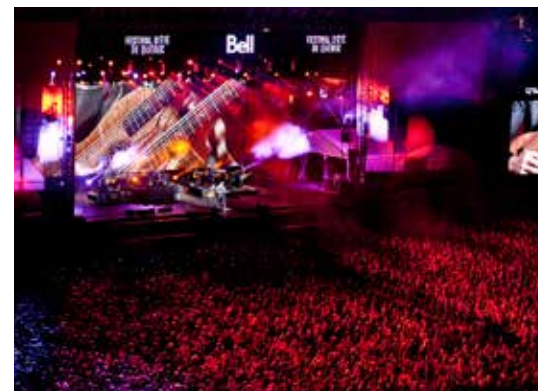
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Québec, accessible via major U.S. cities | Photo: Québec City Business Destination



Cheers at Pot de Vin Restaurant | Photo: Jeff Frenette



Festival d'été de Québec, Bell scene | Photo: Philippe Renaud



Québec City Convention Centre | Photo: Emmanuel Coveney

SPOTLIGHT ON QUÉBEC CITY

Founded 400 years ago, Québec City is the cradle of French civilization in North America. With its European old-world charm and modern-day flair, Québec City features a wide variety of chain and boutique hotels that offer an entire spectrum of state-of-the-art facilities. The renowned Québec City Convention Centre is centrally located in the heart of the city.

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properties including ALT Hotel. With views of the Bow River and the downtown skyline, it's scheduled to open August 2018.

The city's two convention centers, the Calgary Telus Convention Centre (122,000 sf of meeting space, 36 breakout rooms and connected to three four-star hotels) and BMO Centre at Stampede Park (500,000 sf of versatile event space and 25 breakout rooms), are both located downtown.

On the F&B scene, five breweries are opening in a six-block radius and an assortment of restaurants, from Gringo Street's Latin street food to Donna Mac, an eatery focusing on locally grown produce — adding to the city's more than 200 downtown spots.

Calgary Tower celebrates its 50th anniversary this year with an assortment of functions, and scheduled to open November

"Canada is important to our brand because it began in Toronto and we always try to stay connected to our roots."

Jennifer Rondinelli, Director of Meeting Planning
MAC Cosmetics, Global Education, New York, NY

2018, is Calgary New Central Library. Noted as one of *Architectural Digest* magazine's "12 Most Anticipated Buildings of 2018," it will feature 30 free meeting spaces, recording studios and indoor and outdoor performance spaces.

Quebec City Is North America's Paris

Though situated 500 miles east of Toronto and almost 3,300 miles west of Paris, the 3,475-square-mile municipality is decidedly French. This is a city with window boxes overflowing with flowers, cafés serving crepes and croissants and cobblestone streets everywhere. As the only walled city north of Mexico and the cradle of French civilization in North America, a visit here equates to a lesson in living history.

Like a queen on her throne, Fairmont Le Château Frontenac presides over the city. Her regal amenities have attracted such



An evening perspective of Notre-Dame Basilica in old town Montreal.

luminaries as Queen Elizabeth and Paul McCartney, as well as many a group. But beyond this recently renovated legend, which can host an intimate meeting of 12 and a major conference for 700, is an assortment of hotels, including Delta Hotels Québec, Hilton Québec and Hotel Château Laurier Québec.

Among its equally exceptional venues are Le Parlementaire, an elegant setting for black-tie events and Voltigeurs de Québec Armoury, the oldest Francophone regiment in Canada. Situated between the iconic Plains of Abraham and Grande Allée, it can host up to 1,300. An equally cool selection, is the Hôtel de Glace (Ice Hotel) entirely made of ice and snow, making it the perfect setting for a unique winter event. Also available are guided tours, followed by cocktails in the ice bar (served in carved ice glasses, of course).

Vancouver's Variety

Located harborside, bordered by a mountain range and punctuated with skyscrapers, the setting is known for its serenity but beneath this tranquility are superlatives that beckon the planner and best define this Canadian metropolis.

In a city offering 13,000 downtown hotel rooms, the city's historic Fairmont Hotel Vancouver (557 rooms) which is called the "Castle in the City" updated its Fourteenth Floor Heritage Suites. Commemorating the city's royal visit by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth and the royal couple's hotel stay during its 1939 grand opening, the recently-revealed luxurious lodgings are reflective of this era's monarchy.

Among the destination's made-in-Vancouver teambuilding activities are such out-of-the-norm options as learning the art of axe throwing from lumberjacks atop Grouse Mountain, arriving by boat to have a scavenger hunt at Sewell's Marina within the Howe Sound fjord (home to whales, seals and sea birds) and participating in a shoreline cleanup sponsored by the Vancouver Aquarium (also fulfilling a CSR goal).

With Vancouver's International Airport's recognition as the continent's best airport for eight consecutive years — serving 56 airlines to 125 non-stop destinations and with 78 daily U.S. flights — it's little surprise Vancouver was named 2017's No. 1 Destination for a Business Meeting in North America, according to STR's Destination MAP (Meeting Assessment Program).

From Vancouver to Quebec City, there are a world of choices for planners to consider in this second largest country on the planet that is second to none in its power to impress. **C&IT**



Aerial view of Vancouver Convention Centre. Vancouver was named 2017's No. 1 Destination for a Business Meeting in North America.

