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## CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

MAY 2019

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

# That's Entertainment!

Don't Forget This Important Component of Any Successful Event

## Convention Center Competition

Many Venues are Refreshing and Refurbishing

## Let The Games Begin!

Gaming Resorts Offer a Thrill

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38 Arizona

Credit: Materials Research Society



14 Convention Centers

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20 Gaming Resorts

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44 Florida

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## Facilities and Destinations With a Difference



Convention centers across the country are in a hotly contested race for your business as they refresh, refurbish and expand. Also in many destinations the complete reimagining of the area surrounding the convention center is creating a convention campus with multiple options for groups of all sizes. Check out the "Convention Center Competition" story (Page 14) in this issue.

Making your convention or other events memorable sometimes require choosing a destination with a difference (Page 28). Some destinations continuously please attendees and planners because of previous experience, while other destinations have become more desirable, joining the ranks of other traditional popular destinations. New hotel inventory and leisure activities are factors being considered along with costs involved in high-traffic destinations. A growing number of planners are also considering some international locales for their events, in part because of the global boom in demand for events in unique destinations such as Australia, New Zealand, Costa Rica and Singapore.

If you are looking for a year-round domestic destination that has it all, look no further than Arizona (Page 38). With the unique Arizona scenery from Phoenix to Tucson, planners can take advantage of distinct outdoor locations to re-energize attendees who were locked in a meeting room all day. Planners on a tight budget can generally find suitable opportunities throughout the many appealing destinations.

Another great choice is Florida (Page 44), where resorts will satisfy any planner's appetite — from sunny beach resorts to unique urban destinations. Value and pricing propositions can easily be found throughout Florida. Meeting in modern facilities, enjoying leisure time on the golf links or just soaking up the sun with balmy ocean breezes on the beach, the Sunshine State has it all.

Enjoy this issue and please let me know if there are any topics you would like to see covered in future issues.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## Groundbreaking Ceremony for New 5.8-Acre Public Park at Miami Beach Convention Center

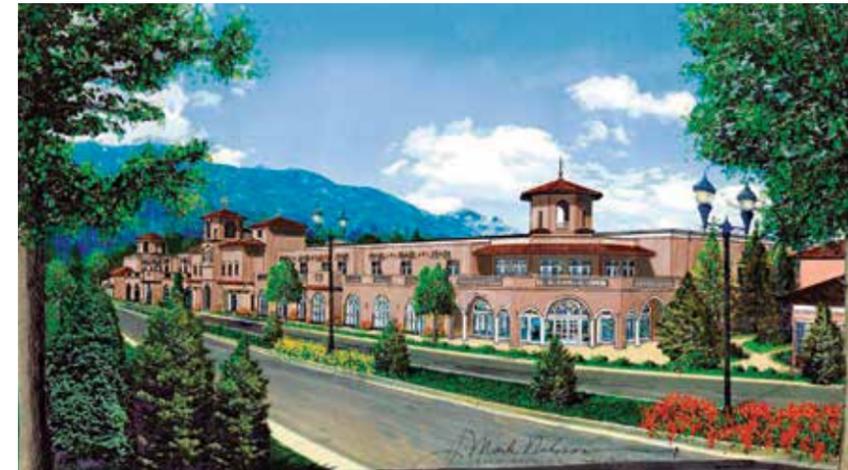


**MIAMI BEACH, FL** — The reimagined Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC) and the City of Miami Beach recently held a groundbreaking ceremony that marks the transformation of the convention center's surface parking lot into a new 5.8-acre public green space. The new public green space is estimated to be completed in fall 2019. The park will feature 500 new trees, open lawn spaces, shaded areas, walkways, lighting, a veteran's memorial and a stunning public art installation. The MBCC is the centerpiece to Miami Beach's meetings and conventions industry. Following a \$620 million-dollar renovation, the expanded MBCC includes a new 60,000-sf Grand Ballroom, almost 500,000 sf of exhibition space, an expanded Grand Lobby and much more. [www.miamibeachconvention.com](http://www.miamibeachconvention.com)

## AECOM to Provide Improvements for Orange County Convention Center

**ORLANDO, FL** — AECOM, a premier, fully integrated global infrastructure firm, has been contracted by the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC) in Orlando to provide owner's representative services for the OCCC's North-South Building Improvements. AECOM began supporting the program earlier this year. The \$605 million program involves approximately 856,000 sf of building improvements, including a conceptual design of a 200,000-sf, column-free Multipurpose Venue that can accommodate up to 20,000 attendees. The proposed improvements also include the Grand Concourse along the side of Convention Way road with 60,000 sf of meeting rooms, an 80,000-sf ballroom and an entrance to the North-South Building. AECOM previously served as OCCC's owner's representative during construction of the original 2.8 million-sf North-South Building, which was completed in 2003. The company will again provide design, project and construction managers, project controls professionals and subject matter experts to support the design and construction oversight of the new improvements. "The OCCC is one of the nation's top tradeshow and convention destinations," said Srini Kris, AECOM's Program Management/Construction Management business line executive. "We are honored to have worked with the OCCC to deliver the original North-South Building and are honored to work with them again on the upcoming improvements." [www.occc.net](http://www.occc.net)

## The Broadmoor Announces New Exhibition Space



**COLORADO SPRINGS, CO** — The Broadmoor will soon offer the most luxurious trade show and exhibition hall experience in the industry, as the only Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five-Diamond awarded hotel in the country to operate a large onsite exhibition space. When the newly announced 110,000+ sf of exhibition space and associated breakout rooms debut in spring of 2020, the resort will be able to provide the highest level of service large conference or tradeshow attendees can receive. "The addition of this new exhibition hall is in response to some of our clients who have simply run out of space at the resort but want to continue to leverage and engage with the other amenities our unique property offers," explained Barry Brown, vice president of sales and marketing. "We haven't been able to provide a true trade show experience at The Broadmoor, so the addition of this facility will afford an opportunity for us to work with larger shows and exhibitions that typically book in cities that have stand-alone convention centers." Together the exhibit hall addition and the existing Broadmoor Hall, International Center and Colorado Hall will work together to comprise the combined 300,000-sf "The Broadmoor Event Center." [www.broadmoor.com](http://www.broadmoor.com)

## IAEE Congratulates its 2019 International Excellence Award Recipient, CES Asia

The International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) congratulates CES Asia, produced by the International CES (Shanghai) Exhibition Co., Ltd., a wholly foreign-owned enterprise of the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), as this year's recipient of the IAEE International Excellence Award. The IAEE International Excellence Award recognizes an individual or organization that has made exceptional strides in creating, launching and managing an event in the exhibitions and events industry on an international scale. CES Asia has seen significant growth over the past three years, as reported in the event audit conducted by BPA Worldwide. "CES Asia is a launchpad for Asian innovations and new technologies from around the world. It is the only event in Asia that brings together the entire tech ecosystem to build brands, forge partnerships and celebrate the best in consumer tech in Asia," said CES, Consumer Technology Association executive vice president Karen Chupka. "On the eve of CES Asia 2019, which marks its fifth anniversary, this first-time recognition from IAEE is a fitting testament to the success behind one of the fastest growing shows in Asia." [www.iaee.com/news](http://www.iaee.com/news)

## Las Vegas Moves Forward with First Underground People Mover

**LAS VEGAS, NV** — The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) Board of Directors recently approved a \$48,675,000 contract with Elon Musk's The Boring Company to design and construct a people mover for the Las Vegas Convention Center that could rapidly and safely carry passengers in autonomous electric vehicles via a loop of underground express-route tunnels. "The Boring Company is excited to contribute to the future of Las Vegas, and work with leaders who have a vision for transportation," said Steve Davis, president of The Boring Company. The contract highlights three underground passenger stations, a pedestrian tunnel



and two vehicular tunnels with an expected total length of approximately 1 mile, an elevator/escalator system for passenger access to stations, pedestrian entrances, exits and coverings from the elements, landscaping, and tunnel lighting, power and video surveillance systems, a fully equipped control room with cell phone, Wi-Fi, intercom/PA, remote data and ventilation/life safety systems. "Las Vegas will continue to elevate the experience of our visitors with innovation, such as with this project, and by focusing on the current and future needs of our guests," said Steve Hill, LVCVA president and CEO. [www.lvcva.com](http://www.lvcva.com)

## The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center Receives Fourth Consecutive LWCC "Safest 70" Award

**NEW ORLEANS, LA** — For the fourth consecutive year, the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center has received a "Safest 70" award from the Louisiana Workers Compensation Corporation (LWCC), the largest workers' compensation carrier in the state. The award acknowledges excellence, outstanding performance and commitment to workplace safety, and is given to the top 70 of over 16,000 entities insured by LWCC. The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center was recognized based on the effectiveness of their safety efforts in preventing injuries and maintaining a consistent workplace safety history in 2018. In addition to this year's "Safest 70" award, The Convention Center also received the title in 2015, 2016, and 2017. "I am proud that we were once again chosen for this prestigious award from the LWCC," said Michael J. Sawaya,



president and general manager, New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center." [www.mccno.com](http://www.mccno.com)

## Salt Lake Welcomes \$3.6 Billion Airport Redevelopment and New Convention Hotel for Urban and Mountain Meetings

**SALT LAKE CITY, UT** — This destination is booming with projects like the \$3.6 billion redevelopment of the Salt Lake City International Airport where a new airport will begin serving passengers in 2020. A 28-story convention hotel is expected to break ground later this year and bring more than 700 rooms and 62,000 sf of additional meeting space when it opens in 2022. Salt Lake already offers meeting professionals a range of choices for their next convention, event or meeting. With new restaurants, buzzing brewpubs, an NBA team, Broadway shows and performing arts venues just 35 minutes from downtown, four of the best mountain resorts in the West are primed for retreats and post-meeting recreation. The Salt Palace Convention Center offers nearly 1 million sf of exhibit, meeting, ballroom and pre-function space, the Mountain America Expo Center offers 234,000 sf



of space just 16 miles south of Salt Lake City International Airport and The Grand America Hotel in Salt Lake, offers facilities

and conference space for up to 3,000 guests just 35 minutes from downtown. [www.visitsaltlake.com](http://www.visitsaltlake.com)

## PCMA Announces New Data Intelligence Service for Business Events Industry

PCMA announced a unique, new product providing market intelligence and data analytics for the business events industry where professionals, organizations, hospitality providers and destination organizations can gain insights into industry trends and behaviors. BEAM, Business Events Analytics/Metrics, was revealed at IMEX, a multiday business events tradeshow taking place in Frankfurt, Germany. "We wanted to create a unique product unlike any other in the marketplace to unleash the extraordinary power of data to advance research, identify industry trends and create predictive analytics that will guide business event professionals to make informed and strategic business decisions," said Sherrif Karamat, CAE, president and CEO of PCMA. "This customized analytics engine is unique as it draws information from multiple data sources to provide the business events industry with exclusive insights and capabilities to explore data," said Robert Haas, PCMA's chief administrative officer, who is spearheading BEAM. "We are thrilled to partner with PCMA on this very important product," said Don Welsh, president and CEO of Destinations International. "This new tool will allow destination organizations to be smarter and have the ability to drive their own success." [www.foundation.pcma.org](http://www.foundation.pcma.org)

## Timms, Heimans, and Fitzgerald White Named as Keynotes for 2019 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition

**WASHINGTON, DC**— ASAE announces co-authors of the bestselling book "New Power," Jeremy Heimans, co-founder and CEO, Purpose, and Henry Timms, president and CEO, 92nd Street Y, as opening keynote speakers for the 2019 Annual Meeting & Exposition. Following a variety of other educational opportunities, singer, actor and dancer, Alton Fitzgerald White, will bring a taste of Broadway as the closing keynote. "We are excited to provide attendees with the opportunity to learn from speakers of varying backgrounds," said John H. Graham IV, president and CEO at ASAE. "The diversity of experiences and perspectives will provide them with the tools to overcome challenges and achieve success at their individual organizations." [www.asaecenter.org](http://www.asaecenter.org)



Plans for a \$65 million transformation of Convention Center Boulevard, connecting the bustling Warehouse/Arts District with the historic French Quarter and dramatically transforming the guest experience at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, are becoming a reality.



## DESIGN ELEMENTS

- + Tree-lined pedestrian plaza
- + Covered porches
- + Outdoor event spaces
- + Water features
- + Transportation Center to move attendees more efficiently to and from the Convention Center
- + Improvements to roads and intersections on shuttle routes within the Warehouse District
- + Green walls
- + Shaded gathering areas
- + Public art



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

# The Events Industry Needs to Set the Sustainability Standard

By Jane Scaletta, DMCP, CIS



## And Take Action

Sustainability for events means taking action toward preserving our natural environment, promoting a healthy, inclusive society and supporting a thriving economy.

Associations like the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) are prepared to set the standard on sustainability at the events level by investing time, money and people with passion for sustainability into the very culture of the association.

At a recent SITE Global Conference in Bangkok, Thailand, Annamarie Ruffino, immediate past president, announced the launch of the association's Sustainability Charter. A charter is a written grant by the sovereign or legislative power of a country by which a body such as a borough, company or university is created, or its rights and privileges defined. For SITE, this is a written commitment to ensuring a sustainable future. This charter serves as a written policy and a commitment to action. SITE's Sustainability Charter suggests ways to support the three pillars of sustainability — environment, social and economic.

What does it mean to set the standard? It means taking a stance and deciding what the standard is going to be. It's our job to set the industry standard on sustainability at events. How do we go about doing that?

### GLOBAL STANDARDS

The events industry has an international standard for implementing an approach to sustainability entitled ISO 20121 (Event sustainability management systems — Requirements with guidance for use), which includes creating a policy. ISO is an independent, non-governmental international organization with a membership of 164 bodies that set national standards. The work done by SITE aligns with ISO 20121 requirements. This means SITE is committed to helping companies support their sustainability strategy.

As a Sustainability Ambassador for SITE's Sustainability Committee, trained by Positive Impact, a not-for-profit launched in 2005 to provide education and collaboration opportunities to create a sustainable event industry, I have worked with chapter board members and assisted other

chapter members in creating a sustainable roadmap. The process of identifying sustainable issues can be overwhelming, and with the help of Positive Impact's toolkit of resources, any chapter can create a roadmap to sustainability.

We need to "set the standard" by aligning our event planning with the ISO 20121 management system. Here are several ways we can do that:

- Lead by example — learn what the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are and implement them into your event.
- Ask suppliers to offer sustainable options.
- Appoint a sustainability ambassador on your chapter board.
- Create a roadmap that shares your objectives.
- Empower a team to work on sustainable objectives.
- Gain top management support by signing off on sustainable policies.
- Share your objectives with your attendees so they can participate in sustainability practices.

There are also dozens of ways planners can implement sustainability practices at events. Some include:

- Rather than automatically pouring water at events, have attendees ask for water.
- Rather than have individual plastic water bottles for refreshment, have a water cooler and ask attendees to bring their own reusable water bottle. The water footprint of a conference program, tote bag and two cups of coffee for 750 meeting participants is equal to one Olympic-size swimming pool, or just more than 660,253 gallons of water.
- Offer chicken dishes rather than beef. Farming chickens emits less carbon than farming cows.
- Donate left over material and food via the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act.



