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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR GLOBAL MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

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## More Than Games

Casino Properties Bring In  
The Meetings As Well

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Atlantis, Paradise Island in the Bahamas was the gaming resort of choice for Dianna Leigh, Director of Meetings, Exhibits and Travel at Globus Medical, Inc.





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MARCH 2019

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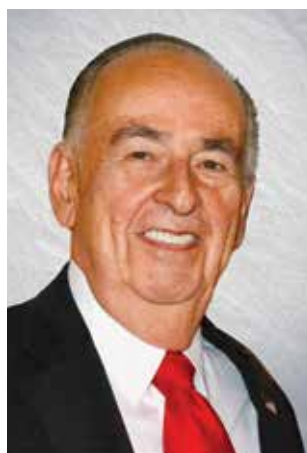
Denver, with its mountains, offers skiing, hiking, dude ranches and much more for event attendees. **PAGE 58**



# Publisher's Message

## Gaming Resorts, Unique Venues, Desert and Mountain Destinations and More

Our cover story this month, "More Than Games" on Page 16, focuses on gaming resorts, where casino properties are offering an abundance of lifestyle amenities to satisfy groups from large to small. Beyond offering thousands of square feet of great function space, gaming resorts are investing heavily in their guest room product and expanded meeting space. Participants can enjoy live entertainment or luxuriate in a soothing spa after hours of meetings.



In Hollywood, FL for example, the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino will be adding a 638-room hotel, additional rooms in an adjacent hotel and 120,000 sf of function space. Also included in this \$1.5 billion expansion is a 41,000-sf Rock Spa, water activities, 30 restaurants and more.

Gaming resorts from Las Vegas to Atlantic City to New Mexico to the Bahamas offer numerous choices, in inviting atmospheres, for groups of all sizes to satisfy a planner's needs.

Also in this issue is our story, "Venues With One-of-a-Kind Features" on Page 26. These unique locales, from Mexico to South Carolina to San Francisco, will no doubt impress your attendees. Choices range from historic sites such as Ellis Island off the New York City shoreline to the Harley-Davidson Museum in Milwaukee. Pearl Stable in San Antonio is an extremely popular southwest venue. Word is out that Pearl is a fabulous venue, so planners are advised to book early. Also included in this story are "10 Intriguing Event Venues," non-traditional event locations worth considering.

Trending these days, according to our story, "Extraordinary Incentives" on Page 40, is that planners are giving participants activities suited to their personal tastes. Many groups have changing demographics and motivators in their audiences, and planners must reassess what creates the perception for a desirable reward. It appears that most seasoned planners are aware that "experiential" is the objective for their programs.

From cover to cover you will find award-winning content to help planners create successful events. Have you considered Arizona or Colorado for your next event? Check out these popular destinations surely worthy of your business.

*Harvey Grotsky*

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## Wild Dunes Resort Announces Plans For New Hotel to Open in Early 2021 Featuring 11,000 sf of Meeting Space

Charleston, SC — Wild Dunes Resort, A Destination Hotel, is expanding its existing oceanfront meeting destination on the Isle of Palms, just 30 minutes outside of historic downtown Charleston.

Opening in early 2021, the highly anticipated project will add a new 153-room hotel, bringing the total to 400 guest rooms and suites, in addition to the existing 240 vacation rental homes and condos. The new, multifaceted meeting and event space includes a grand ballroom with pre-function space and rooftop ballroom and event terrace with 270-degree panoramic ocean views, now allowing the resort to welcome groups of up to 650 attendees.

With the new event space doubling the Resort's function space, the new Wild Dunes hotel will be a haven for meetings, groups and wedding



parties to experience the ultimate Charleston retreat.

Wild Dunes Resort's expansion will also include a 14-treatment room destination spa, state-of-the-art fitness center and dedicated arrival experience and welcome center.

"The new hotel will further enhance Wild Dunes Resort's reputation as Charleston's beloved barrier island resort," said Frank Fredericks, managing director at Wild Dunes Resort. [www.destinationhotels.com/wild-dunes-new-extension](http://www.destinationhotels.com/wild-dunes-new-extension)

## Hilton Washington DC National Mall Will Debut in the Heart of DC

Washington, DC — Hilton Washington DC National Mall will welcome visitors beginning April 1. The hotel is an expansion of the brand in Washington, DC and the product of a multiyear modernization of an existing property above the historic L'Enfant Plaza.