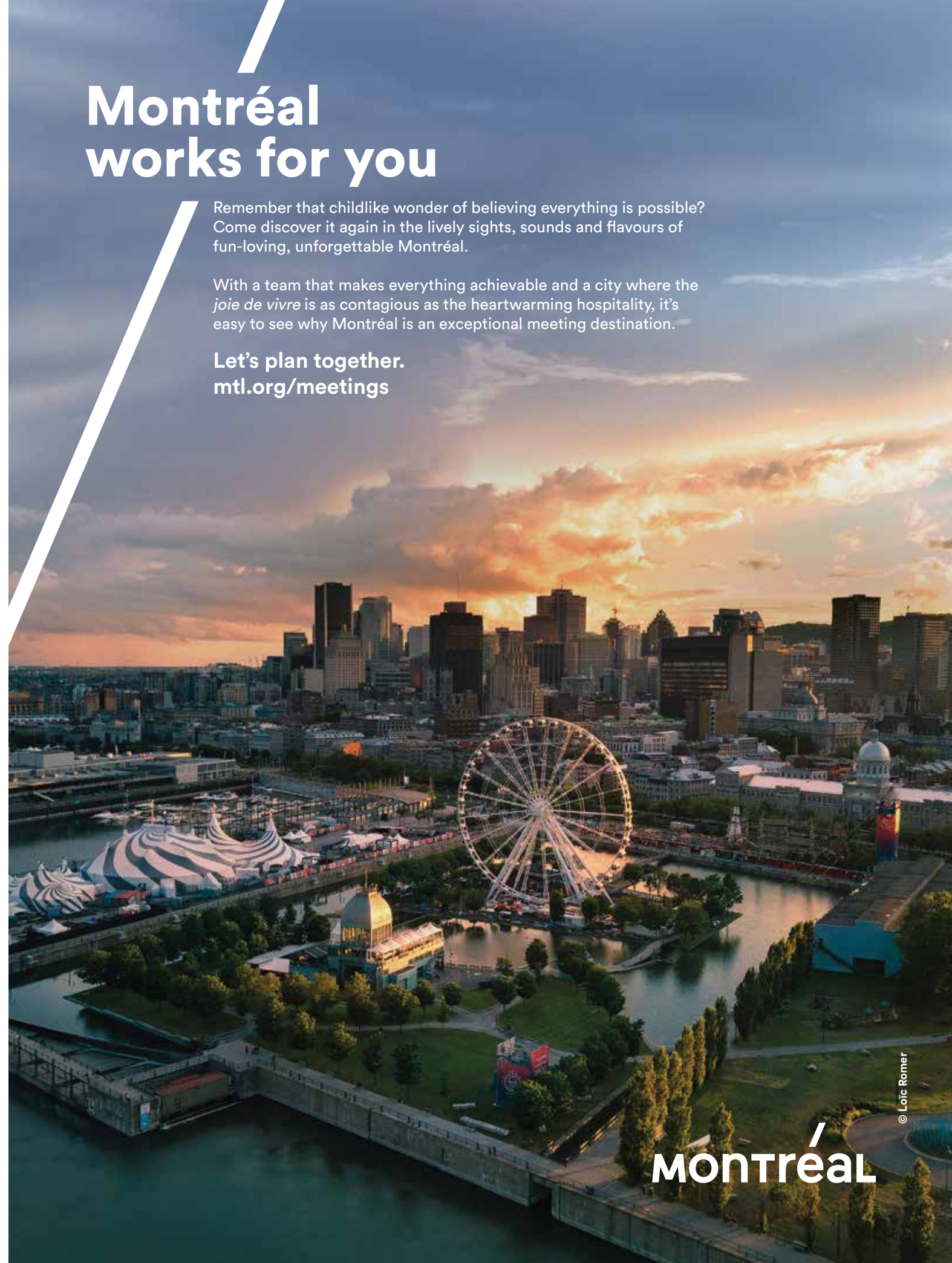
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Montréal

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Destination

Orlando

Record-breaking Visitation and World-class Meetings Infrastructure Are a Powerful Draw

A colorful pool deck event at Rosen Centre Hotel, which also has 150,000 sf of indoor meeting space.

Orlando is known for its world-class theme parks, but for corporate and incentive meeting planners, Orlando also means world-class meetings infrastructure and services guaranteed to draw burgeoning numbers of international attendees. In fact, according to *Business Review USA* and Visit Orlando, 83 percent of meeting professionals say attendance spikes when meetings rotate to Orlando. Visit Orlando reports that among the

By Maura Keller

record 72 million annual visitors to Orlando recorded in 2017, Orlando's Orange County Convention Center welcomed an unprecedented 1.53 million attendees.

Sold on Personalized Service

When Christine Gilmore, meeting planner and vice president of training at Bell Partners Inc. was planning to teach a daylong training session in April 2018, she chose Orlando

as the destination for attendees. Specifically she selected DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld to host the event. "The hotel is really nicely renovated," Gilmore says. "They have a beautiful meeting space and outdoor space. It is a great balance of the functional part of having a meeting and a relaxing atmosphere while you almost feel like you are on vacation."

The location of DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando means guests can enjoy staying in the Downtown Disney Resort

Area. The facility's strong reputation for highly personalized service makes the hotel attractive to meeting planners, and is what keeps bringing them back. Being an official Walt Disney World hotel, they can offer access to private events in the Disney parks, teambuilding, character greetings and entertainment onsite and much more.

The team at Bell Partners was so pleased with the attention to detail and overall collaborative nature of the staff at the



Credit: DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld

DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld recently added the new outdoor Palm Promenade with covered pavilion.

DoubleTree, that they have booked the company's upcoming annual leadership conference, with more than 500 attendees expected, at the hotel.

"They are always very responsive and have the attitude of, 'the answer is yes. What is the question?'"

Gilmore is not alone in her selectivity as it relates to Orlando. More and more meeting and event planners are turning to Orlando as a preeminent meeting location, and for meeting attendees, Orlando leaves nothing to be desired.

Orlando leads the pack for a variety of reasons, according to Visit Orlando, including affordability, accessibility, quality and variety of facilities, alongside the unforgettable experiences attendees enjoy.

Jane Scaletta, general manager at AlliedPRA Orlando, notes that the city never stops changing.

"One of the main reasons planners choose Orlando is because they can return with a program year after year and there is always something new and exciting to offer," Scaletta says. What's more, Orlando is the perfect fit for any meeting, incentive, convention or event because of the non-stop air travel from over 100 cities into Orlando, along with the near perfect weather of 65-75 degrees during the winter months,

and the wide variety of offsite venues and restaurant choices at affordable prices. And better yet, Orlando is still considerably cost-effective compared to other large cities of this size.