*The water footprint of a conference program, tote bag and two cups of coffee for 750 meeting participants is equal to one Olympic-size swimming pool, or just more than 660,253 gallons of water.*

How does this translate to a busy incentive planner trying to be sustainable? What do you really need to do? Take the time to decide on just one SDG to implement into your event. There are 17 from which to choose:

- GOAL 1:** No Poverty
- GOAL 2:** Zero Hunger
- GOAL 3:** Good Health and Well-being
- GOAL 4:** Quality Education
- GOAL 5:** Gender Equality
- GOAL 6:** Clean Water and Sanitation
- GOAL 7:** Affordable and Clean Energy
- GOAL 8:** Decent Work and Economic Growth
- GOAL 9:** Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- GOAL 10:** Reduced Inequality
- GOAL 11:** Sustainable Cities and Communities
- GOAL 12:** Responsible Consumption and Production
- GOAL 13:** Climate Action
- GOAL 14:** Life Below Water
- GOAL 15:** Life on Land
- GOAL 16:** Peace and Justice Strong Institutions
- GOAL 17:** Partnerships to Achieve the Goal

An example of Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, can be as simple as reducing food waste after an event through prevention, reduction, recycling and re-use. Also, use local food suppliers, don't over guarantee for the event, don't put food out on the buffet lines until containers are empty, use organic products and have an excellent food waste plan in place.

We are fortunate to have a great deal of information at our fingertips to learn and use as examples on how to be sustainable.

Visit SITE's website ([siteglobal.com](http://siteglobal.com)) and review the many documents and case studies under the Motivate portal, or visit the Positive Impacts website ([positiveimpacetevents.com](http://positiveimpacetevents.com)) for tutorials and ideas.

SITE Florida & Caribbean Chapter has implemented an aggressive program called the Sustainable Meeting Plan Program (SMPP) and we have designated several events as sustainable ISO 20121 events for 2019. While we are in our first year of implementation, we know we can learn from our actions and improve on them in the coming years. The most important thing is to start. AC&F

*Jane Scaletta, DMCP, CIS, is president of Doflin Destinations. Scaletta is both a Positive Impact Ambassador, a member of the SITE Sustainability Committee and author of several sustainability articles. Scaletta grew up in Jamaica, attended boarding school in England and moved to the U.S. in the late 70s. She has worked in travel and tourism for more than 30 years in the U.S. and Caribbean.*

# Event Technologies

## Meet Higher Expectations

By Brett S. Hyams



### While Containing Costs

While meeting planners' budgets are increasing, they are not without their challenges, fiscal and otherwise. Meeting planners have a host of new expectations to meet, set by themselves and others. These higher expectations have the effect of driving up expenses. Their events must have a "wow" factor and leave a strong, lasting impression to start building participation for subsequent events.

For many conventions, trade shows and annual meetings, meeting planners are expected to create events with relevancy for attendees across multiple generations who have

Meeting planners are now expected to create events that look more like a Hollywood production than an industry conference, and here is the hitch: Engaging multigenerational attendees with a high-energy, high-impact event, while at the same time streamlining administrative processes, capturing data for marketing intelligence, and demonstrating a return on investment to justify costs is challenging even for the most experienced meeting planners.

Creating an engaging event that will appeal to millennials, Generation X and Y, as well as baby boomers requires

*Applying the latest in event technologies, from LED, 4K video walls and touch-screen displays to interactive kiosks and charging stations, along with sophisticated audiovisual technologies, meeting planners can create a highly engaging, movie-like experience.*

different styles of learning, communicating and even eating. Have you noticed that vegetarian fare being offered at more events to accommodate the growing number of vegans?

The increased number of events, all competing for many of the same high-appeal venues, is introducing another challenge for meeting planners both from price negotiation and scheduling standpoints. CWT Meetings & Events forecast a 5 to 10 percent increase in demand for meetings and events and a corresponding hotel rate hike of 3.7 percent. To meet these and other expectations and related cost impacts, many meeting planners have turned to event technologies, which have been proven to create great value. Leveraging these technologies to help meet expectations and contain costs is a discipline meeting planners should master.

#### MEETING PLANNERS' GREATEST CHALLENGES TODAY

Clearly, the bar has been set higher for today's meeting planners. Standard formula agendas, venues, activities and complimentary services simply won't suffice in 2019.

the right, universally appealing theme conveyed in a way that resonates with all ages. Applying the latest in event technologies, from LED, 4K video walls and touch-screen displays to interactive kiosks and charging stations, along with sophisticated audiovisual technologies, meeting planners can create a highly-engaging, movie-like experience.

To meet strategic meeting management goals, streamlining processes such as attendee registration and event marketing demand is essential. This too can be supported by technology that is both effective in accomplishing the task, and user friendly. For example, event management software facilitates more efficient time-, labor- and cost-savings event registration, check-in and badge printing, lead retrieval and e-literature processes. Convenient online registration processes help boost event attendance and potential profitability. Event management software solutions, beacon technology and mobile apps further introduce smart, more effective ways for meeting planners to manage their events.

The use of mobile apps and other interactive, attendee

engagement technologies also give meeting planners a way to both convey information to their constituents and capture meaningful feedback from attendees, exhibitors and sponsors. Mobile apps, for example, can be used to drive traffic to a keynote address or an exhibitor's scheduled product demonstration. A survey on a kiosk can solicit feedback on how attendees responded to a certain breakout session or other components of an event. The data captured through this and other interactive event technology can be used both during the show in real-time to enhance the event experience, as well as in post-event benchmarking with metrics applied to make improvements in various aspects of future events and fiscal management.

Unfortunately, many meeting planners have had the experience of unreliable or inadequate Wi-Fi to accommodate their event's participants. Besides generating negative energy at an event when attendees and exhibitors are unable to get Wi-Fi service, poor Wi-Fi can also result in costly troubleshooting expenses. This challenge can be addressed when the right Wi-Fi solution is provided and managed properly by a solution specialist. This professional will conduct a thorough needs assessment to determine the optimum Wi-Fi solution needed for the event based on multiple factors such as the number of participants expected, indoor or outdoor venue, the venue's existing service, etc. Very often, a venue's Wi-Fi is inadequate and expensive, with meeting planners expected to incur internet connection and other costly infrastructure charges. Using a third-party resource with expertise in designing and configuring a solution using advanced Wi-Fi technologies tailored to a specific event's requirements is much more cost-effective.

Another challenge facing today's meeting planners is reducing their events' carbon footprint. According to data from Repurpose America, the estimated 1.8 million meetings, trade shows and conventions held annually in the United States generate approximately 600,000 tons of trash. To drill down further, the average three-day trade show with 1,000 attendees produces approximately 584 tons of global-warming CO2 emissions. By using event technologies that promote paperless communications and tasks, meeting planners can significantly reduce their event's negative

impact on the environment while reducing labor and material costs. Web-based event registration, which enables online registration and email confirmation; onsite self-registration using kiosks; digital signs vs. paper signage; e-literature libraries; and beacon technology for seamless tracking for CEU's, attendee engagement, branding, sponsorship opportunities, real-time alerts and booth traffic data-feeds also are all environmentally sound and cost-saving technologies.

Boosting social media engagement has become another charge for meeting planners. They are expected to utilize their organizations' social media platforms to spread the word and market their events, and there is an expectation that social media be used to help minimize expenses associated with direct mail and trade advertising. Using event technologies such as mobile apps, charging stations, digital touch screen kiosks and even social media interactive video walls, meeting planners can boost their events' social media engagement significantly. Through follow-up analytics, they can demonstrate their event's impact on key social media metrics such as likes, shares and followers.

#### EVENT TECHNOLOGY — A BUDGET LINE ITEM DRIVING COST-SAVINGS AND INCREASED ROI

As these examples illustrate, event technologies can effectively help meeting planners address some of their major challenges, while also driving cost savings and other high-value benefits. According to the American Express 2018 Global Meetings and Event Forecast, there was a 16 percent increase in meetings technology investments. This comes at the same time that 63 percent of meeting planners surveyed in the Amex study reported more challenging hotel and other venue contract negotiations which, in many instances, increased their event space costs. Meeting planners have an opportunity to strategically use event technologies to better manage many aspects of their events and promote an overall higher return on their event investment. AC&F

*Brett S. Hyams is a senior solution sales executive with SmartSource Computer & Audio Visual Rentals with over 25 years of event industry experience. He works with exhibit and event companies, associations, show organizers and event owners and has extensive knowledge of the event industry's technology and logistical needs.*



# Convention Center Competition

## In a Race for Business, Many Venues are Refreshing and Refurbishing

The Kentucky International Convention Center hosted the Precast Show 2019 for the National Precast Concrete Association.

By Christine Loomis

**C**ities across the country are expanding and updating their convention facilities with a goal of increasing convention and meeting business and staying competitive in this ever-evolving industry. Here are highlights of what planners can expect now and in the future.

### KENTUCKY INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER

Linda Edwards executive director, sales/marketing and business development, at Kentucky International Convention Center (KICC) and Kentucky Exposition Center, is justifiably proud of the expanded center, which reopened last year after a \$207 million-dollar expansion and update.

"The newly renovated convention center boasts 200,000 sf of contiguous Class A exhibit space, a 40,000-sf ballroom with LED color-changing walls and over 50 reimagined meeting rooms. With an 80,000-sf glass curtain encompassing the building," she notes, "KICC is filled with natural light and truly brings the outdoors in. Even in the lower concourse, 10-ft ceilings bring a bright, airy environment to convention-goers. Centrally located in downtown Louisville, KICC is a top-tier convention center and business hub."

Denise Cutler, CMM, director of meetings and executive

support for the National Precast Concrete Association (NPCA), booked an event at KICC in February with 4,274 attending. She had not previously used the center because it was too small for the show, however, with the renovations, she says the 200,000 sf of contiguous space was one of the deciding factors to booking there, but not the only one. "Our show includes various meetings and education courses, so we were also happy that the plans included ample meeting rooms and a large ballroom," Cutler says.

The city itself is also a big draw, she adds. "The geographical location of Louisville is drivable for 80 percent of our members, making it affordable to attend the show. The accessibility to hotels is another plus since a shuttle does not need to be provided."

Additionally, she says, "The center is very open and has modern amenities. Who doesn't like a shiny new penny?"

Cutler and her team made the first site visit the week before the center closed for renovation. "We made the decision to contract by looking at the renderings and plans provided by the center. Louisville Tourism was passionate about the project and their enthusiasm encouraged us to give Louisville a chance. We didn't see the finished project until six months before our event and we were thrilled with the results."

Here are her tips for planners booking the new center:

- Utilize the door monitors to assist guests with directions; they're helpful and friendly.
- If doing a large offsite load-out, inquire about closing 3rd Street. It's a perfect location for a large group and it's covered.
- Levy Catering was very accommodating with menu selection and offered a portable market, which was very popular at the registration area.
- If possible, utilize the major board room — it's state of the art.

### MOSCONE CENTER

San Francisco's Moscone Center celebrated its \$551 million expansion earlier this year. The center now offers 504,914 sf of contiguous space — more than 244,000 sf bigger than before the expansion. An additional 157,000 sf was added to the front of the North and South buildings, and 350,000 sf to the back, including freight access and an expanded kitchen in the same buildings. A new 49,776-sf, column-free ballroom and terraces provide city views, while 107,000 sf of airy pre-function space offers views of the city and surrounding Yerba Buena Gardens.

In all there are now 114 meeting rooms and 1,139,775 sf of usable space across the center's three buildings. Planners and attendees will benefit from the upgraded wireless system, which now allows as many as 60,000 devices at once, as well as added HD screens and LED displays.

At the launch ceremony, Joe D'Alessandro, president and CEO of the San Francisco Travel Association, said, "It is important that San Francisco stay competitive with expanded and upgraded convention facilities. This project has achieved that."

He also pointed to the center's sustainability. "The facility will be LEED Platinum certified, making it the only



The Moscone Center in San Francisco offers 504,914 sf of contiguous space after a \$551 million expansion, which includes a new wireless system.



Denise Cutler, CMM  
Director of Meetings and Executive Support  
National Precast Concrete Association  
Carmel, IN

"The Kentucky International Convention Center is very open and has modern amenities. Who doesn't like a shiny new penny?"

convention center in the nation to achieve such levels of environmental sustainability," he says. "Twenty percent of its power comes from solar energy, and the building's drainage system will be able to correct and recycle over 15 million gallons of water annually."

### MIAMI BEACH CONVENTION CENTER

A \$260 million expansion at Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC) has plenty of highlights to catch planners' attention: nearly 500,000 sf of flexible exhibition space, a new Grand Ballroom — the largest in south Florida at 60,000 sf — four junior ballrooms, one with a glass curtain and sweeping park views, 84 meeting rooms and 9 acres of surrounding green space. Additionally, a 10,000-sf, full-size production kitchen with pastry shop has been added and will be managed by Centerplate. The goal is to elevate F&B at MBCC to reflect the diverse culinary culture of the region.

The 1.4 million-sf facility will showcase more than \$7 million in public art, as well as 1,610 miles of fiber optic cabling and 480 miles of copper wiring to support all IT communications and redundancy in data transfer. Common areas and meeting rooms all have free Wi-Fi.

More good news came for planners and groups last year, when residents of Miami Beach voted to approve the leasing of public land for a privately funded convention center headquarter hotel, which will be connected to MBCC. The future hotel is slated to have 800 guest rooms.

### GEORGE R. BROWN CONVENTION CENTER

In recent years, the George R. Brown Convention Center (GRB) in Houston completed a major renovation, along with the complete reimagining of the area surrounding it, creating a convention campus with multiple options for groups of all sizes. The expansive complex was renamed Avenida Houston, and it includes parks, two convention headquarter hotels, dining, retail and entertainment venues.

In November, The Rustic opened at Avenida Houston,



Credit: L.A. Tourism

The operator of the Los Angeles Convention Center has proposed a \$1.2 billion expansion to possibly bring the center up to 1.2 million sf of space.

becoming the city's largest music venue. In addition to live music, The Rustic offers food and an appealing venue for private events. Also in the last year, the George R. Brown Convention Center kicked off a new sustainable farm project in partnership with Levy catering. There are now four honeybee colonies onsite. The plan is to incorporate the honey from the hives into dishes prepared at the center, and to use the beeswax to produce such products as GRB lip balm.



Pat Hastings  
Director of Meeting Activities  
Materials Research Society  
Warrendale, PA

**“Our international attendees want a vibrant, first-tier city. Seattle checks all those boxes — great airlift, dining, shopping and a technological hub. Now there will be an ideal building and hotels with this campus feel that will be right for us.”**

Additional changes are ongoing across the city. Among them is renovation at the city's famed NRG Astrodome, slated for 2020 completion. Then there's TMC3, of interest to medical and scientific associations and societies. The project is centered around an expansive helix-shaped building, a collaborative effort between Texas Medical Center, Baylor College of Medicine, Texas A&M Health Science Center, University of Texas Health Science Center and the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. The building will be capped with an elevated park featuring gardens and trails, similar to New York's High Line. A 19-story hotel with 410 rooms and 50,000 sf of conference space is also slated for the project, which could wrap as early as 2022. The goal is to make Houston an international hub for biomedical innovations.

Credit: Materials Research Society



The Materials Research Society draws as many as 5,000 attendees for its annual Spring Meeting. The poster sessions, above, are a popular event.

## WASHINGTON STATE CONVENTION CENTER

Although Pat Hastings, director of Meeting Activities for the Materials Research Society (MRS) had a long relationship with convention staff in Seattle, MRS had never booked a meeting there. The new Summit building at the Washington State Convention Center (WSCC), set to open in 2022, changed that.

“We were very excited to hear about the expansion. We've been talking to Seattle for probably 10 years,” Hastings says. “We can fit into the existing Arch building but it's not ideal. We really like the city of Seattle. I've been keeping my eye on it for a long time.”

The MRS Spring meeting, drawing approximately 5,000 attendees, is booked at WSCC in 2021 prior to completion of the new building, and in 2024 and 2025.