Located at the hub of public transit, the hotel adds to the neighborhood 367 guest rooms, 23,000 sf of flexible meeting and private event spaces, and exquisite dining options.

Perfectly situated above the L'Enfant Plaza Metro station, the hotel grants guests direct access to iconic institutions and a rich selection of cultural experiences in metropolitan Washington, DC year-round.

Direct elevator access to the Metro connects guests to Ronald Reagan National Airport (DCA) and Union Station with door-to-door convenience, facilitating hassle-free travel to the nearby Baltimore-Washington International Airport (BWI) and Dulles International Airport (IAD).

"We are so excited to introduce guests to Hilton Washington DC National Mall, not just because of its contemporary design and amenities, but because of

the doors it opens to experience DC," says General Manager Claudia Eggspuhler. "Our unique location brings incomparable access to all DC has to offer. As a hotel, our goal is to help our guests create incredible memories by revealing the gems of Washington. We are hoping to convey what a world-class international destination our city is no matter what occasions bring travelers here."

The hotel is DC's newest venue for memorable events and meetings with the 5,406-sf ground floor L'Enfant Ballroom, second-floor 4,240-sf Gallery Ballroom, and 2,109-sf sunlit Solarium, designed with state-of-the-art audio-visual capabilities.

The poolside reception area will include fire pits, cabanas and a bar, perfect for galas, fundraisers, and more. The hotel's discreet boardroom, Caucus Room, is equipped with a private entrance and foyer, and a plethora of breakout rooms suitable for groups of up to 500 people.

Guests will have access to the highest-quality internet available in Washington's hotels today powered by a fiber optical network unique to Hilton Washington DC National Mall. [www.washingtondcnationalmall.hilton.com](http://www.washingtondcnationalmall.hilton.com)

## Caesars Entertainment's Don Ross to Receive Dom Pérignon Award of Excellence at the 45th Annual UNLVino

Las Vegas, NV — Don Ross, vice president of catering, conventions and events for Caesars Entertainment Corporation, will receive the Dom Pérignon Award of



ROSS

Excellence at the 45th Annual UNLVino wine and food festival; he will also be honored at Bubble-Licious, which takes place April 11 at the Keep Memory Alive Event Center.

"We are proud to have had Don Ross as an integral member of our Caesars Entertainment team for more than 35 years," said Caesars Entertainment chief sales officer

Michael Massari. "With involvement in several local charities including the Jewish Federation, Cancer Society, and American Heart Association, Don Ross exemplifies what it means to be a leader in both the hospitality industry and the Las Vegas community."

Since its inception in 1974, UNLVino has honored numerous industry leaders in the Las Vegas community. [www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com](http://www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com)

## Former Las Vegas Tourism Executive, Michael Goldsmith, Launches Magellan Marketing

LAS VEGAS, NV — Tourism marketing veteran Michael Goldsmith, formerly vice president of marketing, Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA), announced the launch of Magellan Marketing.



GOLDSMITH

The new venture specializes in destination marketing and management, sporting and special event marketing, international business development, strategic counsel, digital marketing, publicity and media relations.

"Over the years, I've been incredibly fortunate to work with not only the world's most successful travel brands, but also many of the most innovative and strategic professionals in the tourism marketing industry," said Goldsmith. "Together with this team of partners, I will leverage our past successes into achieving our clients' brand development and marketing goals."

For more information about Magellan Marketing, visit [www.MagellanUnlimited.com](http://www.MagellanUnlimited.com)

## Montage Laguna Beach Set to Debut Resort-Wide Renovation



Laguna Beach, CA — the award-winning Montage Laguna Beach set on the coastal bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean in the heart of the vibrant arts community of Laguna Beach debuts this month an extensive, property-wide renovation.

This renovation marks a milestone in Montage Hotels & Resorts' deep-rooted history, as Montage Laguna Beach is the flagship property

conceived by Founder, chairman and CEO, Alan J. Fuerstman.