According to Scaletta, Orlando has the second largest convention center and offers the second highest number of hotel rooms in the country.

"Also due to the location, we were able to really integrate some of our world-class theme park elements and entertainment that make Orlando so special," Scaletta says.

What most people may not know is that Orlando hosts 40 percent of the HCEA (Healthcare Convention & Exhibitors Association) top 50 largest medical meetings and is quickly being known as the medical meetings hub of America.

"While we have the large convention center and lots of hotels rooms, we also have intimate and boutique hotels to handle smaller meetings," Scaletta says. "We have restaurants that cater to smaller groups with private dining rooms, like



"(The hotel staff) are always very responsive and have the attitude of, 'the answer is yes. What is the question?'"

Christine Gilmore, V.P. Training
Bell Partners Inc., Greensboro, NC



Ceviche downtown and Mango's Tropical Café, Tapa Toro, Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House and Café Tu Tu Tango on International Drive, and Urbain 40 and Rocco's Tacos in (the) Dr. Phillips area."

New and Renewed

As a constantly evolving destination, Orlando entices meeting and event attendees to return time and again.

For instance, Disney Springs has added intelligent parking garages, along with new shops and restaurants. One of



Rosen Shingle Creek's Shingle Creek Golf Club has redesigned its 18-hole championship golf course, courtesy of Arnold Palmer Design Company. (Right) Rosen Plaza Hotel, which is connected to the Orange County Convention Center, features 60,000 sf of meeting space.



Credits: Rosen Hotels & Resorts

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Credit: Caribe Royale Orlando

The Grand Sierra Ballroom's prefunction space at Caribe Royale.

Scaletta's favorites is the newly opened 1920s-era The Edison, which exudes an "industrial Gothic" feel. Also the Wine Bar George is expected to be popular with more than 100 selections of wine by the bottle.

"With regards to hotels, Orlando is growing with many new hotels being built," Scaletta says. The new Margaritaville is opening along with a new dining and entertainment district and 12-acre water park. What's more, in August, Universal Orlando Resort is opening Aventura Hotel at Universal with a 16-story glass tower of 600 guest rooms and the first-ever rooftop bar and grill in Universal, Bar 17 Bistro.

DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld recently unveiled new state-of-the-art event spaces and services. Located at SeaWorld Orlando, the resort renovated guest rooms and public areas, and added a wealth of welcoming outdoor lawn spaces to enjoy Orlando's beautiful weather. The hotel features 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space, which includes three conference centers each with their own ballrooms. The recent renovations resulted in the new 20,000-sf Majestic Ballroom, and the new outdoor Palm Promenade,



The new Grove Resort & Spa Orlando recently opened the Surfari Water Park.

events. For instance, Rosen Shingle Creek boasts 99 breakout rooms of all sizes.

According to Leslie Menichini, vice president, sales and marketing, Rosen Hotels & Resorts, "We can accommodate from the most intimate group of 10 to more than 9,000 in our 95,000-sf column-free Gatlin Ballroom. Being independently owned, we have the freedom to work with a planner to create the most unique experiences while keeping budget constraints in mind. We're always up for a challenge," she says.

Rosen Hotels & Resorts recently completed an ultramodern upgrade of Rosen Centre, including all of its 1,334 guest rooms and suites. Rosen Plaza, which is connected to the newly renovated Orange County Convention Center, also recently completed refurbishments of all 800 guest rooms and suites, and Rosen Shingle Creek recently refreshed its 1,501 guest rooms and the grand lobby with contemporary furnishings. The Shingle Creek Golf Club now features a newly redesigned championship course by Arnold Palmer Design Company. All three hotels recently have installed Sonifi Solutions in-room

entertainment, which includes interactive TV options and streaming via Staycast. The system also will provide a new group messaging system, allowing planners to send mass messages, photos and video to their entire room block.

Space is also top of mind for planners who select the all-suite Caribe Royale Orlando, which features 29 breakout rooms, the 40,000-sf Grand Sierra Ballroom and the additional 26,000-sf Caribbean Ballroom within its Grand Caribe Convention Center. The resort's standard suites are perfect residences for attendees, and the fully outfitted villas, located near the conference center, can provide extra meeting space as needed. And the facility's new Island Spa, two-story fitness center and paved running and bike trail will appeal to those looking

for a break from other activities. And while Caribe Royale Orlando offers flexible meeting space, the same can be said for The Grove Resort & Spa Orlando, which offers indoor and outdoor meeting venues for groups of up to 125 people. Set on Lake Austin, amid a portion of Central Florida's conservation grounds, the resort is

a sanctuary from the boisterous pace of the theme park areas. Recently, The Grove Resort & Spa Orlando enhanced its family-centric appeal by opening its Surfari Water Park, which features waterslides, a winding lazy river and a dual-rider surf simulator. Perfect for meeting attendees who bring their families, Surfari Water Park is set on its own parcel of the 106-acre resort, separate from The Grove's three existing swimming pools.

Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek also embraces the natural beauty of the surrounding area. Situated on 482 acres of nature preserve, the resort-style hotel boasts nearly 132,000 sf of flexible meeting and function space, including four ballrooms and 44 high-tech breakout rooms. Planners also can take advantage of stunning and unique outdoor venues including a pavilion with sweeping views of waterways and the golf course. When it's time to take a break from work and enjoy some play time, Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek offers a relaxing lazy river, glorious spa and Rees Jones-designed championship golf course.

Nearby, Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace features 108,000 sf of modern event space. The newly renovated property offers state-of-the-art technology and is a mere 10 minutes from the Orange County Convention Center. In addition, the resort features the Disney Institute, which allows meeting planners to access programs, speakers and behind-the-scenes tours. What's more, a meeting's entertainment can be significantly enhanced with the available stage shows and character appearances.