“We're a meeting of interdisciplinary materials researchers and we're very breakout intensive,” Hastings says. “We have maybe 120 exhibitors but it's the breakouts that take up most of our meeting. People need to go room to room to 'browse and graze' the meeting space. Being under one roof with a really easy flow is important to us.”

Of the new facility she says, “Having this light, airy campus kind of feel is ideal for us. There's a lot of breakout space, ballrooms and exhibit space and it's on two levels so you have flexibility in how to structure the meeting.”

MRS meetings have tech talks going on every 15 minutes in some 60 or more breakout rooms. Additionally, there are “poster sessions” in larger spaces, where 500-600 scientists stand by posters displaying their research graphically as attendees stroll by.

“You can have Nobel Laureates and top researchers in a particular field walking around and mingling with students and other attendees,” Hastings says. “It's a very vibrant session,

very important to us. The new Summit building is set up well for this. People come and go and we could have 2,000 people in the room at any given time. The networking that goes on is incredible.”

Hastings also points to the new Hyatt Regency Seattle, which opened near the WSCC in December with 1,260 guest rooms, as a significant factor. It joins the recently renovated Sheraton Grand Seattle, with 1,236 guest rooms.

While the current Arch building isn't ideal for MRS, Hastings looks at 2021 as a “get to know you” year. The biggest concern, she notes, is that the 2021 attendees will look over at the nearly complete Summit building and wonder why the meeting isn't there. “But that's a good way to get attendees excited about the new building for the later meetings,” she says. “And we'll arrange VIP tours at the new building during the 2021 meeting, which should excite attendees.”

The bottom line, according to Hastings, is that Seattle is offering the whole package. “Our international attendees want a vibrant, first-tier city. Seattle checks all those boxes — great airlift, dining, shopping and a technological hub. Now there will be an ideal building and hotels with this campus feel that will be right for us.”

Hastings notes that Seattle makes sense in another way, too. “Seattle is at the forefront of sustainability and that meshes with us. Sustainable materials is one of our important research areas so it's a perfect fit. We're at the cutting edge in science and Seattle is at the cutting edge in tech and sustainability.”

As for the Visit Seattle CVB, Hastings says, “The Seattle convention people take time to learn about your meeting and they're really good people. They know the building and city so they know how to help me present it all in the best possible way. They understand our meeting and the flow and they want to understand us so they can help us. You don't get that in a lot of cities. You just don't.”

## JACOB K. JAVITS CONVENTION CENTER

“Ultimately, we are striving to be a model of sustainable practices for the exhibition industry, buildings across New York City and the surrounding community,” according to a news release from New York's Jacob J. Javits Convention

Center about its recent expansion news update. “We are working with several institutions to study the impact of our conservation efforts while introducing new elements that we believe will have a maximum impact on the environment.”

The Javits Center is already LEED Silver certified thanks to expansion elements already completed. The nearly 7-acre green roof is one of the largest of its kind in the country. Three honeybee hives were installed on the green roof, which now produce honey for center food outlets. A 1-acre working farm to come will produce 40,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables for convention meals annually. The roof is also habitat for 27 bird species and five bat species.



The Las Vegas Convention Center's expansion plans will add 1.4 million sf to the current facility, including at least 600,000 sf of new exhibit space.

Expected to be completed in 2021, the massive project will add 1.2 million sf to the north end of the campus,

bringing the center's total event space to 3.3 million sf. A 53,000-sf special event space accommodating up to 5,000 guests is being constructed with views of the Hudson River, and there will be 500,000 sf of contiguous space on the Level 3 show floor. Other expansion highlights include 113,000 sf of pre-function space, a rooftop pavilion accommodating up to 1,500 attendees, 27 new loading docks and 107,000 sf of new meeting room space.

## LAS VEGAS CONVENTION CENTER

In September, the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA) board of directors took the final step to begin construction on the Las Vegas Convention Center District's Phase 2 expansion, slated to wrap in 2021 in time for CES.

“We've been the No. 1 trade show destination in North America for 24 consecutive years, but we must continue to be innovative and upgrade our offerings if we're going to maintain that top spot,” says Steve Hill, the LVCVA's CEO and president. “This expansion and renovation is our commitment to our clients and our community to foster growth and continue to deliver the excellent service and amenities that have made Las Vegas the world's premier destination.”

Phase 2 will add 1.4 million sf to the current facility, including at least 600,000 sf of new exhibit space and a grand atrium. Phase 3, scheduled to wrap in 2023, will be a complete renovation of the existing 3.2 million-sf facility. With this phased approach, no business will be displaced during construction and renovation.



Credit: Colorado Convention Center

The Colorado Convention Center will get 100,000+ sf of new pre-function and service space, which will include a 50,000-sf terrace on the roof.

### COLORADO CONVENTION CENTER

Denver voters approved an expansion of Colorado Convention Center several years ago and the design phase is well underway. Highlights of the project include 100,000+ sf of new pre-function and service space, which will include a 50,000-sf outdoor terrace on the roof of the existing facility, all with unobstructed views of the Rocky Mountains. Also planned is the development of new flexible meeting and ballroom space of up to 80,000 sf. Not surprising, technology will figure into the mix, including increased capacity for Wi-Fi and video streaming.

The center currently has 63 learning rooms, a 14-acre exhibit hall, one of the state's largest ballrooms and a 5,000-seat theater. Colorado Convention Center is also LEED Gold certified. Among its sustainable efforts is the onsite Blue Bear Farm, which provides thousands of pounds of produce for Centerplate's in-house catering operation.

### ERNEST N. MORIAL CONVENTION CENTER

In New Orleans, the Convention Center District Development is a massive project. The \$557 million, five-year modernization is aimed at upgrading the convention center and area around it. One element recently "topped out" is a portion of the \$65 million reimagining of Convention Center Boulevard, which will connect the Warehouse/Arts District with the Central Business District and historic French Quarter and provide new outdoor attractions for attendees and residents alike.



The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center and surrounding area is in the midst of a 5-year capital improvement plan set to wrap up in 2023.

Credit: New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center

Also underway is a 1,200-room Omni hotel connected to the center, which will be surrounded by a 39-acre mixed-use project. The first part of the project is scheduled for completion in the fall of 2020.

### AMERICA'S CENTER CONVENTION COMPLEX

In October last year, officials of the city and county of St. Louis, announced the "AC Next Gen Project" to improve the America's Center Convention Complex. As cities across the country make large investments in their convention centers, officials in St. Louis saw the time is now to do the same. Originally built in 1977, America's Center is in need of modernization. The estimate for the project is approximately \$175 million and will include an additional 92,000 sf of exhibit space, a 65,000-sf multipurpose ballroom and meeting area with 20,000 sf of pre-function space. It will also include 22,000 sf of new support space, the construction of 26 new loading docks as well as renovation of the existing 12 docks. An outdoor pavilion to serve the needs not only of meeting attendees but of St. Louis residents as well is also planned. Explore St. Louis, the city's CVB, is continuing to work with local officials as legislation passed in April to move the project forward.

### LOS ANGELES CONVENTION CENTER

City officials say Los Angeles loses \$1 billion annually in business because the Los Angeles Convention Center (LACC) is too small and outdated. Now there's a proposal from the operator of the center for a \$1.2 billion expansion. About \$500 million would go to adding as much as 350,000 sf, which would give LACC 1.2 million sf of space, including 250,000 sf meeting rooms. That addition would result in about 800,000 sf of contiguous exhibition space.

Approximately \$700 million of the proposal would be devoted to the addition of a 40-story tower at the JW Marriott Los Angeles L.A. LIVE on Olympic Boulevard. The 850-room tower would be connected via pedestrian bridge to the existing JW Marriott and the West Hall of LACC. The hotel project would also add more meeting space, including a 51,000-sf ballroom. The hope is that construction can be approved immediately and completed as soon as 2021.

L.A. Tourism provides personalized, complimentary service to ensure a seamless experience when holding any meeting or event in Los Angeles. As true destination experts with insider knowledge, L.A. Tourism is a comprehensive source of information whose No. 1 priority is to help you make informed decisions that will exceed your objectives and ensure success. By partnering with L.A. Tourism on your next business meeting or convention, planning and decision-making will become easier, simpler and stress-free.

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# Let the Games Begin!



Credit: MGM Resorts International

MGM Resorts International owns dozens of popular gaming resorts, including the MGM Grand, Park MGM and Bellagio Las Vegas.

## After All the Meetings, Gaming Resorts Offer a Thrill for Attendees

By Ron Bernthal

In 1989 Steve Wynn opened The Mirage, a \$750 million, 30-story Las Vegas casino and hotel tower, the first new gaming hotel to be constructed on the Las Vegas Strip since 1974. With its 3,044 guest rooms and 100 acres on the still-burgeoning Las Vegas Strip, The Mirage ushered in the birth of the integrated gaming property as a meetings and convention destination. From here, Wynn built Bellagio Las Vegas, a luxurious Las Vegas hotel now operated by MGM Resorts International and later constructed Wynn Las Vegas, a Forbes Five-Star award-winning property.

For the Mirage, Wynn hired Joel Bergman, an admirer of Walt Disney, and the property became the most opulent casino hotel in Las Vegas, a magical, colorful palace with a Polynesian theme and, a first for Las Vegas, two huge ballrooms; one with 40,000 sf and the other with 20,000 sf, with 12 smaller meeting rooms and the space to host more than 5,000 corporate meeting and convention attendees. There was nothing like it in Las Vegas, or in the country, and association meeting planners began to book this family friendly casino hotel for meetings and events.

In 1989, even the now-famous Las Vegas Convention Center, which opened in 1959, was just beginning to move from professional boxing events, Beatles concerts and UNLV basketball games, to major consumer and trade show events, often timed to big association conventions.

"I think at one point casinos had a reputation as the leader in player tracking," says David Schwartz, associate vice provost for faculty affairs and a casino industry historian at UNLV. "The opportunity is for casinos to leverage their existing databases in ways that make sense for convention guests. Gaming is usually not a huge part of the convention-guest spending profile; but when it is, those guests need to be properly recognized. Casinos can look at automatically enrolling attendees in their rewards program as they sign up for the conference, which if nothing else broadens the marketing funnel."

These days there are commercial or Native American gaming resort properties in 43 states, and most association planners no longer avoid considering these venues for their meeting or convention functions. Listed below are just a few of the best gaming resort destinations for association

planners, all with meeting space, food and beverage venues, retail outlets and surrounded by exciting and interesting terrain for offsite exploring.

### BETTING ON ARIZONA

The architecturally striking Talking Stick Resort features a 15-story tower, which includes 496 deluxe rooms. Association groups love the property's luxurious spa, as well as the cultural displays from the local Pima and Maricopa Tribes.

Dining options at Talking Stick Resort include the Orange Sky Restaurant, complete with a 360-degree vista of the Valley; there is also Ocean Trail, serving fresh seafood; the Blue Coyote Café, with American cuisine in an indoor/outdoor setting with Southwest-accented décor; Wandering Horse Buffet, serving international cuisine in a unique indoor/outdoor buffet experience; the casual Black Fig Bistro; and The Coffee Garden, offering Peet's coffees, espresso, smoothies, gelato and freshly-baked pastries.

The 25,000-sf Salt River Grand Ballroom and 22 state-of-the-art meeting rooms make the Talking Stick Resort Conference Center the perfect setting for association meetings or conferences, and when you add in another 50,000 sf of outdoor function space, it really is a meeting planner's dream.

### ATLANTIC CITY'S EXPANDING INVENTORY

Atlantic City continues to increase its room availability and the Atlantic City Convention Center (ACCC) remains one of the best on the East Coast. The center's 90-foot high, sky-lit atrium lobby welcomes attendees with a helpful lobby concierge, sculptures and artwork, before they enter an exhibit space with more than 500,000 contiguous sf of



Credit: Talking Stick Resort

Talking Stick Resort offers the 25,000-sf Salt River Grand Ballroom and 22 meeting rooms as part of its Resort Conference Center.

**"The staff at the Atlantic City Convention Center are top-notch and make sure that our attendees and vendors feel like they are their favorite show of the year."**



Samara Feinberg  
Director of Events  
American Camp Association, NY & NJ  
New York, NY

space. The center's footprint of almost 31 acres makes it one of the largest convention centers in the Eastern U.S.

For large convention meetings, the ACCC offers 4 drive-in doors, mechanical elevators, and 1,400 indoor parking spaces. It is connected with the Atlantic City Rail Line terminal that runs the Atlantic City Rail Line from Philadelphia, and jitneys, buses and taxis queue at the front of the building to provide service to other points within the city. A pedestrian air bridge links the ACCC to the adjoining Sheraton Atlantic City Convention Center Hotel.

"We have world-class casino resorts in a true resort destination," says Jim Wood, president and CEO of Meet AC, the city's convention and visitor's bureau. "We have beautiful, pristine beaches that a number of our major resorts sit on. We have the world-famous Atlantic City Boardwalk. We also offer a broad selection of nighttime entertainment, and we offer some of the best culinary experiences anyone could ever expect to have at a meeting."

Last year, the city's Meet AC booked a total of 238 meetings and conventions representing 371,996 future hotel rooms nights for Atlantic City. This year the number of future convention delegates to Atlantic City will reach more than 547,862, with a projected economic impact of more than \$349 million.

Convention business in Atlantic City has been and continues to steadily rise. Association meeting planners are signing multiyear agreements with the ACCC, showing an increased level of confidence, and even professional meeting groups have been hosting their annual meetings and conventions in the city.

"The American Camp Association, NY & NJ has been hosting our annual conference and trade show, the Tristate CAMP Conference, at the Atlantic City Convention Center for almost 10 years," says Samara Feinberg, director of events at the American Camp Association, NY & NJ. "The staff at the convention center are top-notch and make sure that our



Credit: Meet AC

The Atlantic City Convention Center offers 500,000 sf of space. The 31-acre footprint of the center makes it one of the largest on the East Coast.

attendees and vendors feel like they are their favorite show of the year. The proximity to the outlets and restaurants make the center a good starting point for all our attendees to not feel 'trapped' at a convention center with nothing fun to do before or after the show and sessions. I have been planning conferences for over a decade and can say that overall we receive tremendous service from the badge checkers to A/V and to our event management team."

Feinberg adds, "For our latest event in Atlantic City, we used five properties. Our almost 4,000 attendees, including exhibitors, were accommodated at the Sheraton Atlantic City Convention Center Hotel, Caesars Atlantic City Hotel & Casino, Tropicana Atlantic City, Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa and the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City hotels, and they were all fantastic properties to work with. We had a few private dinners during the event, at Carmine's and at Cuba Libre Restaurant & Rum Bar, both located in The Quarter at Tropicana, and another at the Sheraton. Basically, our events in Atlantic City go off without a hitch and our attendees love the atmosphere at the venues and within the convention center."

One of the recently reopened resorts in the Atlantic City skyline is the Ocean Casino Resort, with new additions and exciting improvements. Ocean Casino guests have responded positively to the company's shift in focus to be a casino first and rapid implementation of operational changes. This new approach allows Ocean Casino to offer guests affordability, quality gaming and resort amenities. Ocean Casino Resort spans 20 beachfront acres on the world famous Atlantic City Boardwalk. As the tallest building in Atlantic City, the tower encompasses 1,399 guest rooms and suites with unparalleled views. The resort's high-energy casino features live entertainment, ocean views, nearly 2,000 of the most exciting slot machines, 125 action-packed table games and the finest sportsbook on the east coast in partnership with William Hill. Ocean Casino Resort offers an industry-leading loyalty program, Ocean Premier, that provides members with valuable incentives, benefits and rewards. With more than

15 restaurants, Ocean Casino Resort offers world-class dining, including American Cut, Amada and Dolce Mare. Best-in-class amenities such as Exhale Spa + Bathhouse, 3 pools, HQ2 Nightclub, HQ2 Beachclub, Topgolf Swing Suite, shopping and more provide guests with boundless entertainment options. Additionally, Ocean Casino Resort has 160,000 sf of flexible, indoor meeting and convention space and 90,000 sf of unique outdoor spaces.