"Each element of this refresh was thoughtfully curated from the design elements to the detailed touch points in each guest accommodation," said Anne-Marie Houston, general manager of Montage Laguna Beach. "We've been honored to greet the many guests and locals that have stayed and visited us over the last 16 years,

celebrating their personal milestones and creating memories. We are pleased to welcome back our guests to share new experiences with the same personalized service and luxury hospitality they have always enjoyed from Montage Laguna Beach."

To commemorate the renovation, guests who book "Celebration Escape" receive a special credit offer. [www.montagehotels.com/lagunabeach](http://www.montagehotels.com/lagunabeach)



## Global DMC Partners Adopting Virtual and Augmented Reality Through New Balti Virtual Partnership

Washington, DC — Global DMC Partners, the largest global network of destination management companies (DMCs) serving more than 500 premier locations worldwide, announces its partnership with Balti Virtual, a leading software company specializing in augmented and virtual reality experiences.

"We are thrilled to be ushering in a new era in the meetings and event space by offering these innovative and engaging technologies to our clients," said Global DMC Partners president Catherine Chaulet. "The creative applications are endless."

Planners will be able to step into venue spaces from any location in the

world. From start to finish, attendees will be captivated through memorable experiences such as augmented reality invitations, augmented 3-D agendas, virtual augmented gifts, customized scavenger hunts, and photo ops with AR brand mascot: Global Girl, affectionately known as "G.G."

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

## Pacific World Reveals Most In-Demand Event Destinations for 2019

Singapore — Pacific World, one of the world's leading global destination and event management companies with a vast network of events professionals throughout the world has identified the most-demanded event and incentives destinations for 2019.

Worldwide Top 10 Most Demanded Destinations and EMEA Top 5 Most Demanded Destinations rank Spain as No.1. On Asia Top 5 Most Demanded Destinations 2019 Thailand takes the lead as No.1.

"It's no coincidence that the destinations that top our list all have strong convention bureaus and a clear destination development strategy, as well as modern infrastructures and convenient access," said Patricia Silvio, global marketing manager of Pacific World.

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

## Lip Smacking Foodie Tours Arrives at San Jose's Santana Row

San Jose, CA — Lip Smacking Foodie Tours, an innovative tour operator from Las Vegas, introduces its award-winning culinary experience to San Jose's upscale Santana Row in the heart of Silicon Valley.

This open-air, European-style piazza encompassing trendy restaurants, retail shops, tech companies, a boutique hotel, movie theater and luxurious residences, attracts 12 million visitors annually.

An expert guide leads the tour, offering not only eye-opening details about the restaurants visited, but also insight into the "hidden" art found throughout Santana Row of which even few natives are aware. They include the art installation "Tabula Selenographica," by French artist Christine Foulche and the Lee de Forest Building honoring the San Jose inventor of the vacuum tube in 1906, which made radio broadcasting, long-distance telephone lines and motion pictures with sound possible. [www.santanarow.com](http://www.santanarow.com)

## The Confidante Miami Beach Unveils New Oceanfront Ballroom

Miami Beach, FL — The Confidante Miami Beach, a playful oceanfront oasis in Miami Beach's popular mid-beach neighborhood, has unveiled a full transformation to its marquee meetings and events space with the debut of the new Carmen Miranda Ballroom.

Named after the dynamic Portuguese-born Brazilian singer, samba dancer and film star, who rose to international fame in the 1930s. Through its design and style,

the space pays homage to the iconic performer who encapsulates Miami's vivacious personality, as well as the hotel's vintage-glam roots dating back to the 1940s.

The 4,639-sf ballroom features a pre-function area dedicated stairwell to the property's two heated pools and colorful poolside cabanas and bungalows, and private wrap-around terrace with views of the hotel's pools, lush tropical landscape and sparkling Atlantic Ocean.

"We're thrilled to unveil the Carmen Miranda Ballroom, showcasing the hotel's mid-century modern design and our commitment to executing flawless events with unique style," said Keith Butz, general manager of The Confidante Miami Beach. "We wanted to create a tremendous venue that's just as captivating for corporate groups, weddings and gatherings of all kinds."