Space, Space and More Space

Considered one of the largest meeting properties in the Orlando area, the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate recently underwent a \$40 million expansion, which added 100,000 sf of event lawn and conference center space at the Osceola Conference Center. The 862-room resort now offers a total of 248,111 sf of indoor-outdoor meeting and event space. The new Grand Salon Ballroom, designed particularly for galas and special events, boasts a new porté cochere for



The Loews Meeting Complex connects the meeting space at Loews Royal Pacific Resort (above) and Loews Sapphire Falls Resort.



New event terrace at Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate.

private arrivals, an expansive new ballroom, and a delightful terrace with a fireplace, promenade, patio space, event gardens and grand event lawn.

The resort's self-automated business center means that meeting professionals and attendees can have access 24 hours a day.

And in this era of "doing good and giving back," to help companies further their philanthropic and sustainable giving initiatives, Omni is working to end hunger in America by contributing one meal per actualized reservation, allowing companies to give back for each attendee who stays at the resort.

When not attending a work or meeting event, attendees can enjoy the resort's 15 acres of pools, including the newly expanded pool deck and recreational space, 36 holes of championship golf and Orlando's only resort wave pool, lazy river and nine restaurants.

Being connected to the country's second-largest convention center makes Hyatt Regency Orlando a perfect locale to work some and play some. Not only can attendees move seamlessly from the resort's state-of-the-art Orlando convention space to the Orange County Convention Center via a skywalk, but the hotel features more than 315,000 sf of event space including five ballrooms, 105 breakout rooms and an awe-inspiring 56,000-sf rotunda.

If getting away from it all while still having access to the myriad of Orlando theme parks sounds appealing, Reunion Resort may be the perfect retreat for an upcoming corporate meeting or event. Situated on 2,300 rolling acres, Reunion Resort features championship golf and recreation aplenty. The resort, which offers a variety of accommodations including one-, two- and three-bedroom villas plus vacation rental homes, also boasts 25,000 sf of meeting and event space, as well as a Grande Event Pavilion, complete with stunning views and a luxurious waterfall.

Work Some, Play Some

Universal Orlando Resort's five onsite 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 guest rooms. Meeting attendees can enjoy convenient access to a myriad

"One of the main reasons planners choose Orlando is because they can return with a program year after year and there is always something new and exciting to offer."

Jane Scaletta, CIS, General Manager
Allied PRA Orlando



which offers four distinct event spaces and a covered pavilion.

Rosen Hotels & Resorts' three convention properties — the 1,501-room AAA Four Diamond Rosen Shingle Creek, the 1,334-room Rosen Centre Hotel and the 800-room Rosen Plaza Hotel — offer a combined 700,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space with flexibility for all types of



Credit: Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort recently completed a \$140 million renovation that encompassed all guest rooms.

of event options at Hard Rock Live, Universal CityWalk and all of the Universal Orlando theme park amenities. And when it's time to get down to work, the Loews Meeting Complex offers more than 295,000 sf of meeting and event space indoors and another 97,000 sf of outdoor space, as well as an expansive business center. The complex connects the meeting space at Loews Sapphire Falls Resort and Loews Royal Pacific Resort.

Universal recently introduced Fast & Furious Supercharged at Universal Studios Florida. In addition, Universal's new Vol-

phin hotel lobby and the resort's guest rooms a major facelift. Guests of the hotel enjoy special access to extended theme park hours, character encounters and more.

New and upcoming at Walt Disney World Resort are Pandora — The World of Avatar in Animal Kingdom, featuring the exhilarating 3-D ride Avatar Flight of Passage; the Frozen Ever After attraction in Epcot; Star Wars: Galaxy Edge, opening in 2019 in Disney's Hollywood Studios; and the Guardians of the Galaxy roller coaster in Epcot, which will be one of the world's longest enclosed coasters when it opens in time for Disney's 50th anniversary in 2021.

If golf is the draw for meeting attendees, the Villas of Grand Cypress features 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature-designed golf, including a new Scottish links course, and a 21-acre Academy of Golf training center. Accommodating groups of up to 240 meeting attendees, the Villas of Grand Cypress' 7,200-sf Mediterranean-style Executive Meeting Center features meeting rooms that surround an open atrium overlooking a scenic garden terrace. Because of its beautiful locale, the 1,500-acre property also boasts 10,500 sf of outdoor event space.

At the Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek, the well-appointed lakefront hotel is equipped to handle business functions, from board meetings and large conferences



Credit: Villas of Grand Cypress

The Villas of Grand Cypress features 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature-designed golf, including a new Scottish links course.

cano Bay water park offers new ways for meeting attendees and their families to beat the heat.

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort is synonymous with exceptional event experiences, thanks in part to its expansive meeting facilities and ideal location between Epcot and Disney's Hollywood Studios and nearby Disney's Animal Kingdom and Magic Kingdom. Comprised of two distinct hotels, the Swan and the Dolphin boast a combined 330,000 sf of meeting space. The resort also has recently completed a \$140 million renovation, giving the convention space, Dol-

to corporate fundraisers and trade shows. It's been two years since the Wyndham added approximately 6,000 sf of meeting space to its facilities for a total of 32,000 sf of meeting and event space. Located on the banks of a beautiful 10-acre lake, Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek offers peaceful surrounds — the perfect backdrop for productive, yet enjoyable events. The Bonnet Creek area, also home to Hilton Bonnet Creek and The Waldorf Astoria Orlando, will welcome a new JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek resort with 50,000 sf of meeting space in early 2020. **C&IT**



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By David Swanson

When it comes to reputation management and weather, some cities face an uphill battle. San Francisco is known for its fog, Chicago is the Windy City.

For Seattle, the first thing most of us think of is rain, and who needs showers interfering with transportation and outdoor events during a meeting? “That’s our foremost misconception — that it rains here all the time,” says Wendy LeBlanc, director of sales and marketing for the newly opened Embassy Suites Seattle Downtown Pioneer Square. “In fact, we actually get less than Atlanta.”