Another Atlantic City sure bet is the recent addition of the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City, formerly the Taj Mahal. With 2,000 rooms and more than 150,000 sf of meeting and event space, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City can fill any bill. A variety of venues are available to amplify any program and are designed to accommodate groups of all sizes — from intimate board meetings to large-scale events and conferences. Hard Rock Live at Etes Arena can handle a general session of 7,000 people or 300+ booths for a trade show. The Seminole Ballroom, with 29,000 sf, can be divided into six sections and configured to host banquets, corporate events and small private concerts. Attendees can reach every space from their room, and each space offers Wi-Fi access, expert A/V and technological integration.

#### THE BAHAMAS OFFERS MORE CHOICES

The newly updated, Bahamian culture-infused resort, Atlantis, Paradise Island, sitting atop 5 miles of pristine beach on Paradise Island, has embarked on a new chapter tied to a meaningful connection with the ocean, Bahamian culture and the spirit of the property's 7,500 employees. Atlantis features five distinct properties within the resort, from the iconic The Royal to the original The Beach, the newly refurbished The Coral to the recently built luxury properties, The Cove and The Reef.

Five new outposts of beloved Bahamian restaurants have opened at Atlantis, giving guests the opportunity to enjoy the same authentic flavors inside the resort. They include: SipSip, from Harbour Island located at The Cove; Sun & Ice, in the lobby of The Coral; and McKenzie's Conch Shack, Frankie Gone Bananas and the Pirate Republic brewery tap room in Marina Village. All offer fresh ingredients from local farmers and fishermen. The resort's latest restaurant and cocktail bar, Fish, is helmed by renowned Master Chef José Andres.

Other new happenings at the property include well-known designer Jeffrey Beers designing the pool scape and cabanas at the newly refurbished Coral Pool, along with a new swim-up Popsicle and Cocktail Bar. At the Cove Pool, influential designer Lulu de Kwiatkowski's love for the Bahamas was used for her inspiration to redesign its pool scape and cabanas in her Lulu DK fabrics. Throughout the pathways among the 141-acre waterscape, a curated playlist created

# TURN ANY MEETING INTO A SHOW.

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Steve O'Malley, Michael Guerriero, and David Peckinpaugh (pictured left to right) Maritz Global Events





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George H. Erwin Jr.  
Former Executive Director  
North Carolina Association of  
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Fletcher, NC

by iHeartRadio brings together a fusion of sounds characterizing the look and feel of each property.

The Atlantis Casino offers 85 table games, including blackjack, baccarat, craps, roulette, Let It Ride, Three Card Poker Progressive and Ultimate Texas Hold ‘Em. As for slots, there are more than 700 machines playable with denominations from a penny to \$100. Every machine is equipped with the newest validators and ticketing technology.

The Cove Pool offers poolside gaming, including blackjack and craps, while Sea Glass at The Cove offers gaming with a variety of slot machines and roulette and blackjack tables.

Although the resort’s expansive gaming and meeting facilities may get lost in the mix when describing the unique aquatic and culinary amenities, the property does offer the Conference Center at Atlantis, including the 50,000-sf Imperial Ballroom, more than 40,000 sf of pre-function space, 30 breakout rooms and three boardrooms. Ballrooms of 25,000-sf and 13,000 sf are also available to planners.

Dolphin Cay is one of the world’s largest, open-air, man-made marine mammal habitats. It opened in 2007 in response to the need to provide a safe haven for Dolphins rescued after Hurricane Katrina tore through their home in Gulfport, MI.

Every guest visit to Dolphin Cay supports the Atlantis Blue Project Foundation, which creates and promotes solutions for marine conservation challenges ranging from coral reef degradation to marine species in decline. More than \$5 million to date has allowed the foundation to create a fully restored, 1 million acre-healthy coral reef protected area in the Bahamas.

The Grand Hyatt Baha Mar on Cable Beach — considered one of the most beautiful in the Bahamas — is conveniently located 7 miles from the airport and just 5 miles from downtown Nassau. With 1,800 guest rooms, including 230 suites, the property offers the Grand Club Lounge, the perfect location to enjoy a continental breakfast, all-day snacks, evening chef-inspired selections, as well as refreshments and cocktails.

The property provides six swimming pools, an expansive ESPA at Baha Mar spa, with a state of the art fitness facility, 100,000 sf of gaming with 1,140 slots and 119 tables, pool-side cabanas, and 200,000 sf of indoor/outdoor event spaces. In addition, the 82,000 sf Baha Mar Convention Center, with 16 breakout rooms and an Arts & Entertainment Center, is one of the largest in the Caribbean. There are more than 20 food and beverage venues onsite.

For groups that want to combine golfing with professional conferences or meetings, there is the par-72 Royal Blue at Baha Mar course, which features ocean views on the front nine and forested panoramas on the back nine.

### FLORIDA’S SEMINOLE HARD ROCK EXPANSIONS

Set to open in October 2019, the \$1.5 billion expansion of Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood will feature an iconic guitar tower hotel, complete with 638 rooms reaching 450 feet up. The casino will nearly double its size with over 3,000 slot machines, 198 table games and a 46-table poker room.

Additionally, the property will offer an elaborate 13.5-acre pool complex highlighted by the new “Bora Bora” experience with private villas surrounded entirely by water and waterfalls. Playing host to musicians, comedians and other types of entertainment, the redesigned and rebuilt Hard Rock Live theater will provide 6,500 seats and a world-class design.



Atlantis, Paradise Island offers planners the 50,000-sf Imperial Ballroom, more than 40,000 sf of pre-function space and 30 breakout rooms.

Major enhancements will also take place within the retail outlets, spa, dining and nightlife venues and meeting spaces.

“My clients will be on property next year, and again in 2021 for meetings. The first will include a trade show, with expected attendance for the first group approximately 320 attendees, and about 400 for the second group,” says Todd

S. Winston, president of T. Global Partners, Inc., a meeting/event planning firm. “I was excited to present the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino to my clients because it offered enough meeting space that I had no concerns about each client’s sizable conference exhibits working in the space.”

Winston continues, “The Seminole Ballroom presents more options than many venues. The proximity of the salons and the Grand Ballroom to the Seminole Ballroom also offered convenience for the clients’ food and beverage needs as well as their break-out sessions.”

Like many groups meeting at a gaming location for the first time, there is a heightened eagerness and expectation about gathering at a casino location. “These clients have not typically held either of these events in a venue that has gaming as an option, so there is a great deal of excitement about having a casino on property, and I am sure it will be utilized by attendees during both programs,” Winston says. “In addition, both groups are excited by the abundance of dining options, as well as the property’s many entertainment options, which include both a comedy club and a concert venue.”

Winston thinks the initial contact with a venue’s sales representatives can often be a litmus test of what the total meeting experience will be. “The early interaction with a sales team is often indicative of what a meeting group’s experience is likely to be when they arrive on property,” Winston says. “I have no concerns that both of the upcoming meetings I have arranged at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino will receive the same level of attentiveness that the sales team there have already shown to my clients and my own team. Finally, although it may not have driven the decision making, one additional characteristic of this property that may have played a role in our selection is that most travelers want to be able to say they have visited the major landmarks in an area. As the property’s “guitar tower” becomes an iconic landmark for the Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood area, I know my groups will be proud to say they have seen it up close.”

At the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa, renovations are set to debut in summer/fall 2019, and includes a new hotel tower with 500+ rooms, additional pools and a more expansive gaming space. The property, which has completed renovations to its state-of-the-art Poker Room, Mezzanine Level Casino/Rock Walk, Smoke Free Gaming Area and the Orient Garage, will also be unveiling a new Rock Spa & Salon, meeting space, entertainment venue and a new arrival experience. In addition, food, beverage and catering options will be instituted, including some that are already open for association attendees such as The Rez Grill, an American grill concept by James Beard-awarded culinary director, Frank Anderson.

### NEVADA IS ALWAYS A SURE BET

Located on the top four floors within the newly opened, 2,700-room Park MGM, formerly the Monte Carlo, each of the 293 rooms and suites at NoMad Las Vegas are residential in feel. Each room is appointed with custom furnishings, oak hardwood floors, original artwork, and custom Argan bathroom products. The hotel features the first-ever NoMad Casino, poised under the building’s original Tiffany glass ceiling. The casino provides an intimate space to play roulette, blackjack and baccarat. The renowned Royal Portuguese Cabinet of Reading in Rio de Janeiro inspired the NoMad.

The restaurant’s design features 23-foot walls that showcase a collection of books that have been carefully curated. The property offers unique indoor/outdoor meeting and private dining spaces, catering menus designed by Daniel Humm and Will Guidara, state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment, and the Cellar, an intimate private dining space. Park MGM offers 77,000 sf of event space at its new Madison

**“I was excited to present the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood to my clients because it offered enough meeting space that I had no concerns about each client’s sizable conference exhibits working in the space.”**

Todd S. Winston  
President  
T. Global Partners, Inc.  
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Meeting Center, and a new Eataly Las Vegas is adjacent to the property’s Las Vegas Strip entrance. Open 24/7, the 40,000-sf Italian marketplace offers many dining and shopping options.

Caesars Entertainment Corporation broke ground last year on CAESARS FORUM, their newest Las Vegas development. The \$375 million, 550,000-sf conference center is within walking distance to more than 20,000 Caesars Entertainment hotel rooms and will provide direct access via skybridge to Harrah’s Las Vegas Hotel & Casino and The LINQ Hotel & Casino, and also will be connected to The LINQ Promenade and the Flamingo Las Vegas. The LEED silver-rated facility provides a unique option for association meetings and events. Caesars Forum will be the first facility of this size built on one level, and will feature the two largest pillarless ballrooms in the world, equivalent to 27 tennis courts or three ice hockey rinks. It will also feature FORUM PLAZA, the first 100,000-sf dedicated outdoor meeting and event space in Las Vegas.

CAESARS FORUM secured its first booking with the American School Counselor Association for July 2021, which is expected to include 3,500 attendees from all over the U.S. In addition, Caesars Entertainment has contracted over \$70 million in conference business for the FORUM, expected to open in 2020.

The Flamingo Las Vegas, another Caesars property, is in the second phase of multimillion-dollar room renovation, which will include 976 guest rooms; phase one renovated the first 1,270 rooms. So far the property has spent \$156 million on the project. The property provides a 73,000-sf Corporate Convention Center and Executive Conference Center, which includes two ballrooms and meeting rooms that can accommodate up to 1,200 attendees.

### NORTH CAROLINA

Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort broke ground last year on their newest expansion, a \$250 million project that will add 83,000 sf of meeting space, a parking garage and over 700 hotel rooms to the bustling resort.

An enterprise of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Harrah's Cherokee is the largest meetings property in the state. In addition to an expansive casino floor, with over 3,600 slot games and 150 traditional table games, the prop-



The LINQ Hotel & Casino has 31,034 sf of configurable meeting space and a mix of dynamic meeting rooms that can accommodate 10 to 1,000 guests.

erty also features over 1,100 hotel rooms, 10 restaurants, the Essence Lounge, the Mandara Spa and seven retail shops. Association attendees meeting at the 56-acre property have privileged access to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian-owned Sequoyah National Golf Club.

"I have been organizing the annual gathering of the NCAPC at Harrah's Cherokee property since 2012," says George H. Erwin Jr., former executive director of the North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police. "I recently retired, but

I consider my experience bringing our groups to this venue as extremely successful."

"After taking over the planning for the annual conference and vendor show, the group had been going to another North Carolina property, but our costs were too high and we were losing attendees very year," Erwin says. "Once we switched to Harrah's there was some apprehension about moving the group to a casino property, but we needed to 'think out of the box' and try something new. The result was that for the past seven years our costs were reduced, our attendance increased every year, and we signed new contracts every three years, extending our visits through 2020. With the property's expansion, I imagine we will continue our great run at the property."

Erwin says the venue was perfect for both attendee and vendor needs. "Our approximately 250 attendees used all the venues in the hotel, as we booked about 300+ rooms, used classroom-style meeting space and hotel dining facilities. We also booked the Events Center for our large receptions, and the approximately 100 vendors were delighted that the Events Center offered plenty of floor space for exhibits and a stage big enough for the vehicle displays."

Erwin was very blunt when asked if he thinks the group will continue patronizing Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort. "I imagine we will see even higher attendance among police chiefs, state officials and vendors," Erwin says. "And with spouses and significant others enjoying the optional offsite visits to Pigeon Forge, TN, or to the Cherokee Museum, or enjoying the gaming floor if they prefer, there's no reason to tweak the format."

### MARYLAND

The flagship Live! Event Center at Live! Casino & Hotel, adds an additional 350,000 sf to Maryland's largest gaming facility. The hotel tower features 310 guest rooms, an event center, meeting spaces, new dining options, and a day spa/salon. The Event Center itself currently offers 20,000 sf of meeting and banquet space with a ballroom flexible to accommodate breakout space. The venue's built-in performance stage has a state-of-the-art A/V system with professionals onsite, and meeting packages are customizable for conventions, corporate retreats and private events. The Phase II expansion, to be completed by the end of this year, will double the size of the event and meeting space to 4,000 seats for live entertainment and add 40,000 sf of additional meeting space.

Just minutes from Live! Casino, is the property's "sister" venue, called Live! Lofts, with a newly-renovated, 11-story, 250-room hotel including 100 suites. Approximately 3,400 sf of newly-renovated meeting and banquet space is also available for custom meetings and events.



Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood is undergoing a \$1.5 billion expansion set to wrap up in the fall. The casino will nearly double in size.

### NEW MEXICO

Situated in a beautiful mountainous region between Albuquerque and El Paso, the stunning Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino offers just about anything a meeting planner could ask for in terms of price, number of rooms, meeting facilities, catering and a slew of year-round outdoor activities to keep attendees and their families happy for the entire event. There is also a friendly casino on property.

There are over 40,000 sf of event and meeting facilities, with 15 individual rooms configurable to accommodate any group. Eight dining venues and catered F&B make it easy to feed everyone, and each of the 273 guest rooms and suites are comfortable and filled with amenities such as mini-bars, free Wi-Fi and oversized king and queen beds. A specialized group team member will be assigned to the group to help organize meeting logistics, F&B needs, and offsite activities such as skiing, horseback riding, big game hunts and golf.

Another popular New Mexico option is the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa. Located on the Santa Ana Pueblo, the resort is steeped in culture and history with magnificent views of the Sandia Mountains and a Cottonwood bosque forest. The 12,000-sf Tamaya Ballroom can host up to 700 guests for a formal banquet, while the Sunrise Amphitheater, House of the Hummingbird or the 8,000-sf Cottonwood Pavilion and Patio near the banks of the Rio Grande are great for a gorgeous outdoor ceremony.

### THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Work has wrapped up at Tulalip Resort Casino in the state of Washington, 45 minutes from Seattle, on its \$15 million renovation. The work included a redesign of 360 rooms and a redo of one of the five "mega-suites." Association planners who visited Tulalip just a few years ago will notice a "night-and-day" difference between what the rooms and public spaces were and what they look like now, after the massive renovation of the casino, amphitheater and outlet malls.