[www.hyatt.com/en-US/hotel/florida/the-confidante-miami-beach/miaob](http://www.hyatt.com/en-US/hotel/florida/the-confidante-miami-beach/miaob)



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## Being Relentless

By John Tschohl

**'S**tart living your dreams. Whatever you choose, it should propel you out of bed every morning hungry to accomplish something.' — Lou Holtz, from his book *Winning Every Day*

I have been talking and writing about customer service longer than anyone else in the world, letting both large and small companies know that it's fiercely competitive out there and the only way to compete and win is with superior customer service. I, for one, am relentless in this. I work on it daily!

### The Amazon Approach

In 1994 Jeff Bezos quit his job on Wall Street and he and his wife started on their relentless journey to where he is today — the richest man in the world. Twenty-five years later, he shows no signs of slowing down. In his letter from 1998 he wrote:

"I constantly remind our employees to be afraid, to wake up every morning terrified. Not of our competition, but of our customers. Our customers have made our business what it is, they are the ones with whom we have a relationship, and they are the ones to whom we owe a great obligation. And we consider them to be loyal to us — right up until the second that someone else offers them a better service. We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better." — Jeff Bezos, founder, chairman, CEO, and president of Amazon.

Mr. Bezos has pursued this goal every single day. And isn't it amazing that ... he has no competition! He talks about better customer service and he provides it, always. He prides himself as being "obsessed" with awesome customer service.

"I constantly remind our employees to **be afraid**, to wake up every morning terrified. **Not of our competition, but of our customers.**"

— Jeff Bezos



Amazon can be described with a single word — relentless. They purchased the site of [www.relentless.com](http://www.relentless.com) long ago to connect directly with their company, Amazon and their customers. For 40 years, I have said the major reason organizations are not customer-driven is because top management has no grasp of how the financial impact affects employee performance. They are not relentless.

### Value of Customer Service

Companies spend millions on the land, building the store, and stocking it with product, all for one thing — the customer. But when the customer actually appears, the companies fall down on the job. All that time, thought, and money is wasted if the customer walks out, never to return. No one appears to have been trained on customer service; the customer experience. The entire focus has been on advertising. Seldom do firms understand the power of a service strategy.

Another problem is that most CEOs are not relentless. What is worse is many firms who have a service culture when the CEO retires, but then delegate those duties to a financial CEO. They put blinders on and deal with numbers only, no thought to strategy and customer service. They don't even pay any attention to the fact that it is very difficult to recover the service brand. Great leaders know that service is what your customer says it is, so they stay in touch with their markets and willingly spend the money to do so.

We are relentless: For 40 years we have been helping companies succeed. For 40 years, over 1 million people trained

using our system. For 40 years we have tailored programs for motivating frontline employees. For 40 years we have helped companies save money and watch their profits grow with great customer service.

Generating excitement, innovation, and a focus on continuous improvement like we teach, has been used for centuries by the top companies in the world. It creates a culture that's hard to build otherwise, and a true competitive advantage goes to companies that get it right. They make it easy for customers to communicate with the company.

The newsletter Quality Assurance Report states that only when a company knows exactly what kind of service its customers expect, delivers on those expectations 100 percent of the time, and at a price that customers are willing to pay — while still getting an acceptable return — can the company claim to excel in customer service. Amazon excels in the customer experience making Jeff Bezos the richest man in the world!

"They've known for years that customer service doesn't cost, it pays."

C&IT



### John Tschohl

John Tschohl is a professional speaker, trainer and consultant. He is the president and founder of Service Quality Institute (the global leader in customer service) with operations in over 40 countries. John is a self-made millionaire traveling and speaking more than 50 times each year. He is considered to be one of the foremost authorities on service strategy, success, empowerment and customer service in the world. John's monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.



## How to Stay Safe on Free Wi-Fi

By Jack Warner

Corporate professionals who are frequent travelers must be well acquainted with free public Wi-Fi at airports and elsewhere, but many might not be aware of the cybersecurity risks of free Wi-Fi on both the individual and the company's confidential communication.

### Cybersecurity risks you've repeatedly overlooked

Before connecting to most public Wi-Fi networks, you are usually required to agree to some terms and conditions. That is the only hurdle to overcome before connecting, so most tend to ignore it in all eagerness to get online.

However, if you had taken the time to glance through a couple of sentences, you will understand why your data might not be secure once you're logged in. In fact, the owners know their connections may be wildly unsafe and try to warn you so they are not held responsible for whatever happens afterward.

be expected to have the best tech in the game. Surprisingly, they admit that 'the transmission of information via the internet and via the service is not secure.'