Seattle

Yes, Seattle gets 38 inches of rain annually. But by comparison, Atlanta averages 50 inches of rainfall annually, Orlando gets 53 inches and New Orleans sees 63.5 inches of precipitation annually. Boston, Houston, Miami and Washington, DC, also experience higher average rainfall than Seattle.

“We do have the drizzle, but I think it makes Seattle people more creative,” LeBlanc adds. “And there’s no place I’d rather be in summer.”

Californian by birth, LeBlanc moved to various corners of the Pacific Northwest from Las Vegas in 2003, and she’s a certified booster for the area that extends from northern California to Vancouver, and into Idaho, a region sometimes called Cascadia.

“You have this amazing diversity of ecosystems,” explains LeBlanc. “Mountains and islands, water and desert, green and lush. That means you’ve got skiing, kayaking, horseback riding and all the outdoor elements, but you can pair it with the wine country, abundant seafood and cultural elements.”

“We continue to turn away more business than we can accommodate. The growth and enhancement of supply and infrastructure around the region has been long overdue.”



Tom Norwalk, President and CEO
Visit Seattle

Seattle’s iconic Space Needle, which offers elevated meeting spaces, is undergoing a \$100 million renovation that will enhance the visitor experience.

“Our attractions are so authentic — the biggest in Seattle is Pike Place Market,” LeBlanc adds. “This is a real community place, for visitors and residents alike — you’re rubbing shoulders with the locals.”

For visitors, the outdoor environment and cultural fare has always been there, but for meeting planners who might have previously skipped over the city, Seattle is just getting ready for its close-up, with a series of developments that will avail more beds and more real estate for the Washington State Convention Center (WSCC).

“We continue to turn away more business than we can accommodate,” explains Tom Norwalk, president and CEO of Visit Seattle. “The growth and enhancement of supply and infrastructure around the region has been long overdue.”

Getting Real in the Pacific Northwest

Natural Beauty and New Builds Set the Stage for Magnificent Meetings in Seattle and Portland



The city recently received a long-awaited green light to construct a second, non-contiguous building for its convention center. The existing WSCC has been the smallest facility of any major West Coast city, so the added square footage is vital for keeping the Seattle meeting and convention business competitive. Construction breaks ground in July 2018, with an anticipated completion date in 2021.

“It gives us a lot of flexibility,” says Norwalk. “It’s a building of slightly larger size, and it will allow us to do two meetings simultaneously.”

Additionally, eight hotels catering to a divergent audience are opening in Seattle this year. The additional 2,431 rooms will represent a 20.5 percent increase in inventory for the city.

Among them is LeBlanc’s Embassy Suites Seattle Downtown Pioneer Square, which opened its doors March 28 in the city’s oldest neighborhood, 1.5 miles from the convention

center. The 282-room hotel features a six-story atrium — ideal for receptions — and nearly 10,000 sf of meeting space, including a 7,433-sf pillar-free ballroom.

“Hilton didn’t really have a huge presence in Seattle, so this was a way for them to make a big splash,” says LeBlanc. “We’re a flagship for the new design of Embassy Suites, and it’s a completely unique experience.”

Also new for Hilton and part of the Curio Collection is The Charter Hotel. Debuting in July and located just a block from Pike’s Place Market, the 229-room hotel features 10,000 sf of flexible meeting space, a 2,500-sf fitness center, an Argentine restaurant focused on locally sourced meats, fish and seasonal produce, and the Fog Room, a 16th-floor rooftop lounge.

Twelve miles south of the city in Tukwila, 3.8 miles east of SeaTac International Airport, Hotel Interurban opened its doors on May 22. The 185-room hotel offers 15,000 sf of



The new Ilani Casino Resort in Washington opened a 30,000-sf Meeting and Entertainment Center (right) in April.



Credit: Ilani Casino Resort

Tribal Gaming Options

Operated by the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, the new Ilani Casino Resort is located on the tribe's 156-acre reservation in Ridgefield, Washington, about 20 miles north of Portland, Oregon. The 368,000-sf facility includes a 100,000-sf gaming floor and a 30,000-sf Meeting and Entertainment Center 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 Tulalip Resort Casino, located 30 minutes north of Seattle. Having recently completed a \$15 million renovation, Tulalip offers 30,000 sf of meeting space, including a 15,000-sf ballroom, and 360 redesigned guest rooms that express the rich history and culture of the Tulalip Tribes.

C&IT

meeting space, including the 5,000-sf Rainier Room on the 19th floor, accommodating up to 500 guests theater-style, with views of Mount Rainier as a backdrop. A commuter rail station is 1 mile away, taking guests into the heart of the city, and free airport shuttles serve SeaTac.

Newly opened in 2017, the Hyatt Regency Lake Washington at Seattle's Southport boasts an inspiring setting on the shores of Lake Washington. Attendees are treated with panoramic views of the lake and downtown Seattle, the Olympic Mountains and Mount Rainier from public and meeting spaces such as the Grand Ballroom with its floor-to-ceiling windows and outdoor terraces. The 347-room, AAA Four Diamond hotel



"As a meeting planner...I am thrilled that Portland finally has (a convention center hotel) in their portfolio. For my client and this particular conference, this may open up additional dates for us."

Anne Hallinan, CMP
Tektronix Inc., Beaverton, OR

offers a total of 60,000 sf of function spaces, including 25,000 sf of outdoor venues to bring a beautiful sense of place to events. Even the Executive Boardroom showcases "epic views" of Lake Washington and Seattle. The Water's Table signature waterfront restaurant features Asian cuisine, an outdoor dining terrace and private dining rooms. Located in Renton, 11 miles from downtown Seattle and nine miles from the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, the Hyatt Regency offers guests direct access to Lake Washington and the adjacent Gene Coulon Memorial Beach Park.