The award-winning Tulalip Resort Casino is one of the

most distinctive gaming, dining, meeting, entertainment and shopping destinations in the state of Washington. The property is listed on Condé Nast Traveler Gold and Traveler Top 100 Resorts lists, and includes 192,000 sf of gaming space, a hotel featuring 370 guest rooms and suites, 30,000 sf of meeting and convention space, the full-service T Spa, and eight dining venues, including the Blackfish Wild Salmon Grill and Bar and the newly opened Tula Bene Pastaria + Chophouse.

Conveniently located between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C., the property offers more than 122 name-brand retail shops that are a big attraction for both attendees and their families attending events at the property.

"We have held multiple conferences at Tulalip Resort," says Crissy Wilson, meeting planner with the Land Surveyors Association of Washington. "Our last event took place in February, with 375-400 attendees. The staff at Tulalip is always responsive, and the meeting space fits our group well. Our conference uses the full inventory of indoor meeting space available."

**"The staff at Tulalip Resort Casino is always responsive, and the meeting space fits our group well. Our conference uses the full inventory of indoor meeting space available."**

Crissy Wilson  
Meeting Planner  
Land Surveyors Association of Washington  
Santa Rosa, CA

Wilson continues, "From contract to execution of the event, the staff at Tulalip is responsive to all our needs and helped to make our conference run flawlessly. The attendees love the facility as the rooms are nice, the casino offers great entertainment, and it is convenient to shopping and restaurants."

Also, ilani, the event and gaming property in Ridgeville, WA just 30 minutes north of Portland, OR, is celebrating the one-year anniversary of its Meeting & Entertainment Center. The center includes the Cowlitz Ballroom, accommodating up to 2,500 attendees for concerts, conferences and other events. Other spaces in the center are suitable for classroom and showroom set-ups, and customized catering is available for small and large events. The property encompasses more than 400,000 sf, including 15 dining venues, the gaming floor and indoor/outdoor event spaces. Presently, association groups can easily be accommodated in nearby Portland or Vancouver, WA, although a hotel addition to ilani's Meeting & Entertainment Center is expected to open by 2021.

# A Unique Upside



Credit: Trump National Doral Miami

## Find That Destination With a Difference to Make Your Event Truly Memorable

Trump National Doral Miami offered one planner golf, pools and nearby shopping and nightlife — everything her attendees wanted.

By Maura Keller

Organizing an event, convention, retreat or off-site meeting? From musical venues to appealing hideaways to ultra-hip destinations, there are a variety of meeting locales and destinations for attendees who want a memorable experience. These destination gems offer unique accommodations and amenities aplenty — all while providing ideal locations for associations to work and play.

### MIAMI IS MARVELOUS

Having a successful event is part art, part science. But if you have it in a world-renowned locale like Miami — you've got it made. Jennifer Porro, meeting planner and officer of

Conventions & Program Development, Florida Chiropractic Association, recently held the Florida Chiropractic Association's "SE Regional Convention and Expo 2019" at Trump National Doral Miami.

With 475 attendees and 150 exhibitors participating, the expo featured chiropractic continuing education as well as exhibitions showcasing the latest and greatest industry resources.

"Our convention wasn't easily conducive to the downtown options Miami had to offer," Porro says. "In our quest to find a location further south than Palm Beach County, but not wanting to give up the elegance and hospitality that Palm Beach County offers, we discovered The Trump National Doral. The appeal of many golf courses was quite attractive, yet the fact

that it was easily accessible for attendees by car or plane, coupled with the amazingly hospitable staff to help us properly host our South Florida crowd."

According to Porro, members of the Florida Chiropractic Association who were Miami residents requested a destination south of Palm Beach County, so they have made an effort to bounce between Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties every other year.

"This location has tremendous opportunity to appeal to golfers, poolside-loungers, as well as downtown city life junkies," Porro says. "Downtown Doral is across the street, and Brickell is a quick ride away for those that are wanting fine dining, hip bars, and more nightlife than the resort will offer. Miami Beach is not far for a destination, and the airport is a quick 10 minutes away."

Confident and cutting edge, Miami offers one of the most intriguing destinations for meeting and events. From high-tech hotels to art gallery spaces, the city is teeming with venues aplenty. One of the largest, most recent renovation projects in Miami is the refurbishment and expansion of the ever-popular Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC). For years, the MBCC has been the epitome of convention locales within the Miami area.

The Miami Beach area is the most attractive region in the country for meetings and events, as the area continues to develop properties and infrastructure unparalleled anywhere else. The city of Miami continues to be at the forefront of this trend as the region updates its infrastructure while growing room and function space inventory with the addition of revolutionary projects, including the MBCC project.

Occupying 27 acres in the heart of Miami, the Miami Worldcenter will be opening the door to new and unique meeting spaces for meetings and events of all sizes in 2021. Situated on a 10-block site, Miami Worldcenter is one of the largest private real estate developments underway in the U.S. At the heart of the development is a delightful open-air, pedestrian-friendly shopping center and entertainment complex.

In addition, the monumental Marriott Marquis Miami Worldcenter Hotel & Expo Center will deliver a level of style, setting and service for guests that is simply unprecedented. Offering approximately 1,800 rooms and 600,000 sf of meeting, exhibition, and convention space, the hotel will boast a wealth of resort-style amenities, including an expansive pool deck with views of the bay, the American Airlines Arena, and the downtown skyline, as well as an 80,000-sf outdoor event deck.

Dominique Vanleuven, conference and incentive manager at HiPoint Events, has held several events at The Palms Hotel & Spa in Miami, mostly being upscale and international meetings. The most recent event held at The Palms was a group with 85 attendees, where they organized a cocktail bar near

**"Its variety of culture and melting pot of ethnicities has made Miami an international destination ... Whether you're visiting as an attendee or planner, there are plenty of options and activities available to meet your business needs or leisure."**



Dominique Vanleuven  
Conference and Incentive Manager  
HiPoint Events  
St. Petersburg, FL

the pool, a dinner on the lush green lawn, as well as a barbecue lunch under the Grand Tiki. The property makes the most of its inspired-by-nature design which includes lush gardens, a large pool area, and white sandy beaches, providing plenty of opportunity and space for guests to mix and mingle.

"Miami is a popular destination that is often associated with gorgeous beaches, palm trees, and clear blue waters as well as its fun and unique art deco architecture," Vanleuven says. "Its variety of culture and melting pot of ethnicities, has made Miami an international destination that is both safe and fun. Whether you're visiting as an attendee or planner, there are plenty of options and activities available to meet your business needs or leisure."

The Association of Internal Management Consultants recently held its international conference in Miami, with approximately 100 consulting leaders attending. According to Dr. William D. Trotter, AIMC executive director, the event involves presentations, panel discussions, networking sessions, a vendor share fair, awards ceremony and skill-building workshops.

"The location on the beach was a differentiator," Trotter says. "Miami has the combination of great climate, beaches, entertainment and proximity to international airports. As with all conference planning, it is important to visit the site personally before making a decision."

Laura Land, meeting planner with the Florida Watermelon Association, Inc. agrees. In January 2018, Land orchestrated the 50th Florida Watermelon Association Convention at Trump International Beach Resort Miami for about 250 attendees.

"Miami has something to offer anyone — from the casual beach setting to the most luxurious big city settings. We have an annual convention and move yearly to different locations throughout the state. Miami made for an awesome experience with the warm weather and beautiful beach settings."

### ORLANDO, A FAVORITE CHOICE

In October, conference manager Libby Long hosted a conference for senior executives of her company at the Hilton

Orlando. Across 2 1/2 days, the attendees absorbed phenomenal content in an even better environment thanks to the fresh and open event space and a staff that values partnership in event production and unparalleled service. Long hosted private lunches, receptions and the chefs at the property transformed the standard “conference food” experience into a culinary journey for attendees.

“Orlando is such a convenient location that really has it all — an international airport, countless golf courses, spas and entertainment — what more could you want?” Long says. “From an attendee perspective, Orlando brings a one-stop shop for a large array of interests, while being very convenient. Essentially, it is where you want to go.”

For meeting planners interested in Orlando as a potential locale for an association meeting or event, Long advises planners think outside the box. “There is more than meets the eye



Ashley Vercellone  
Meeting Planner and Senior  
Director of Operations  
NACAS  
Charlottesville, VA

**“Orlando is convenient to the Walt Disney World Resort, Universal Studios Florida, and other local attractions ... there are many options to host unique experiences with access to local restaurants and other facilities.”**

when it comes to Orlando, so take the time to understand how you can take advantage of all the city and area has to offer,” Long says.

Ashley Vercellone, meeting planner and senior director of operations, National Association of College Auxiliary Services (NACAS), says Orlando is a popular conference destination for NACAS members. “The location is convenient to the Walt Disney World Resort, Universal Studios Florida, and other local attractions,” Vercellone says. “This makes it appealing for our members to extend their stay into a vacation. From an event planning perspective there are many options to host unique experiences with access to local restaurants and other facilities.”

Last year NACAS hosted the C3X Annual Conference and Expo at the Rosen Shingle Creek Orlando resort. The 50th Anniversary celebration attracted approximately 1,300 attendees representing over 300 institutions and 200 business partners. Held annually, C3X is the pinnacle event for the auxiliary services industry where professionals can come

together for high-level learning, idea generation, collaboration, and relationship building.

In addition to engaging general sessions led by keynote speakers and more intimate educational sessions, NACAS hosts the expo, where business partners have the opportunity to showcase their goods and services. They also host campus tours, a golf tournament, and affinity events to raise money for the NACAS Foundation.

“In addition, we hosted over 600 people to TopGolf for our opening event, and celebrated our 50th Anniversary with a barbecue and fireworks show overlooking the lake at the Rosen Shingle Creek resort,” Vercellone says.

Vercellone suggests meet planners look into event opportunities beyond the hotel.

Look at other local attractions that may not be your first inclination,” she says. “There are tons of quirky venues in the area that are unique, fun and convenient. Also consider the timing of your events as there are some potential weather considerations.”

While in Orlando, NACAS was connected with Florida Meeting Services, through Global DMC Partners and Shelley Meixell, vice president of global sales.

“While Florida Meeting Services brought us the fireworks and games, Meixell and her team continue to bring the connections across the country and around the world,” Vercellone says. “In the past two years that we have been working in partnership with Global DMC, they have provided us with creative ways to promote our conference and unique experiences that help to elevate our event for attendees. They are always quick to address any additional requests or concerns that come up along the way.”

### NASHVILLE IS MORE THAN MUSIC

Nashville has become a hot destination, joining the ranks of other popular destinations. Just ask Brittany Baugh, CMP, DMCP, senior event manager of CSI Nashville, who has orchestrated many events in Nashville, ranging from spouse tours to offsite events for 300 people.

“Music city has Southern charm and a wealth of live music talent, which has lately been capturing the attention of Hollywood stars who are building homes here,” Baugh says.

“We’re not just country music anymore. We have axe throwing, pontoon boats, happening rooftops, and every type of cuisine you can imagine. We’re building countless hotel rooms to keep up with the demand.”

Karen Bennett, meeting planner with Coast Shows, has found that the convention and visitors’ bureau is always happy to help with events coming to Nashville and how to make the most out of an event.

“They can help meeting planners obtain hotels, convention or event space, catering and anything else you could need

to produce an event,” Bennett says. “Everyone in Nashville is always happy to help.”

Though the convention center gets booked years in advance, Bennett recommends that planners be aware that their meeting date does not take place at the same time as another large event.

“Due to the fact that the traffic getting around the city could be an issue,” Bennett says. “The hotels are great and there are enough of them for any type of event size in Nashville. And there is live music everywhere you turn, great venues that are clean and willing to work with you, as well as outstanding restaurants and always something to do.”

Speaking of unique venues, Nashville boasts a century-old former train station turned hotel, called Union Station Hotel Nashville. Guests of the hotel now enjoy a new Union Station experience designed to convey a celebration of Music City — from local art to live music in the lobby. The Union Station Hotel also offers a range of group activities, including whiskey tastings and history tours.

Likewise, City Winery Nashville offers association event attendees amazing live music capabilities, delectable culinary creations, an award-winning wine program and stunning patio views. From intimate private dining spaces to a full production concert venue and winery, there are several distinct event spaces that can be combined and configured to host a one-of-a-kind gathering.

### ANAHEIM IS ALWAYS A SAFE BET

Looking for a unique cool weather location? Anaheim, CA is a preeminent location for associations and their members who are looking to get away from it all. Thanks in part to the modern Anaheim Convention Center, many associations have found this city to be the ideal destination for hosting events with a reasonable budget. From intimate meeting spaces to large convention-style facilities, the Anaheim Convention Centers offers a wealth of venues from which to choose. And, thanks to a growing meeting and events industry, key facility space throughout the convention center has been expanded and renovated to engage and delight visitors.

The new 200,000 sf of space allows the convention center to grow with large annual events, providing meeting space capacity to attract meeting-intensive conventions. Specifically, the expansion consists of a vertically stacked facility containing 200,000 sf of multipurpose convention space.

**“Nashville is not just country music anymore. We have axe throwing, pontoon boats, happening rooftops, and every type of cuisine you can imagine. We’re building countless hotel rooms to keep up with the demand.”**



Brittany Baugh, CMP, DMCP  
Senior Event Manager  
CSI Nashville  
Nashville, TN

### THE BAHAMAS IS SURE TO PLEASE

With sun-warmed beaches, iridescent waters and breathtaking sunsets, the Bahamas is naturally linked as an ideal meeting destination. Within the last few years, this memorable getaway has become more than just a few moments in paradise. In fact, the Bahamas has turned into a key destination as associations discover that the islands can double as the perfect event setting. Hosting a meeting or event in the Bahamas offers a combination of adventure travel and wonderful surroundings. Add to that the affordable prices, and you’ve got yourself the ideal location for an association event.

Cindy Coakley-Knowles, CEO and creative director, Destination Angels Int’l recently organized and hosted a familiarization and educational event at Courtyard Nassau Downtown/Junkanoo Beach for some of her fellow colleagues of the Association of Bridal Consultants. They had a combination of 35 attendees — local members and members from the United States.

“All organized activities centered around the attendees becoming familiar with the property and learning the destination at large,” Coakley-Knowles says. “There were eye-opening site inspections, island tours and informative educational presentations. These professional bridal consultants were pleased that this property gave everything they would want for their bride seeking that personal atmosphere away from the hustle and bustle of a large resort, which we all agreed

applies for any meeting planner seeking a vendor that gives you everything a large resort offers in terms of its modern contemporary décor and all the A/V amenities one would need.”

Simply put, Coakley-Knowles says making the Bahamas the destination of choice for attendees, gives them a destination within a destination.

“In the Bahamas you have options. Go ahead, pick an island — something secluded and super private where locking doors



Nashville is world famous for its music, but the destination offers a variety of other attractive activities for attendees who want more.



**“Miami has something to offer anyone — from the casual beach setting to the most luxurious big city settings. Miami made for an awesome experience with the warm weather and beautiful beach settings.”**

Laura Land  
Meeting Planner  
Florida Watermelon Association  
Fort Myers, FL

featured a golf tournament, spa appointments, dolphin encounters, swimming with the pigs, sailing, rum tastings and tours, snorkeling and ATV/dune buggy tours of the island.

“If you’re looking for a destination that is a sure bet for entertainment, recreation and relaxation for your attendees — the Bahamas is the place to go,” Stefan says.

#### UNIQUE INTERNATIONAL LOCALES

Mexico has long been one of the world’s most popular destination locales. Offering high-quality facilities, stunning backdrops, and hundreds of different activities, Mexico is the perfect place for associations to find exactly what they’re looking for in a meeting locale.

While many think of Mexico as being strictly a “beach” destination, the country offers a wealth of options for those who seek more variety for their event. In addition to some of the world’s most famous locales — from golden beaches with turquoise waters, to old colonial cities teeming with charming buildings, cobblestone streets and classic archways — Mexico gives associations the utmost in choice and opportunity for their event.