I can go on and on, but I believe you get the idea already. Even if every other bit of data I provide might not convince you, hearing it from the providers should set some bells ringing.

### Network operators want to strip you bare

As if all of the above is no reason for worry already, another threat comes in the form of the network operators. Apparently, you could still be susceptible to internet privacy breaches even if the network was tightened against external attacks.

Again, the companies that give their customers free Wi-Fi don't hide this. It is yet another common feature in their terms and agreements.

The U.S. District Court of Puerto says of its Wi-Fi network that 'all communications over the [Wi-Fi] service may be

“The ideal thing to do would be to **stick to your own data plans** and do away with the free Wi-Fi in the first place.”

You don't have to take my word for it. We can pick a few examples of businesses offering free Wi-Fi to the public and review their policies.

Starting with Suddenlink, they state of their Wi-Fi zones in the U.S. that 'You acknowledge that the [Wi-Fi] service is inherently not secure and that wireless communications can be intercepted by equipment and software designed for that purpose.'

If that is not explicit enough, consider what Tim Hortons — the revered coffee chain from Canada — says. For one reason or the other, they state that 'Your messages may be the subject of unauthorized third-party interception and review.'

Matters are not even helped when we move on to the likes of Arqiva. You should note this is a company dedicated to fitting the lounges of airports with a Wi-Fi network and would

subject to monitoring and should not be considered either private or protected.' Coming from a court of law, isn't that rather ironic?

Little wonder then that other firms can do the same. After all, Virgin Media holds the right 'to monitor and control data volume' while the guys over at the Oscars can also 'monitor and collect information while you are connected to the [Wi-Fi] service.'

### Possible attacks on public Wi-Fi

If you have not already started picking up on it, the biggest problem with using free public Wi-Fi connections is data leak. How does this happen?

#### • Man in the middle attacks

Experienced hackers can place themselves between two



sides of a conversation. This allows them to intercept the messages being sent and received. They will also be able to hijack the conversation at any point, pose as either side and extract sensitive information.

#### • Rogue networks

Hackers may also set up rogue networks that will look legit and offer free connection to interested users. Once those users connect, they will be at the mercy of such a hacker who would now be able to access all of their activity.

This grants the hacker access to bank logins, forum passwords, sensitive data, emails and so much more.

#### • Malware attacks

Due to a lack of encryption on public Wi-Fi networks, hackers can freely upload malware to the server.

Everyone who connects to such a network faces the risk of downloading the malware to their computer units. This holds so much more significance since the hacker would still be able to maintain remote access to the computer — through the malware — even after the user has disconnected from the network.

### How you protect yourself better

There isn't supposed to be any harm in just being able to enjoy your free Wi-Fi connection in peace. With a number of unscrupulous individuals hunting your sensitive data though, that is not the case.

The ideal thing to do would be to stick to your own data plans and do away with the free Wi-Fi in the first place. If that is not an option, getting a quality VPN would be the recommended line of action.

A VPN will allow you to connect like always. The difference is that you would be using a different server to send hackers on the wrong trail. That is not to mention being able to better mask data you send over the otherwise insecure network.

In addition to that, you also get to access content that might have been blocked on the Wi-Fi network.

With such procedures in place, you can keep enjoying your coffee shop freebie without having to worry about losing your bank login details or some other important data — to some snooper.

C&IT



### Jack Warner

Jack is an accomplished cybersecurity expert with years of experience under his belt at TechWarn, a trusted digital agency to world-class cybersecurity companies. A passionate digital safety advocate, Jack frequently contributes to tech blogs and digital media by sharing expert insights on topics such as whistle-blowing and cybersecurity tools.

<https://www.techwarn.com/author/jack-warner/>



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# More Than Games

## Casino Properties Bring In The Meetings As Well

By Patrick Simms

**L**abels can sometimes be misleading in the lodging industry: While a property with a significant amount of well-appointed meeting space relative to its guest room total may be labeled a “meeting hotel,” the same property with a casino added may become known as a “gaming resort.”