Not all the news comes from new-builds. With an eye to staying competitive in a fast-evolving market, last October Loews Hotel 1000 wrapped up a renovation of its 120 guest rooms, lobby and restaurant. The downtown hotel's meeting



Embassy Suites Seattle Downtown Pioneer Square opened its doors March 28 in the city's oldest neighborhood.

Credit: Embassy Suites Seattle Downtown

space — just over 10,000 sf total — also received a refresh during the project.

And the 1,236-room Sheraton Seattle Hotel just completed an extensive refresh of all guest rooms and common spaces. Located directly across the street from the convention center, every inch of the hotel's 75,000-sf function space has been renovated, and an upscale, full-serve Starbucks concept with slow-pour drinks and a beer and wine menu will open later this summer. The hotel is renowned for having the largest private art collection on display at a Seattle business, and features numerous pieces by renowned glass sculptor, Dale Chihuly.

Other downtown Seattle meeting hotels of note include the 450-room Grand Hyatt Seattle with 25,000 sf of meeting space, across the street from the WSCC; and the LEED-certified Hyatt Olive 8 Seattle, with 346 guest rooms and 12,000 sf of meeting space.

Seattle's iconic Space Needle is also nearing completion on a \$100 million renovation that will enhance the visitor experience inside while leaving the 605-foot tower's classic architecture virtually unchanged. Views will be enhanced through the replacement of safety "cage" that wrapped the top deck with glass panels that will create seamless sight lines; glass floors will open onto a view of city streets that was unavailable previously. Meeting planners can incorporate this one-of-a-kind landmark into their event by taking one or both rooms on the



Hyatt Regency Lake Washington at Seattle's Southport features panoramic views of Lake Washington and downtown Seattle.

SkyLine Level, a private event and banquet space 100 feet off the ground with capacity for 350 guests reception style, or 300 for a banquet. The two-level "tophouse" Atmos also will be available for airy corporate events.

The jewel in the crown for Seattle this year will be the November opening of the 1,260-room Hyatt Regency Seattle, which debuts as the largest hotel north of San Francisco.

Located in the heart of downtown between Stewart and Howell streets and Eighth and Ninth avenues, the full-service hotel is two blocks from the existing Washington State Convention Center and adjacent to the convention center addition. The 45-story Hyatt Regency will have 103,000 sf of flexible meeting and ballroom space and is expected to enliven the surrounding pedestrian streetscape and growing convention neighborhood.



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Credit: Deschutes County Fair and Expo Center

Off the Beaten Path

For those seeking a venue for large-scale events to be held outside Portland, the Deschutes County Fair and Expo Center may be just the ticket. Located 175 miles southeast of Portland, 15 minutes from Bend, Deschutes Expo sits at the hub of the tricounty

area (Deschutes, Jefferson, and Crook Counties) known as Central Oregon.

Deschutes Expo is a full-service event, performing arts, conference, equestrian and sports center, with state-of-the-art multipurpose buildings offering more than 200,000 sf

Deschutes County Fair and Expo Center visitors can enjoy more than 300 days, annually, of high-desert sunshine.

of flexible meeting and trade-show space. The busy, 132-acre facility is mostly used for local community events, such as graduations, equestrian events, gun shows and flea markets, but also serves as the best option for gatherings in Central Oregon.

Venue options include the fair and expo center; the First Interstate Bank Center, a 10,000-seat arena with a 40,000-sf floor (used for NBA games); and the Three Sisters Conference Center offering three main halls (up to 14,900 sf) and 10 breakout rooms. On-site catering is available, and can be customized for each event for groups of up to 2,000 attendees. —DS

"This has been a long-awaited project, and it's a game-changer for us," suggests Norwalk, who adds that the location is walkable and its easy to reach the downtown core. "They're adding lots of meeting and function space to the city."

For Seattle, such expansion couldn't come soon enough. The city recently celebrated its eighth consecutive year of tourism growth — overnight visitors were up 3.9 percent in 2017 — and SeaTac International Airport has grown to be the nation's ninth busiest by passenger volume.

"The only challenge for us has been one of the sheer size of convention center," says Norwalk, who adds that attendance is "incredibly strong" for meetings coming to Seattle. "There's a misconception that we're a seasonal destination, but even our first quarter is doing well — 10 months out of the year, we are busy."

But challenges of weather and capacity are outweighed by the vibrancy and uniqueness of Seattle, according to Norwalk.

"We've never been a traditional cookie-cutter, chain-restaurant town," explains Norwalk. "That tight, compact downtown core provides an ease of getting around, meaning



The Grand Hyatt Seattle, across from the convention center, has 25,000 sf of meeting space.

Credit: Grand Hyatt Seattle

transportation isn't as big a priority as it is for some convention destinations.

"There's been a renaissance in Seattle over the last couple years, and it will afford meeting planners more choices, more hotel space, and more offsite venues to work with."

Portland

Down the road in Oregon, Portland is also experiencing major tourism growth, much of it aimed at the meeting and convention market. The city's hotel room inventory is projected to increase 40 percent by 2020, with six hotels opening this year alone.

While this year's crop of new hotels in Portland mostly targets business travelers and the leisure market, the new Hyatt Regency Portland at the Oregon Convention Center (OCC), opening December 2019, will be a dramatic addition to the city for meeting planners. The \$244 million, 600-room hotel located next door to the OCC will feature 32,710 sf of meeting and event space, including a 12,655-sf ballroom. The hotel will be located near bus lines, a streetcar line, the MAX light rail line, and a bike-share station, providing guests and meet-