Australia and New Zealand also has a growing meetings and events sector, thanks in part to the global boom in demand for events in unique destinations. According to Cvent, Australia and New Zealand are some of the world’s best destinations for meetings and events — offering breathtaking landscapes, modern city life and unique cultural experiences. Both countries offer a wealth of memorable venues, historical sites and famous landmarks that offer an ideal backdrop for meetings, conventions and events of all sizes.

A growing number of association planners are exploring Costa Rica as a unique destination for their conventions, meetings and events. Here’s why: Costa Rica is a natural paradise with rain forests, cloud forests, volcanoes, more than 300 species of birds as well as pristine beaches.

The \$35 million Costa Rica Convention Center has recently opened in the country’s capital of San José, fulfilling the most significant goal in the Costa Rica Tourism Board’s strategy to more aggressively compete in the meetings sector. The long-awaited facility covers nearly 168,000 sf, with the capacity to host as many as 4,600 attendees in one session. It is located approximately midway between Juan Santamaría International Airport and downtown San José.

And while it may be a bit farther, Singapore has also become a favorite destination for many travelers who revel in the unique urban setting. Singapore has become the perfect place for meetings, conferences and exhibitions thanks to its wide range of state-of-the-art convention centers and venues that cater to a variety of needs and budgets. In addition to entertainment options aplenty, Singapore boasts wonderful cultural and environmental gems just waiting to be explored.

is optional and air conditioning is not needed or you might be more inclined to keep it modern while enjoying the island lifestyle,” Coakley-Knowles says. “The Bahamas gives you this and more because it is more than just ‘an island’. There are 700 islands and cays.”

Meeting planners should utilize the on-property meeting planner or a local planner in the Bahamas to assist in providing a local experience for attendees. “This would add value for your attendees who will get to actually ‘feel’ the destination,” Coakley-Knowles says.

Leah Stefan, event manager at CSI Bahamas, says the Bahamas boast crystal blue beaches, white sand, 2,400 coral reefs



Credit: Grand Hyatt Baha Mar

Grand Hyatt Baha Mar offered a golf tournament, spa appointments, dolphin encounters, sailing, rum tastings and more at a recent event.

and year-round sunshine. There are 700 islands that make up the Bahamas, of which only 30 are inhabited.

“The islands’ close proximity to Florida makes the Bahamas one of the easiest island destinations to get to and from,” Stefan says. “After a long day of meetings, there’s no better way to kick back and relax with a frosty cocktail by the water.”

Stefan recently orchestrated a trip for 325 executives and their spouses. Held at the Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, the event



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# That's Entertainment



Entertainment takes on many forms for attendees, whether playing table tennis against a robot, playing an updated PONG game or a VR flying game.

Entertainment can mean the difference between a meeting or convention and an experience. That's why savvy meeting planners not only think about an association's overall event goals and objectives, but the audience and purpose for the entertainment.

"Conventions are an environment for learning and collaboration, but above, all the purpose is to provide opportunities for shared experiences," says Sarah Maio, vice president of marketing and communications for the Wisconsin Center District (WCD) in Milwaukee. "That kind of team building can come in many forms. Shared 'out of office' social experiences are proven to increase motivation, collaboration and creativity. What better way to integrate positive reinforcement into the workplace than with terrific entertainment?"

In 2019, that could mean bringing in everything from the latest Ted Talk sensation, to a top act from "America's Got Talent" to a celebrity chef everyone is talking about.

"As a venue, we see creative entertainment ideas all the time," WCD's Maio said. "They can range from ancillary pre-function enhancements to private full scale A-list artist performances. You know you've got a winner when people are posting their professional moments on their personal social media channels."

Event professional Peter Salib, chief relationship officer and co-founder of Denver-based Event Integrity, says providing entertainment for meeting attendees adds to the overall experience and leaves an impression.

"We all know how meetings create strong, personal connections centered around education, but the most memorable moments come through attendees leaving inspired and not just informed," he says. "After all, when was the last time you were inspired by a branded notepad and water bottle?"

Not every entertainment option includes a performer. Some more typical but timeless entertainment options, when done well, include photo booths, food art and table/attendee activations.

"Photo booths are great for smaller meetings because they can provide group photos of stakeholders and they can be branded," Salib says. "Food art is great when it can also double as the food you are serving at a meeting. The build your own, mini-doughnut conveyor belt was a major hit. Table top activations are fun and help provide better meeting interaction. They also allow for a branded experience and provide a take away that is attached to a story. With larger meetings and budgets, group recreational options, especially in meetings lasting more than a day, are a typical favorite."

Christine Erickson, senior vice president, US Events Solu-

## Don't Forget This Important Component of Any Successful Event

By Keith Loria

tions for Chicago-based BCD Meetings and Events, says however one defines entertainment — whether it's virtual reality, group activities, live performances, visual artists, gamification, keynote speakers, etc. — it can be used to build brand love, reinforce a narrative and drive business objectives.

"Entertainment comes in various forms. Typical ways to connect with your audience might be through keynote speakers, live bands and performances," she says. "Whatever you opt for, the feeling you want your guests to walk away with needs to map back to your objectives and make sense to your audience."

For example, at a recent leadership summit, BCD Meetings & Events brought in The Second City as an opportunity to connect its audience with its business objectives.

"The customized sketches were intentionally written to tie back to our business objectives, and the relatability made the experience incredibly meaningful," Erickson says. "Light-hearted delivery and insightful messaging were an ideal combination for the audience, resulting in a memorable, authentic experience."

### KNOWING WHAT WORKS

Not every entertainer will be right for every convention, which is where hiring a superb meeting planner brings value.

"A great meeting planner will carefully consider their audience when adding entertainment to their event," Maio said. "There will always be an educational component and function to a convention, but a professional planner will bring real value by thinking carefully about the group and their work when considering outside entertainment. Not everything has to be grandiose, but if it speaks to the audience then it's a memorable success."

While there will always be a time and a place for effective keynote speakers and live entertainment, at the same time, there is an opportunity to think outside the ballroom with trending forms of entertainment such as social walls and customizable gifting stations.

"Unconventional ideas aren't always better in every situation; it's really a matter of determining the best fit for your audience at that portion of your event," Erickson says. "Your entertainment options need to fit your budget, space and itinerary. But above all, it won't work if you don't know your audience."

Depending on the goal of the entertainment, whether to help attendees become inspired, relax, have fun, let loose, or bring them together, something different or something typical might make the most sense.

"You don't know what will work for a meeting until you evaluate the educational content and attendee needs," Salib says. "It's important to know your audience and play by the

**"We all know how meetings create strong, personal connections centered around education, but the most memorable moments come through attendees leaving inspired and not just informed."**



Peter Salib  
Chief Relationship Officer and  
Co-Founder  
Event Integrity  
Denver, CO

rules. If you are hosting a formal event, something like a mechanical bull doesn't make sense. Your entertainment plans should honor the brand's core values, be feasible for the guests and consider reasonable risks involved in the selection of one option over another."

Jeff Consoletti, founder, principal and CEO of JJ|LA, an event planning and production company in Los Angeles, notes live entertainment can certainly be a great addition to a convention's atmosphere and can leave guests feeling very excited about the performance. However, live music is not always compatible to the event being produced.

"It is also important to select live entertainment that resonates with guests as well as the event itself. Selecting the correct live entertainment can be a challenge, but if properly executed can really elevate the guest experience and give guests something to enjoy," he says. "The type of live entertainment that is best for an event really depends on the event itself and the guests in attendance. Whether it be a live performer, a DJ, a fire blower, a magician or a musician, it all really depends on the overall event aesthetics and audience."



In Milwaukee, hometown of Harley-Davidson motorcycles, event attendees could find themselves watching, or even participating in, a motorcycle rally.

Lindsey McKee, communications manager for VISIT Milwaukee, has seen several recent events bring in some unique entertainment options to the city.

"For Northwestern Mutual's annual meeting, they had several entertainers," she says. "They worked with Cirque du Soleil, iLuminate Dance, and their own adviser-led band for some of their morning sessions. Then they also have an annual show that has had entertainers such as Imagine Dragons, Lady Antebellum, and Maroon 5."

Meanwhile, Milwaukee-based Harley-Davidson, the popular museum and the motor company, uses entertainment at their anniversary events every five years across multiple locations and stages citywide.

### HAIL TO THE CHIEF

One of the most popular entertainment performers for conventions lately has been comedian Dave Burleigh, who does a President Donald Trump impersonation. What



**"There will always be an educational component and function to a convention, but a professional planner will bring real value by thinking carefully about the group and their work when considering outside entertainment."**

Sarah Maio  
Vice President of Marketing and Communications  
Wisconsin Center District  
Milwaukee, WI

started as just a bit in his standup routine, has turned into a full-fledged imitation with prosthetic make-up that takes up to 5 hours to apply. It really enhances the impression from the human hair wig, to the fake teeth, to the exact eye color contacts.

"I've done corporate conventions and meetings for most of my career," he says. "The attendees are drawn in immediately. The visual with 'Secret Service' agents in tow is always a sure way to generate a buzz while walking into the room. Then, the vocal impression at a podium with all the bells and whistles really brings the performance to its peak. Taking photos with the audience afterwards is always fun and a big hit as they get to meet the 'President' and have a brief fun chat as well."

Randy Nolen, Burleigh's manager and co-producer, signed him up originally four years ago to do a Joe Biden imitation because he never thought Trump would win the presidency. Looking forward to the 2020 election, Nolen is working on



Entertainment that creates a lasting memory doesn't have to be a comedy act, it can be an interesting design or decor that livens up a venue.

other political personalities like Bernie Sanders and possibly Joe Biden. Trying to be politically current and trying to please audiences of different political persuasions is not any easy task.

"Most of our shows are a surprise, so the audiences are shocked to see him walk into the room with a Secret Service detail and Hail to the Chief on the sound system," Nolen says. "Normally by the time he gets to the stage, most of the people figure out that it is not the president and that it is a comedy show. They quickly realize that the material is not mean-spirited or disrespectful, but just silly/goofy, yet clever."

Each show is also customized — sometimes with a Q&A — so the convention attendees feel they are a part of the show. And afterward, Burleigh is available for photo ops.

"It is so unique and different from a normal comedy show and I have found, over the years, that people love to have their photo taken with 'The President,'" Nolen says. "It's an opportunity that they will most likely never have in the future. And today, photos can be shared with family and friends via social media within seconds. I had one CEO recently tell me that his photo still hangs proudly on his office wall and is the topic of conversation almost every time someone new visits his office."



Comedian Dave Burleigh, who does a President Donald Trump impersonation, says his act is popular with planners and attendees.

Over the years, Burleigh has found that people enjoy taking a break from the meetings and networking to enjoy his act.

"People are able to share a laugh together and relax a bit before getting back to business," he says. "Besides providing comic relief from what might otherwise be a rigorous day of serious speakers and presentations, I think that this type of show is one that attendees will always remember."

### A PUZZLING ADVENTURE

John Smyth, director of sales for Puzzle Break, which provides escape room adventures for conventions and meetings that can be played anywhere for groups of 10 to 2,000+ players, thinks meeting planners are just starting to see the value in this entertainment option for association meetings.

He recently demonstrated the possibilities at several Meeting Professionals International (MPI) events in Northern California. He regularly works with meeting planners and venues and has found that most events have some kind of team-building activity set aside as a break from learn-



Puzzle Break, a company that sets up escape rooms, says the activity is popular at conferences and events as a team-building exercise.

ing or as an ice breaker event to get people engaged and working together.

One of the escape rooms they offer is entitled "A Hollywood Mystery" and is set in 1940s Hollywood when a murder occurs. Another is a fantasy adventure where guests are trapped in an enchanted forest by an evil witch.

"Each event includes an exciting escape challenge that can be made to be competitive across teams or a fully relaxed experience to best fit an event," Smyth says. "Puzzle Break has captured the magic that makes escape rooms the ultimate team-building activity. We bring it to you in a unique experience that you can't find anywhere else."

### MONEY MATTERS

When planning entertainment for a convention or meeting, planners need to think about the budget as some of these acts tend to be very pricey. In addition to the talent,

**"Whatever you opt for, the feeling you want your guests to walk away with needs to map back to your objectives and make sense to your audience."**



Christine Erickson  
Senior Vice President U.S. Events Solutions  
BCD Meetings & Events  
Chicago, IL

often other costs are associated with bringing someone in, such as equipment, lodging and transportation.

Thinking of budget constraints, Event Integrity created a scent bar for guests to make a custom scent according to the business coaching they received during the team meeting and company training event, which was an innovative form of entertainment.

"It was customized according to the meeting goals but included different types of scents in different mediums and each attendee interacted with and created their own mix," Salib says. "It was simple, on budget, and helped the client enhance the meeting. Although scents can be a touchy subject, in this circumstance it fit the bill and the client has had people share how they still have the takeaway they received from that meeting and they reference it regularly."

Additionally, cutting corners on entertainment hiring or regulatory compliance can make for a logistical nightmare for a planner and increase risk to their client or employer.

### GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

The right entertainment also creates plenty of buzz, but to leave attendees talking after an event, one must give them things to talk about.

"Think about what they want to see, and engage them early in your planning process when you ask them to save the date," Salib says. "This literally is the secret and it's simple. Engage your audience and do the research. If you aren't sure how to do this, get help from a digital marketing strategist."

The secret to having attendees talk about the entertainment is making sure the act is so compelling that employees want to share it on their personal platforms. That act shows that what they're participating in is a major source of pride. When people are proud of their work and their employer, they stay longer and work harder. It's a win-win.

"Entertainment can be a crucial aspect of the attendee journey before, during and after the event," Erickson says. "Choose entertainment that resonates, and then put your communications campaign to work. Utilize your event app and social media touchpoints to extend the life of your event and maximize post-program engagement."



# Arizona

The Phoenician, a Luxury Collection Resort, Scottsdale, offers a total of 160,000 sf of indoor/outdoor event space and 41 event rooms.

## From Phoenix to Sedona to Scottsdale to Tucson, Destinations That Offer It All

By Cynthia Dial

Things are different in Arizona: The mountains are sharper, the desert more dramatic and the contrasts greater. The destination is where the afternoon sky paints a reddish patina over this setting known for its Native American heritage and perpetual sunshine. Celebrating a plethora of perks — from authentic cowboys, distinctive cuisine and fashion-forward shopping to championship golf courses, palm-tree appointed resorts and spring training baseball, Arizona is a meeting planner’s dream.

### GREATER PHOENIX IS GREAT

Encompassing 2,000 square miles and more than 20 incorporated cities (including Scottsdale and Mesa), Greater Phoenix may represent the nation’s fifth-largest city, but it is anything but a hustle-and-bustle kind of town. With a lifestyle that is relaxing, scenery that is radiant and an ambiance reflective of the Southwest’s quiet serenity, civilization seems a world

away. However, don’t mistake the beckoning comfort of Arizona’s epicenter, and capital, for a lack of worldliness — for it’s a hub of sophistication. Physically defined by arid landscape, scattered cacti and architecture that blends, here you are never far from reminders that the desert lives within this city surrounded by the Sonoran Desert and three mountains, including iconic Camelback.