The latter tag suggests the hotel primarily caters to casino-goers, when in fact it is extremely adept at servicing meeting groups. Beyond simply having great function rooms, the hotel staff knows how to bolster the ROI for a group client. A case in point comes from the staff at the Beau Rivage Resort & Casino. The

Biloxi, Mississippi resort recently hosted Bad Boy Mowers’ annual dealer meeting, and did it with flair.

### Beau Rivage Resort & Casino

“We had mowers throughout Beau Rivage,” noted Sherrise Stephens, director, global accounts with HelmsBriscoe



Bad Boy Mowers selected the Beau Rivage Resort & Casino in Biloxi, MS to host its annual dealer meeting. Planners say gaming resorts are a top-of-the-list pick when seeking a venue with plenty of meeting space and plenty of activities for event attendees.



Credit: Sherrise Stephens

Performance Group, who once worked as a sales manager for the Batesville, AR-based mower manufacturer. “They put our mowers in their gardens, so when our dealers were walking through the parking garage into the lobby, they saw mowers all along the way.”

Pumpkins and orange flowers complemented the orange-colored mowers, making the display aesthetically appealing. Beau Rivage’s commitment to convention service was also evident in how the staff handled challenges that arose.

“We had packages shipped to the hotel and couldn’t find one. Not only was my sales manager and CSM in there on a Saturday looking for it, but the director of sales came to look for it as well,” Stephens observes. “I was very



Credit: ilani

ilani, in Ridgefield, WA, hosted an event for Waste Connections of Washington, Inc. The company’s community affairs director said the staff was friendly and the activities plentiful.

Fazio-designed Fallen Oak Golf Course, went deep-sea fishing on the Mississippi Sound, and of course, tried their luck in the casino.

“They hadn’t been to a gaming prop-

erty before; it was a new thing for us. But we’ll go back. Our owner was so happy with how happy his dealers were that he opened the bar for anybody who wanted to drink for about two hours,” Stephens says.

As Cyndi Holloway, community affairs director for Waste Connections of Washington, Inc. and organizer for the event relates, the staff at ilani was very attuned to her group.

“They really took the time to get to know us and the event itself, which was really refreshing,” she says. “They didn’t stereotype us as a bunch of truck drivers. They really wanted to know why we were doing this kind of event for our company; what did it mean to us. This event is very important for my president and vice president every year.”

The result was a multifaceted event in the ballroom that ensured guests weren’t entirely enthralled by the casino, which was a concern since this was the first time the rodeo was held at a gaming property. Attendees enjoyed an Eddie Money concert, buffet dinner, mechanical bull rides, a photo booth



Credit: Live! Casino & Hotel

The Live! Casino & Hotel in Hanover, MD has a 4,000-seat arena for concerts. It’s where the Cordish Art Collection, which includes pieces by Andy Warhol, makes its home.

impressed with a team that would put that much care into it. And then the booth would not fit in the big ballroom, which was our fault not theirs, and so we had to move the group to another room. It was completely seamless, which hardly ever happens in my world. Something like that generally is a disaster, and they handled it beautifully.”

The resourceful service complements Beau Rivage’s 50,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including the 17,000-sf Magnolia Ballroom. And its 1,740 guest rooms nicely accommodated Bad Boy Mowers’ approximately 1,200 attendees. The dealers were able to try out mowers at the nearby MGM Park, enjoyed shows at the nearly 1,600-seat Beau Rivage Theatre, teed off at the Tom

### ilani

Another prime example of a gaming property proving its meetings savvy comes from Ridgefield, WA, home of ilani. Located within the Portland metro region, the casino resort houses a 30,000-sf Meeting & Entertainment Center equipped with advanced AV and featuring the



Credit: Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino

Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood, FL is expanding. It is adding 120,000 sf of function space.





The Mirage has long been a favorite of planners. The Mirage Convention Center has more than 170,000 sf of space, while the Mirage Event Center offers 90,000 sf.

Credit: The Mirage

**Sherrise Stephens**  
Director, Global  
Accounts  
HelmsBriscoe  
Performance Group  
Alexander, AR



even said, 'Hey, if you want to drive one of your trucks into our ballroom, you can.'"

That go-the-extra-mile service is a major reason why the Waste Connections group will be returning to ilani again this year.