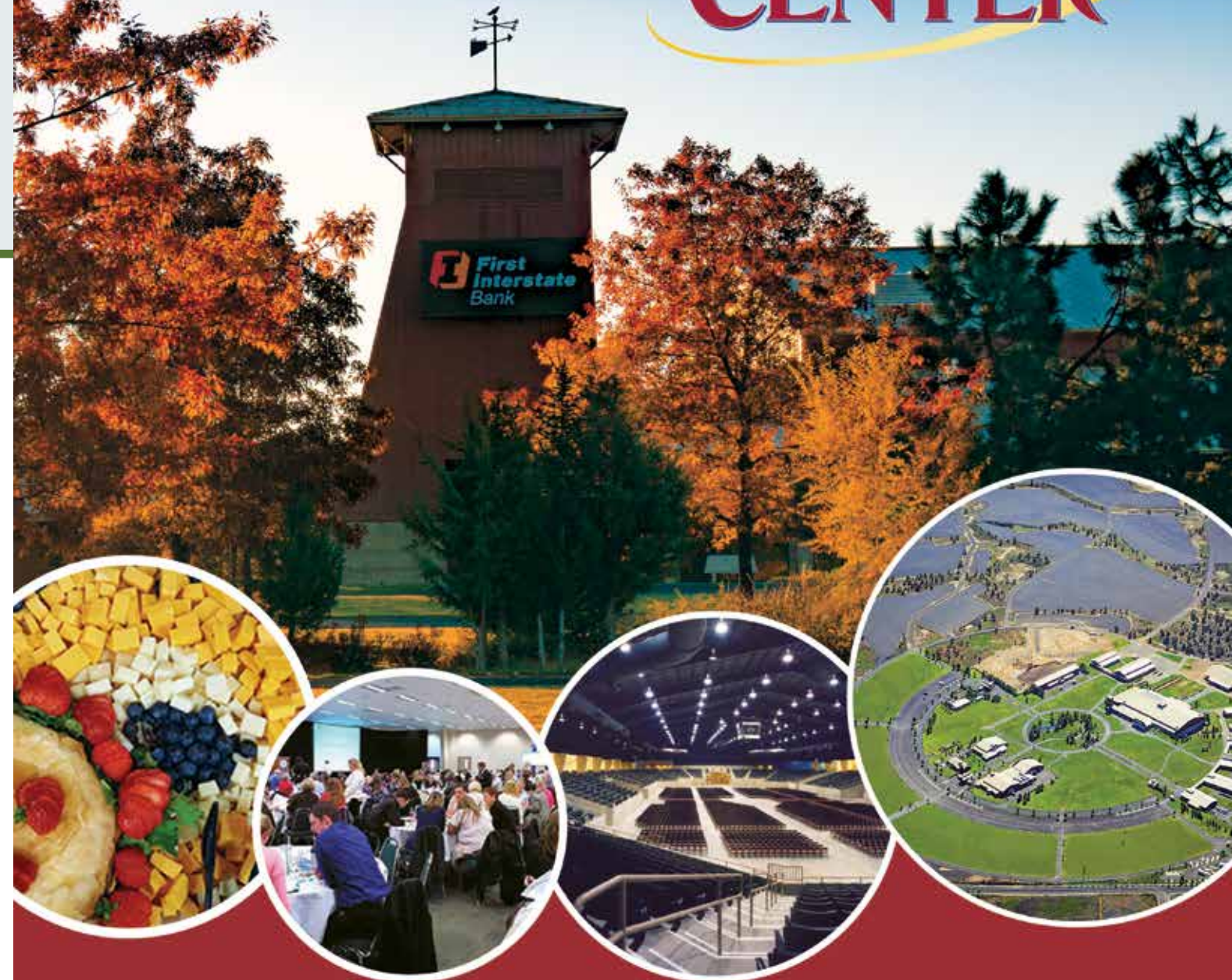


The downtown Sheraton Seattle Hotel recently completed a top-to-bottom renovation.

Credit: Sheraton Seattle Hotel

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ing attendees with quick access to downtown Portland, the central eastside and the airport.

The opening of the new Hyatt Regency will be of benefit to meeting planners such as Anne Hallinan, CMP. In January, Hallinan oversaw the Sales University 2018 event for Beaverton-based Tektronix Inc. (Tek), manufacturer of oscilloscopes, logic analyzers and video and mobile test protocol equipment. The 630 attendees were split between the 477-room DoubleTree by Hilton Portland, located in the up-and-coming Lloyd District, and the 202-room Courtyard by Marriott Portland Downtown/Convention Center.

"Our challenge is tight availability," explains Hallinan. "The meeting is held during the first quarter, and although Portland in January isn't high on people's choice for vacation, convention center and hotel space is tight. We don't have much, if any, choice in dates. We are at the mercy of the calendar and need to fit between other, larger events."

Hallinan says the new Hyatt Regency is long overdue and very exciting.

"As a meeting planner and someone very engaged in the meetings industry, I am thrilled that Portland finally has this in their portfolio. For my client and this particular conference, this may open

up additional dates for us as sometimes the hotel occupancy has dictated when we could hold this event.

"We hold our conference at the Oregon Convention Center. It is ideal because we have a fair number of breakouts, plus general sessions, ancillary meetings and group meal functions with seating for 600 — the convention center can accommodate all under one roof with minimal, if any, room turns. This meeting also requires quite a bit of electricity due to all of the equipment used in the breakouts. This is problematic for most hotels, but the convention center can handle it easily.

"I love the fact that the hotel and the convention center are industry leaders in sustainable meetings, from power conservation to recycling and composting," says Hallinan. "Additionally, the first time I worked on this program, I was impressed by the fact that the DoubleTree had Chinese-speaking front desk agents. This was invaluable, as some of our guests have limited English and it was a great welcome to them as they arrived after many hours of travel, especially if they had any issues with their hotel reser-



Rendering of meeting space at the Hyatt Regency Seattle, which opens this November as the largest hotel north of San Francisco.

ventions or credit cards." But Hallinan also cautioned that the DoubleTree is on the light rail line, and it can be heard in many of the guest rooms, "especially early in the morning when the service starts up again for the day."



"I've worked in cities all over the country, and it's really hard to beat the staff and facilities at the Oregon Convention Center."