### SUNNY SCOTTSDALE

Attracted to everything that is Scottsdale is Samantha Moore, CMP, senior director, meetings and education, American Bakers Association (ABA), a 122-year-old organization serving as the Washington, DC-based voice of the wholesale baking industry. Having taken the Annual ABA Convention to this Arizonan city many times: the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess in 2012; The Phoenician, a Luxury Collection Resort, Scottsdale for several years, including last year and returning in

2020; and the The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa in 2024. Moore is obviously committed to this destination. “Our members are mainly located in the grain belt, Chicagoland and mid-Atlantic corridor, and after a long winter, they love nothing more than coming to Scottsdale for a sunny, mild weather getaway, while getting down to business. These are people who are avid sportsmen and women and are well versed in golf, tennis and the area’s various sport teams’ training camps. Our annual convention often serves as a spring board for our members’ leisure travel on the front and back end.” And it’s about the old and the new as Moore’s group enjoys the mix of tried-and-true spots, but they also appreciate that there’s always something new in Scottsdale.

As the ABA has been working with The Phoenician — often times consecutively on even-year rotations since 2002 — its planner deems it natural that with its repeat hosting and genuine hospitality always extended by the property, it is a member favorite. “That said, with Scottsdale’s incredible resort inventory and today’s market, we’ve had the opportunity to branch out and work with other exceptional properties too.”

In the food and beverage (F&B) arena, this group is attentive. “We are bakers, so anything baked is exciting for us. At all properties I challenge the CSM team to incorporate baked goods into displays, décor, in-room amenities; everything. I also routinely create a custom menu on Tuesday evening for our always-themed Farewell Reception.” Citing specifics, she mentions a “Hipster” theme where the group was treated to “too-cool-for-school” food trucks, micro foods, mustaches, suspenders; the works. And a 1940s “Bon Voyage” party for which the hotel served foods popular at the time such as spam fries. With respect to corporate social responsibility programs (CSR), Moore mentions a spousal event arranged by Event Team Inc. — building bikes for underprivileged kids and participating in a sandwich/lunch kit-building program with a local food kitchen.

While five years out, The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa made a significant impression on the ABA planner. “That hotel is a hidden gem. It feels like a Ritz-Carlton or a Luxury Collection hotel, but it is designed for group business. And it’s attractive due to the golf layout, meeting space, outdoor spaces, room renovations and the price point.” Located near the McDowell Mountains, it offers 41 meeting rooms; the award-winning Agave, The Arizona Spa & Salon; 10 food or drink outlets, including The Scotch Library, an impressive collection of more than 300 labels imported from all six whisky regions of Scotland and projects a sense of place. It’s also the recipient of consecutive Corporate & Incentive Travel magazine’s Award of Excellence for the last three years.

In the end, Scottsdale, Moore and the ABA are a winning trifecta: “I work very closely with hotels to realize our ideas and

“The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa is a hidden gem. And it’s attractive due to the golf layout, meeting space, outdoor spaces, room renovations and the price point.”



Samantha Moore, CMP  
Senior Director, Meetings and Education  
American Bakers Association  
Washington, DC

I can say with confidence that we have not had a partner in Scottsdale who has let us down.”

Another Scottsdale devotee is Erik Samdahl, vice president of marketing, Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) who has repeatedly taken members of his group — a research firm and membership organization focused on discovering next practices in human capital — to the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess. The most recent visit this year, was for its i4cp Next Practices Now Conference of 400 attendees. Seeking to provide a superior experience for attendees, most of whom are executives from large organizations, Samdahl calls out the Fairmont as one of Scottsdale’s best. “We’ve considered changing venues in the past but always return to the Fairmont for that reason.”

While days are spent in one of the resort’s two 23,000-sf ballrooms, the planner’s aim each evening is to entertain. “We provide plenty of food, drink and entertainment, typically local bands or other performances that add a unique spin to things. We stay on property from start to finish — there’s no reason to send people elsewhere.” The association also strives to incorporate the desert into its themes. Case in point is Fairmont’s Western-style event center, Copper Canyon, where they actually brought in cattle and donkeys to authentically stage the theme of the night.

Samdahl’s parting advice to planners is to take advantage of the area’s distinctive outdoor locations. “Keeping people locked in a room all day is a crime given the property and the weather in general.”

An additional option, Sanctuary Resort & Spa on Camelback Mountain offers meeting planners a luxurious combo of accommodations: 109 casitas and eight private homes, many with wood-burning fireplaces and outdoor terraces and all complemented by the newly renovated Sanctuary Resort Spa, where its menu features Asian-inspired treatments. The resort also offers such dining choices as elements, Praying Monk and XII, a private, intimate dining room.

Further detailing Scottsdale’s appeal, Kelli Blubaum, CMP,



Erik Samdahl  
Vice President of Marketing  
Institute for Corporate  
Productivity  
Seattle, WA

**“We’ve considered changing venues in the past but always return to the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess ... We stay on property from start to finish — there’s no reason to send people elsewhere.”**

vice president of sales and services, with Experience Scottsdale, references these high points. Scottsdale is a short, 10-mile commute from the nearest international airport, as well as any outdoor recreation of your dreams — enhanced by 300-plus days of annual sunshine. “We work closely with Arizona Outback Adventures, which leads group hiking and mountain-biking adventures in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, a protected desert that comprises nearly a third of our city’s land mass.”

#### THE MESA MIX

Louis Mengsol, SMP, president of the U.S. Sports Congress, selected Sheraton Mesa Hotel at Wrigleyville West for his association’s meeting of 125 two years ago. An organization designed to produce boutique meetings and events in the sports market that provide opportunities for C-suite candidates to discuss the business of sports, as well as attend professional development sessions and trade shows, Mengsol says: “Our conference is sports based, so having a host property within walking distance of Sloan Park, the Chicago Cubs spring training venue, was a bonus.” The Sheraton Mesa Hotel is located in the Northwest corridor of Mesa and adjacent to Scottsdale and Tempe. It offers 180 rooms, three restaurants, three pools and 16,000 sf of meeting space at Wrigleyville West Conference Center.

Extending a day of networking with activities, choices were home-grown Arizona: a jeep desert excursion or a round at Las Sendas Golf Club, with its Robert Trent Jones Jr.-designed course that has been ranked the nation’s 12th-most

challenging course; and a local beer tour. The opening reception was at the Tempe Center for the Arts, and continuing the sports theme, were the closing events at Topgolf in nearby Gilbert and an after-hours poolside party and putting contest.

As home of the Fresh Foodie Trail, a route that connects Mesa to regional communities, delicious day trips offer group opportunities from pizza- and pasta-making classes to culinary seminars. There is also team building with Green Zebra Adventures via Tomcar, an off-road vehicle originally designed for the Israeli Special Forces, along trails of the 25,000-acre Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation reservation.

#### THE TUCSON TRUTH

About 100 miles south is Tucson, a low-key desert town known for its more than 340 days of annual sunshine, relaxing resorts, prime-time golf, renowned spa getaways Miraval Arizona Resort & Spa and Canyon Ranch Tucson and an authentic Mexican flair only a destination 60 miles from the border can possess. Named a UNESCO “City of Gastronomy,” — the nation’s first — and known for its selection of eateries along “The Best 23 Miles of Mexican Food,” its Hispanic fare is beyond impressive. Equally impressive are such one-of-a-kind attractions as Biosphere 2, described as “the world’s largest living research center focused on the future life of our planet” and the Pima Air & Space Museum, one of the world’s largest aviation and space museums with more than 350 historical aircraft sitting on 80 acres.

And the price is right. Generally less expensive than Greater Phoenix, it’s a match for clients on a tight budget looking for a AAA 4-Diamond rated hotel. With great room rates in summer (June–August) and possibly shoulder season (May, September and December) and a temp averaging five to 10 degrees cooler than its sister to the north, it can be an irresistible offer.

A planner repeatedly attracted to Tucson is Kimberly Pierce-Boggs, executive director, Alliance of Independent Academic Medical Centers (AIAMC), a national membership organization of independent teaching hospitals that held its 2019 Annual Meeting and 30th Anniversary Celebration and its recent AIAMC National Initiative VI Meeting Four at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort. A 93-acre luxury property with 37,000 sf of interior meeting space built within the Catalina Mountain range, it

was designed to celebrate its natural surroundings and for guests to enjoy the beauty of the Sonoran Desert. With more than 80 institutional members, the AIAMC exec explains that the association’s size provides an environment that encourages and supports networking and collaboration. “This is our fourth meeting in 10 years at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort. The reason we have returned in the past and plan

to do so in the future is simple: the people. I have worked in the meetings industry for 30-plus years, and it’s a rare privilege to work with the same people over a decade’s time.”

Its physical comforts are equally appealing to Pierce-Boggs’ group — oversized guest rooms, private balconies and the surrounding setting, punctuated by the resort’s dramatic 80-foot waterfall. “We held our 30th anniversary celebration and annual awards dinner under the stars on the Kiva Patio. The conference services staff worked with us to create outstanding food stations and it fit into our limited budget,” explains the planner.

“The actual meeting time is quite full and there is little downtime. However, several of our meeting attendees took advantage of the guest room conference rate three days-pre or three days-post and enjoyed nearby Sabino Canyon Recreation Area, Reid Park Zoo and more. Our conference chairman brought his family and visited the Grand Canyon before driving south to Tucson,” said the AIAMC planner.

Touting the area’s serenity, Pierce-Boggs concludes: “The theme of our National Initiative was well-being, and we encouraged attendees to be mindful of their own wellness. We hope the AIAMC and the beautiful setting at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort helped ‘care for the caregivers,’ as our members are primarily physicians who experience high rates of burnout.”

Another area option is the AAA Four Diamond El Conquistador Tucson, A Hilton Resort, which is nestled in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains. Voted Best Experiential Hotel 2018 by Hotel Interactive, among its perks for the planner are 45 holes of nearby championship golf, 31 lighted outdoor tennis courts, five outdoor swimming pools, horseback trail rides and lessons, Elements Wellness Center and more than 100,000 sf of flexible indoor and outdoor meeting space.

Among the resort’s consistent fans is Michael Nave, sales manager, Nitro Technologies NA, who has selected El Conquistador for 14 of the 26 events of the Nitric Acid Users Group



The 93-acre Loews Ventana Canyon Resort offers 37,000 sf of interior meeting space and nearly 40,000 sf of outdoor meeting space.

(NAUG), including its most recent NAUG XXVI May 2019 annual conference, which typically attracts between 65 to 80 attendees. In addition to excursions to Kartchner Caverns State Park, the Titan Missile Museum and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, the planner elaborates on on-property meals usually with a southwestern flair and an always-welcoming staff. “We host nightly outdoor dinners for the group onsite. The ven-

ues offer spectacular sunsets, along with mountain and valley views you cannot get anywhere else in this city.”

Nave’s final advice for Tucson-bound planners: “Don’t take the endless views from the resort for granted. Your guests will appreciate them more than you realize.”

#### THE SECRET OF SEDONA

Located away from Tucson and Phoenix but within proximity to six state parks, five national monuments, seven wilderness areas and only a two-hour drive from the Grand Canyon is Sedona. With four mild seasons marked by sunny skies and clean air, more than 4,000 rooms, 50 restaurants and up to 33,500 sf of flexible meeting space, Sedona is consistently ranked in Top Ten lists from Best First Impressions to Most Stunning Views. Naming the Hilton Sedona Resort at Bell Rock for the upcoming July summit of 125 attendees of Receivables Management Association International, Executive Director Jan Stieger, CAE, CMP, explains her choice. Limiting the group to 125 paid attendees, “We look for a resort in a rural setting that keeps the attendees onsite to encourage networking



Canyon Ranch Tucson has 166 guest rooms, an 80,000-sf spa complex, a 3,400-sf Golf Performance Center and a total of 10,590 sf of meeting space.

Credit: Canyon Ranch Tucson

**“Our conference is sports based, so having the Sheraton Mesa Hotel at Wrigleyville West within walking distance of Sloan Park, the Chicago Cubs spring training venue, was a bonus.”**



Louis Mengsol, SMP  
President  
U.S. Sports Congress  
Beloit, WI

## How to See and Save in Scottsdale and Sedona

### Sedona

Association groups can take advantage of value rates at some of Sedona's premier hotels and resorts, by booking events mid-week and off-season advises the Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau. "By holding events in our mild summer and winter months, costs can be minimized while still enjoying the beauty for which Sedona is so famous."

An additional program: Planners booking a new program at one of the designated partner hotels between Nov. 1 and Feb. 10 or June 15 to Aug. 31 for a minimum of 25 total actualized room nights Sunday through Thursday will receive \$1,000 payable directly to the planner.

### Scottsdale

Experience Scottsdale's Kelli Blubaum encourages planners to experience a customized site inspection and see firsthand what makes the town a top meetings destination. Called Site See & Fly Free, the executive describes the promotion as "something

we are proud to offer planners," and says that more than 100 planners visited Scottsdale as part of the program in the last fiscal year.

In the summer months when Scottsdale's temperatures rise, The Desert is Hot Summer Meetings Rebate Program gives extra incentives to planners that can help them save big. Explained by Blubaum, she details that it affords groups the opportunity to earn up to \$5,000 off their master bill for qualifying summer business. It additionally allows planners to take advantage of other "hot" rates and amenities, from meeting packages as low as \$89 to discounts on luxury transportation and group visits to some of the destination's best attractions.

Scottsdale is a favorite destination of planners not only for its 300-plus days of annual sunshine, but for a number of venues offering attendees abundant outdoor activities.



Credit: Experience Scottsdale

throughout the conference, especially during outside formal group events. This is our first time to Sedona. The scenery is a huge draw and the fact that it is at a higher elevation of 4,500 feet to avoid Arizona's summer heat is attractive." With the addition of stunning views from almost anywhere in the valley and top-quality shopping in downtown Sedona, the decision was not a difficult one.

"I plan to encourage attendees to come early and/or stay late to explore the area, especially the Grand Canyon," Stieger says. What else is on the agenda? "Our family-friendly Wednesday night event including Native American dancers will be at

the golf course to capture the natural beauty and there will be jeep tours. We also have a children's reception at the same time as the attendee reception, featuring kid-friendly food, so the children can create friendships, too, during the conference."

Sedona offers custom jeep tours through red rock wilderness where attendees can stop for a grounding group meditation session, taste local wines at a creek-side winery and finish with a Wild West chuck wagon supper while taking in a breathtaking sunset.

### FINAL WORD

Weather is a big factor in attracting groups and meetings, summates the Arizona Office of Tourism. In winter when people are battling cold weather and storms, the desert communities of Tucson and the Phoenix metro area attract those who want sunshine. For the budget conscious, the desert communities offer the same stunning resorts, hotels and attractions but at a fraction of the winter rates. Sedona is a red rock mecca at any time. But no matter what time of year an association visits Arizona, outdoor recreation can be found at or near a hotel's doorstep. Alfresco activities allow meeting attendees to get into the desert or the mountains in just a hop, skip or jump. And Arizona's most famous attraction — the Grand Canyon — lures many to come early or stay late, though it is accompanied with a warning. "Be prepared to be inspired" is the refrain — a sentiment that applies statewide. AC&F

**"This is our fourth meeting in 10 years at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort. The reason we have returned in the past and plan to do so in the future is simple: the people ... it's a rare privilege to work with the same people over a decade's time."**



Kimberly Pierce-Boggs  
Executive Director  
Alliance of Independent  
Academic Medical Centers  
Chicago, IL



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# FLORIDA

## at Its Finest

The Sunshine State Has It All — From Beautiful Weather to Unique Cities

By John Buchanan

**F**lorida — the world-famous “Sunshine State,” beloved by tourists from around the world — enjoys a special status in the association meeting industry: It boasts more high-quality and unique individual destinations than many other states. And what all of them have in common are two of the things meeting planners invariably say they look for in a destination: beautiful weather, including warm winters, and a strong value proposition.

No matter what kind of infrastructure, hotel product or amenities a planner seeks, her or she can find them somewhere in Florida.