#### Live! Casino & Hotel

One of the perks of meeting at a gaming resort is the live entertainment and state-of-the-art concert venues often found on-site. A prime example is Live! Casino & Hotel, in Hanover, MD. The property's Event Center includes a 4,000 seat concert venue along with 20,000 sf of function space (set to double in size this year). The 310-room hotel tower also includes a 6,000-sf spa, fitness center, top-rated steakhouse and The Cordish Art Collection. Curated exclusively



Credit: Mandalay Bay

The Mandalay Bay Convention Center recently installed a multimillion-dollar LED lighting system to conserve energy.

for Live! Hotel by Suzi and David Cordish, the collection includes more than 40 works by world-renowned artists, including Andy Warhol, Jennifer Steinkamp, Charlie Ahn, Robert Indiana, and Not Vital.

Complementing Live! Casino & Hotel is Live! Lofts, an elegant, 250-room boutique hotel with its own 3,400 sf of renovated function space.

Another advantage of meeting in many gaming resorts is the connection to Native American tribal cultures, which can be fascinating for guests.

ilani, for example, is a project of the Cowlitz Tribe and Salishan-Mohegan. In Scottsdale, AZ, Talking Stick Resort is accessible to Salt River, home of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community.

Attendees can immerse themselves in the heritage of two Native American tribes: the "Akimel O'Odham" (River People) and the "Xalychidom Piipaash" (people who live toward the water).

Both Talking Stick Resort and Salt River are approximately 20 minutes from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, and thus very convenient for corporate groups flying in from disparate parts of the United States and internationally.

The 496-room resort is well stocked in meeting venues, including the 24,556-sf Salt River Grand Ballroom;

a Conference Center that can be divided into 12 meeting rooms; and a 650-capacity showroom.

For many attendees, Talking Stick Golf Club, offering two courses and views of the Sonoran Desert and Camelback Mountain, will create the ideal backdrop for informal networking and bonding.

#### Park MGM

When it comes to gaming resorts in the Western United States, MGM Resorts International's properties are



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Credit: MGM Grand

MGM Grand offers more than 85,000 sf of meeting space and Topgolf, an interactive golf game.

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Caesars Entertainment features venues such as Caesars Palace and The Linq Hotel & Casino. The company renovated 11,348 rooms, more than half of its room inventory in Las Vegas.

among the most progressive in offerings to groups. Park MGM is exemplary in this regard. In July, the hotel debuted the Madison Meeting Center, Las Vegas' first executive meeting center. And in November, Park MGM added the 7,000 sf Ideation Studio. Now a member of IACC, the Ideation Studio makes Park MGM the first hotel to offer groups Cisco Webex Boards and Cisco Webex Teams. Park MGM has also installed the brand's Stay Well Rooms and Stay Well Meetings, arguably the most comprehensive wellness room and meeting experiences in the industry.

### The Mirage

The Stay Well Meetings offerings at The Mirage, another MGM Las Vegas property, are expanding with the recent conversion of Calypso Court to the Stay Well concept. Calypso Court includes seven meeting rooms totaling 15,000 sf. Last year, 121 Stay Well guest rooms were also launched at

The Mirage. When lodging in these guest rooms and convening in Stay Well meeting rooms, attendees



M Resort Spa Casino offers a multitude of activities, such as virtual golf, in which event attendees can participate in their down time.

can expect increased energy, focus and productivity.

### Mandalay Bay, MGM Grand, ARIA Resort & Casino

Conserving electrical energy was the goal at MGM's Mandalay Bay last year when it collaborated with

business-to-business events organizer UBM plc to develop a new LED lighting system in Mandalay Bay Convention Center's exhibit halls. The multimillion-dollar investment has resulted in less energy usage and a reduced carbon footprint.

Mandalay Bay is welcoming more meetings business following the 2016 expansion that added 350,000 sf of new exhibit space, the 70,000-sf Oceanside Ballroom and a 20,000-sf foyer. The Mandalay Bay Convention Center now has more than two million total sf of flexible exhibit and meeting space.

Last December, MGM further enhanced its Las Vegas meeting space offerings when it debuted the expanded conference center at MGM Grand. With an additional 250,000 sf of

meeting space, the facility now offers 850,000 sf. In addition, ARIA Resort & Casino recently added the Ironwood Terrace, completing its 200,000-sf expansion. The 8,000-sf outdoor space connects ARIA's East and West Convention Centers, and overlooks the pool complex and mountains.