Leah Silber, CEO
Tilde Inc., Portland, OR

For the event, Hallinan says Tek arranged dinners throughout the city at restaurants and breweries. "It was a great opportunity for our attendees to experience Portland since their schedule is so tight while they are here. The restaurants were very flexible and provided a really nice experience for everyone."

Like many visitors, Hallinan praised Portland's light rail system.

"It's a huge advantage," explains Hallinan. "The vast majority of our attendees fly in from around the country and internationally. Being able to use MAX (Metropolitan Area Express) means we don't have to pay transportation costs to get everyone to and from the airport. Our attendees use it to get to and from hotels and the convention center (for those who don't want to walk the short distance).

Hallinan also recommended utilizing the meeting planning services of Travel Portland.

"They are extremely helpful not only with putting together



Meeting space at the LEED-certified Hyatt at Olive 8 overlooks downtown Seattle.



The Washington State Convention Center will break ground in July on a second building.



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Credit: Hyatt Regency Portland

The Hyatt Regency Portland at the Oregon Convention Center will be a game-changer for meetings when it opens in December 2019.

the meeting space/sleeping room package that works for the group, but also with amenities and extra incentives. Because we utilized the convention center and (maybe) the size of our room block, Travel Portland provided us with complimentary passes for the light rail and bus system."

For Leah Silber, CEO of Tilde Inc., an open source code developer, a quality convention center and other attributes weren't mere motivation for holding a conference in the city.

"My company moved our headquarters to Portland about five years ago, in part because we knew we'd want to be hosting more and more of our events here," says Silber. "The convention center really is a pleasure to work with and I recommend weighing that heavily."

"I've worked in cities all over the country, and it's really hard to beat the staff and facilities at the Oregon Convention Center," Silber continues. "The venue makes or breaks the show, and it's amazing — and rare — to know you can really rely on the convention center staff to do their jobs perfectly just about every time. The OCC also has shockingly good retention of staff, so when we go back year after year, we're dealing with the same people over and over again. Most of the folks we work with there have been at the convention center 10 years or more, and some have been there as long as 30 years! Being able to establish and lean on that rapport is a serious competitive advantage if you're a repeat event organizer."

"We've all worked with venues that really made our lives difficult, or even seemed to sabotage our events. Being able to know you don't need to worry about things like that is a real game-changer."

Silber says that lodging needs have been evolving for her meetings, including her most recent, EmberConf 2018, held in March. The event drew about 1,000 attendees and the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Portland provided the principal room block.

"We've been moving to smaller and smaller hotel room blocks, even as our events grow, because so many people are choosing Airbnbs. They're harder to track. ...On the other hand, they don't come with liability for us in terms of guaranteed nights — so there are ups and downs. It's definitely changed things in a big way, and I'm interested in seeing how it plays out long term."

During her events, Silber typically arranges a private VIP or team dinner for 30–50 people. "We invite all the folks who are instrumental in making our program stand out and take them for a dinner we hope they won't forget. Portland helps us deliver. There are so many great restaurants to work with, and I'm constantly finding new and interesting private spaces



Credit: Travel Portland

Portland's famous Voodoo Doughnut, where "the magic is in the hole."

that work for things like this. Our current favorite is Olympia Provisions, which we found after Simpatica shut down its catering business."

But the destination, as for Hallinan, is the key selling point for Silber.

"Our attendees, many of whom fly in for the conference and stay extra time to explore the city, love Portland," says Silber. "It's a great mix of big city and small town charm, and one where pricing for most things is still reasonable. They go skiing, hiking, biking — the nature just can't be beat. And there are just so many different little hot spots to explore in all four quarters. They love patronizing all the inventive and friendly local businesses Portland offers, and the restaurant scene is great, too."

"As a destination city, Portland ticks all the boxes on our minimum-viable-show checklist. It has a friendly international airport with quick and cheap mass transit to downtown, reasonable pricing and selection for hotels and Airbnbs — pretty much everything you'd want!"

Silber notes another Portland draw that hits the sweet spot — the original Voodoo Doughnut bakeshop: "Who could argue with that many options for amazing doughnuts?" **C&IT**



Credit: Travel Portland

The MAX light rail line serves the Oregon Convention Center.



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On The Move



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WARD



BRICKNER

David Berzofsky was appointed director of sales for Teneo Hospitality Group, Midwest. With more than 25 years of hospitality sales experience, he most recently was global account executive for The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company/Marriott International.

Elise Gertenbach was promoted to director of group sales for Hotel Contessa in San Antonio, Texas. She most recently served as national account director for the hotel.

Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel has announced **Jennifer Lewis** as director of sales and marketing. She most recently worked as the director of sales and marketing for the Kimpton Hotel Monaco Baltimore.

Gary Baker, CMP, has joined The Spa a Norwich Inn, Norwich, Connecticut, as director of sales. He formerly served as director of convention sales and services at Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, Connecticut.

DoubleTree by Hilton Alana Waikiki Beach in Honolulu, Hawaii, has promoted **Cheryl Lynn Nasser** to director of sales, marketing and revenue. She most recently served as director of revenue management for the hotel.

Scott Ward was named director of sales and marketing for Benchmark's Santa Barbara Beach & Golf Resort, Curacao. He was previously interim director of sales and marketing for Benchmark's South Florida properties, Beachwalk Resort in Hallandale Beach and Marenas Beach Resort in Sunny Isles.



WILKINS

Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront hotel has named **Melanie Brickner** as group sales manager responsible for large group bookings in the Southeast and Florida state association clients. She formerly served as meeting connection sales manager at Hyatt Regency St. Louis at the Arch.

Next Level Performance in New Brunswick, New Jersey, has named **Leigh Wilkins** as director, travel experiences. She returns to co-manage the travel department, after having worked on the travel team for several years in the past.

Fontainebleau Miami Beach has appointed **Kevin Bryant** as executive director of sales. After holding the position of director of sales and revenue management at the resort, he served as corporate director of revenue management at Fontainebleau's parent company, Turnberry Associates.



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