### MAGICAL ORLANDO

Although Florida now boasts a list of popular meeting destinations, Orlando stands as one of the top two association meeting and convention destinations in the U.S., along with Las Vegas. And like Las Vegas, as a result of its formidable and ever-improving infrastructure, it often hosts major citywide conventions.

Jennifer Richards, director, convention services, at the American Diabetes Association (ADA) in Arlington, VA, used Orlando last year as the destination for the ADA’s

five-day, four-night annual meeting, which drew 14,337 attendees. She had previously used Orlando for the same meeting years ago.

“Based on the size of our meeting and the number of hotel rooms we need on peak nights, there are a relatively limited number of destination options for us in the U.S. that have all of the things we need,” Richards says.

Airlift was also a major factor in the selection of the destination. “More than half of the attendees at our annual meeting are international attendees, so being in a major city with huge airlift is very important,” Richards says, adding that the cleanliness and ease of navigation of Orlando International Airport is another key benefit.

The other major factor in Orlando’s favor is the number of meeting-quality hotels that are available. “And that’s especially true of the four or five major hotels that are near the convention center,” Richards says.

ADA does not designate a headquarters hotel, but Richards chose the Hyatt Regency Orlando — formerly the legendary Peabody Orlando, located directly across International Drive from the Orange County Convention Center — as housing for her executives and senior staff.

They also held a board meeting there. “It’s a great property,” Richards says.

For her room block, she used many other hotels, all located along the International Drive corridor. The overall planning and layout of the convention district are a major factor in Orlando’s appeal for citywide meetings, she says — the ability to book enough hotel rooms for a citywide convention within a reasonably short distance of the convention center.

And the size and quality of the Orange County Convention Center also ranks highly on Richards’ list of important amenities. “It’s one of the largest convention centers in the country,” she says. “And we use a lot of convention center

“For example, at the Loews Miami Beach Hotel we were able to have our opening night reception outdoors on the lawn looking out onto the beach, and we were also able to have our banquet in a space featuring a balcony with a beautiful view of the beach and ocean.”



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Svinicki Association Management Inc.  
Milwaukee, WI

space, including an exhibit hall and breakout rooms for about 15 concurrent sessions. It’s also a very clean convention center. They also really want to work with you. Our meeting manager was very knowledgeable. We had a great experience there, including in the exhibit hall.”

Yet another factor in Orlando’s favor, Richards says, is its CVB, known as Visit Orlando. “They’re wonderful — very accommodating and easy to work with,” she says.

Given her experience — twice — for her most important meeting of the year, Richards gives high marks to the Magic City as a destination.

“Because it’s such a large destination, and it has so many hotels, it’s a great destination for large meetings, but even for smaller ones,” she says. “The hotels are easy to work with, and you don’t get that in every city. So that’s a huge factor, in my opinion. It’s a very accommodating destination. It also has a lot of great restaurants and attractions like The Wheel located in ICON Park, a 400-foot tall observation wheel that overlooks the convention center district from International Drive. And there’s always something new and exciting.”



Credit: American Diabetes Association



The Orange County Convention Center, left, and the Hyatt Regency Orlando, above, recently hosted an American Diabetes Association event.



Kelly Spann, CMP  
Meeting Planner  
International Cemetery,  
Cremation and Funeral  
Association  
Sterling, VA

**“All of the feedback we got from attendees was incredibly positive ... and all of the meeting space is new. And then, of course, there’s the fact that Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa is a five-star resort, so the service was at the level we and our attendees are looking for.”**

for the position of local meeting host. And then the entire membership votes on the hotel. The individual who proposed Miami grew up in Miami and really loves it, so that’s why she wanted to bring the meeting there, even though she no longer lives there.”

After experiencing Miami, Kilpatrick is pleased that she discovered it.

The Loews Miami Beach Hotel served as the group’s hotel. “The meeting host who proposed Miami as the destination also proposed the hotels to be considered,” Kilpatrick says, noting that Loews Miami Beach won the business after an RFP process and a site inspection trip.

“One obvious key factor was that the Loews had enough of a room block to accommodate the meeting,” Kilpatrick says. “Generally speaking, for this meeting we don’t like to book room blocks in more than one hotel. The members prefer to be all under one roof.”

She also cites the hotel’s location, toward the northern boundary of the fabled and wildly popular South Beach neighborhood, as “stellar.” Its meeting space was also ideal for the client, she says.

“We were able to offer the general session programming and the exhibit space within a concurrent pattern. There was no separation between floors or anything like that. And the quality of their outdoor function space was also a big factor. For example, we were able to have our opening night reception outdoors on the lawn looking out onto the beach, and we were also able to have our banquet in a space featuring a balcony with a beautiful view of the beach and ocean. But one of the primary factors that led to the Loews was the quality and functionality of its meeting space.”

She also praises the room product at the Loews Miami Beach. “The sleeping rooms are beautiful,” she says. “They’re also very comfortable. The soft goods were great. Everything was very clean.”

She gave a similar review to the food-and-beverage. “It was outstanding,” Kilpatrick says.

But what her attendees liked most about the hotel was its location directly on the beach and its easy walking distance of just a few blocks to South Beach’s most famous hot spots. It was the world-famous beach that made the meeting such a pleasant, fun experience for attendees.

“The beach sells,” Kilpatrick says. “People just loved it. But our attendees also loved Miami as a whole, because there is just so much to do. And the weather is just beautiful

and South Beach, which is entirely walkable, also has a very interesting culture. And the food scene is incredible.”

### DISCOVER PALM BEACH

Yet another Florida destination popular among association meeting planners looking for a timeless and classical beach experience is Palm Beach. Among the amenities that give it its old world charm is what is arguably the ultimate offsite venue — Donald Trump’s The Mar-a-Lago Club.

Kelly Spann, CMP, meeting manager at the International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association (ICCFA) in Sterling, VA, had her first experience with Palm Beach late last year, when she hosted a three-day, two-night fall management conference for 165 attendees at the Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa which is situated on a secluded private beach. In the 2015 Conde Nast Traveler “Readers Choice Awards,” the Eau Palm Beach — which also features a Forbes Five Star Eau Spa — was recognized as Florida’s top resort. It now boasts more than 30,000 sf of expanded and updated meeting space.

What cinched the deal for Spann and ICCFA was what she calls “a strong response” to her RFP, which was followed by a site inspection trip. “We looked at all of Florida,” Spann says, “But the factor that led us to decide on Eau Palm Beach was their overall offer and the quality of the property.”

Not surprisingly, the feedback that meeting attendees provided after the conference lived up to the accolades the resort has earned.

“All of the feedback we got from attendees was incredibly positive,” Spann says. “People just loved it. They loved the sleeping rooms, and all of the meeting space is new. And then, of course, there’s the fact that Eau Palm Beach is a five-star resort, so the service was at the level we and our attendees are looking for.”

Spann cites the room product as

particularly noteworthy. “The rooms are large and bright, very cheerful,” she says. “The bathrooms are big. They all have a balcony. And the decor is just fun and very ‘beachy.’ This was the first time in five or six years that we’ve experienced a resort with sleeping rooms of the quality you find at Eau Palm Beach.”

Likewise, she heaped praise on the resort’s F&B. “Our

### MIAMI AND THE BEACHES

Another Florida destination that has become a powerful player in the association meeting market is Miami. After the South Beach neighborhood of Miami Beach emerged as one of the most glitzy and glamorous tourist destinations in the world, and the Miami Beach Convention Center underwent a massive expansion and modernization, the city saw its association meeting business start to spike.

Jenni Kilpatrick, CAE, an account executive at Svinicki Association Management Inc. in Milwaukee, WI, held her first meeting in Miami last spring, a five-day, four-night medical conference for 957 attendees, including exhibitors and guests.

“The client association that held the meeting has an interesting destination selection process,” Kilpatrick says. “A destination is proposed by a member, who is also running



Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa, with 30,000 sf of updated meeting space, hosted the International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association’s Fall Management Conference.

Credit: International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association



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Credit: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa offers The Grand Ballroom, with 9,680 sf of space that can be evenly split into three breakout rooms. The Plaza Ballroom is 2,666 sf and the Ocean Ballroom is 2,441 sf.

attendees also had nothing but good things to say about the food and beverage. It was excellent."

She also notes that the level of customer service rises to the standards of the resort's lofty standing with Forbes and AAA.

"Everything was fantastic," Spann says. "Every time I asked a question or needed something, they were on it right away. I'm the kind of planner who will usually do things on my own rather than wait around for something to happen. But at the Eau, no matter what I needed, they were right on it, so that made my job very easy. And in terms of their service to me as the planner, they were also excellent. For example, instead of hot coffee, I like iced coffee, so they made sure I always got that without having to ask. They just paid attention to all of

**"Because Orlando is such a large destination ... the hotels are easy to work with, and you don't get that in every city. So that's a huge factor, in my opinion."**

Jennifer Richards, Director, Convention Services  
American Diabetes Association, Arlington, VA

the little things that really set one property apart from others when it comes to service."

She notes that because the Eau Palm Beach is privately owned and not part of a chain, the owners are very much involved in maintaining an exceptional level of service. "And as a result of that," Spann says, "the service we got for this meeting was, hands down, the best I've ever had."

#### DAYTONA BEACH OFFERS VALUE

Located north of Palm Beach on the Atlantic coast, Daytona Beach is another classical Florida beach destination that offers a more laid-back ambiance than its more famous counterparts in the state.

Marlinda Fulton, executive director of the Central Florida District Dental Association (CFDDA), headquartered in Orlando, hosted her organization's spring, two-day, two-night educational meeting for dentists last year in the time-honored destination. It was the first time Fulton had used it.

"Our educational meeting moves around within the central district of Florida," she says. "And our president, when that particular meeting was held, was from the Daytona Beach area and wanted to keep the meeting within his affiliate area."

Together, Fulton and her president

chose the Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort as their venue. "We both met with the hotel and really liked it," Fulton says. "He was also familiar with the hotel, because he had stayed there before and really liked it. So we did a site inspection trip together. We really liked the location, because our attendees love the beach. So we knew it would be a very popular venue."

One of the key reasons the Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort won the business was because of its pricing and value proposition, Fulton says. "The room rates were reasonable, so that meant dentists could bring their families and staff at an affordable cost. Value is especially important for this meeting because the association encourages member dentists to bring their spouses and children as well as their team members, such as hygienists."

Daytona Beach was particularly appealing to family members because of its status as an iconic Florida beach destination and there is so much for families to do while spouses are in meeting sessions, Fulton says.

One big benefit of the Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront: it's convenience to local restaurants.

Fulton and her attendees also liked the room product. "The rooms were nice," Fulton says. "I had a lovely room. I was very pleased. So were our attendees."

The hotel's meeting space also worked very well for her meeting, she says. "It was renovated fairly recently, so it's very fresh."

She also cites the Hilton's customer service as exemplary. "I give kudos to the staff," she says. "They worked very well with us on everything from A to Z. They were very accommodating and I heard very positive feedback from our attendees."

As for the destination, Daytona Beach made a lasting impression on her from her first exposure to it. "People just loved Daytona Beach," she says. "They loved going to the beach. The views from the hotel were spectacular. And

the destination was very, very well received. Because of the response it got, we will definitely be going back in the future. I can say that with 100 percent certainty."

#### NAPLES SOPHISTICATION AND CULTURE

Although it is not as well known as its sister destinations in the Sunshine State, Naples — on the Gulf of Mexico in the southwestern corner of the state — is its most sophisticated and cultured destination. One reason for that: It's the No. 1 home to retired CEOs of Fortune 500 companies.

Mike Donaldson, CMP, manager of member services and meeting planner of the Florida Attractions Association (FAA) in Tallahassee, used Naples for the FAA's four-day, three-night Annual Conference last summer for more than 300 attendees from Florida-based attractions and CVBs, as well as tour operators and industry suppliers. The last time FAA had met in Naples was 2004.

For the meeting last year, the FAA selected the Naples Grande Beach Resort, one of the city's most exclusive properties.



Credit: Naples Grande Beach Resort

Naples Grande Beach Resort has more than 83,000 sf of customizable indoor/outdoor meeting space among its ballrooms, pools and terraces.

"We just fell in love with the property when we went on our first site visit," Donaldson says. "I loved the meeting space and loved everything about the resort. I had been there for previous conferences held by other organizations, so I knew it was a great property."

The Naples Grande Beach Resort's guest room product is exceptional, Donaldson says. "The rooms are beautiful. They have large bathrooms, and a lot of the bathrooms feature

**"I've experienced good food at other hotels in Florida for our annual conference, but I wasn't prepared for how outstanding the quality of the food was at the Naples Grande Beach Resort. And that was true of every meal we had at the resort, not just the opening dinner. It was out of this world."**



Mike Donaldson, CMP  
Manager, Member Services and Meeting Planner  
Florida Attractions Association  
Tallahassee, FL

large sunken tubs, which was a nice surprise for a lot of attendees. Everything about the rooms was just lovely."

He singled out the hotel's food and beverage for particularly enthusiastic praise.

"For example, we held our opening night dinner in the Vista Ballroom," he says. "We did a Mexican buffet and the food was out of this world and so was the presentation, with so much attention to detail. I've experienced good food at other hotels in Florida for our annual conference, but I wasn't prepared for how outstanding the quality of the food was at the Naples Grande. And that was true of every meal we had at the resort, not just the opening dinner. It was out of this world."

Although FAA hosted almost all meals onsite, two highlights of the meeting were offsite events. "We went offsite one night for what we called 'A Taste of Naples,' which was a dine-around program that consisted of organized group dinners at some of the best restaurants in downtown Naples," Donaldson says. "And the reason we did that is because Naples has such a great upscale local dining scene. Then, on closing night — which we do every year — we went offsite for a dinner and evening at a local member attraction. This year, it was the Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens, which is a fantastic venue."

As a Florida planner, Donaldson urges his national counterparts to take a look at Naples if they are unfamiliar with it. "The biggest appeal of Naples is its sophistication and culture," he says. "It's very beautiful. It has beautiful beaches and a fantastic dining scene. It's also not as congested as other major Florida destinations. And there are lots of things to do, like eco-tourism. It's also very clean and safe. It's just a very unique destination that has a lot of appeal for attendees. And most importantly, it's a very good draw, from a meeting perspective. In fact, the attendance at this year's meeting was the highest we've ever had. It set a new record. And that's the name of the game when it comes to meeting destinations."

AC&F

The Willard InterContinental Hotel appointed **Ernie Arias**, director of sales and marketing at the historic hotel. Arias began his career with The InterContinental Hotels Group in 1998 as the director of sales and marketing of The Crowne Plaza

Houston-Brookhollow. Arias returns to IHG with more than 20 years of related global hospitality experience. In his new role, Arias will oversee the sales, marketing and public relations strategies to help increase the hotel's luxury brand positioning, amplify

international sales and grow the domestic and foreign business.

Visit Phoenix named **Karen Morris**, CMP, director of national accounts, convention sales team. Morris joins Visit Phoenix with an extensive career in the travel industry. She started as destination services and sales coordinator at Visit Savannah, and after just over a year in that role was promoted to director of destination services.



Arias



Morris



Squeglia



Milligan

Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI), the premier global sales organization for independent luxury hotels and resorts and small luxury brands in the meeting, incentive, convention and exhibition (MICE) industry, has appointed **Drew Squeglia**, director of global sales, Mid-Atlantic. Drew brings more than 13 years of experience in the meetings and hospitality industry.

The Society of Government Meeting Professionals has announced its newly elected National Board of Directors for 2019-2021. Current president **Michelle Milligan**, MSW, LMSW, CGMP, was re-elected president. Milligan serves as the director of the Clinic for Child Study, part of the Third Judicial Circuit of Michigan in Detroit.

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