Planners looking for a gaming venue off the beaten path to host an event pick Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino in New Mexico.

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



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## Caesars Entertainment

Caesars Entertainment has also been investing heavily in its Las Vegas gaming resorts, focusing on its guest room product. By mid 2018, the company renovated 11,348 rooms — more than half of its room inventory in the city. Highlights of the initiative include a \$125 million redesign of 2,052 guest rooms and suites in the new Resort Tower at Bally's Las Vegas; a \$140 million transformation at Harrah's Las Vegas, which includes 1,622 modernized guest rooms and suites in its Valley Tower; a \$90 million renovation of 1,270 rooms at Flamingo Las Vegas; and a complete renovation of all rooms at Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino.

One of the earliest renovations took place at the Palace Tower in Caesars Palace. In October of 2017, the refurbishment of all 1,181 guest rooms was completed, and 10 luxurious new villas were added to the 29th floor.

This year, Caesars Palace plans to debut the Vanderpump Cocktail Garden, bringing Lisa Vanderpump's Los Angeles-based brand of restaurants and lounges to Las Vegas. The fresco-style garden can serve as a tranquil, informal gathering spot for groups.

## M Resort Spa Casino

In nearby Henderson, NV, the 390-room M Resort Spa Casino also offers its share of distinctive event spaces. For example, the Villaggio Del Sole Pool and Entertainment Piazza spans 100,000 sf and is an ideal setting for scenic outdoor functions. Large-scale corporate events can also be held in the 25,000-sf M Pavilion, which accommodates up to 2,300 guests. M Resort's 92,000-sf conference center is distinguished by its use of natural light and views of the Las Vegas skyline. After meeting sessions, guests will find many diversions beyond the casino, such as a 23,000-sf spa and salon.



The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in Atlantic City has 106,000 sf of function space, including 30,000 sf of ballroom space.

## Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino

Speaking of great spas, one of New Mexico's finest gaming resorts debuted a luxury spa last fall. Inn of the Mountain Gods' new oasis for guests offers an array of signature treatments and services within a facility designed to reflect the native culture of the Mescalero tribe. Last summer, the 273-room resort earned the AAA Four Diamond Rating for the second consecutive year and is the only resort in southern New Mexico to receive this designation.

From a planner's perspective, the

resort is sound choice for intense business meetings, given its 40,000 sf of space comprised of 15 highly configurable meeting rooms. And a memorable teambuilding adventure is close at hand with the Apache Eagle ZipRider over Lake Mescalero.

## Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa

Still the Northeast's undisputed hub of gaming action, Atlantic City continues to improve and its dynamic properties do not rest on their laurels. One example is Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa. This summer, the resort will introduce an \$11 million new bar and sports wagering experience.

Last summer, Borgata became the first Atlantic City casino to accept a legal sports wager under New Jersey's new sports betting regulations. Meetings at the 2,000-room Borgata are certainly no gamble: The property houses 106,000 sf of varied function space, ensuring every group will find an ideal meeting venue. Possibilities include the 30,000 sf of ballroom event space, complete with a variety of small meeting rooms; the 18,000-sf Central Conference Center; and a 1,000-capacity theater.



The Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood, FL is expanding, with the work set to finish in 2019. The new look will include the company's iconic, guitar-shaped tower.

**Cyndi Holloway**  
Community Affairs  
Director  
Waste Connections, Inc.  
of Washington  
Vancouver, WA



**"[The ilani staff] really took the time to get to know us and the event itself, which was really refreshing."**

## Hard Rock Hotels

Hard Rock Hotels has been investing in major portfolio enhancements that present new options for corporate groups. Last June saw the debut of Hard Rock Hotel Atlantic City, yet another symbol of the city's revival. The 2,000-room hotel offers more than 150,000 sf of function space, making it a great option for large corporate groups. In fact, Hard Rock Live at Etess Arena can accommodate a general session of 7,000 attendees or a trade show of over 300 booths. Another option is the 29,000-sf Seminole Ballroom, which is divisible into six sections.

In the Sunshine State, the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood, FL is preparing for the opening of its \$1.5 billion expansion this fall. The project will add a 638-room, guitar-shaped hotel; 168 guest rooms in an adjacent tower; 120,000 sf of function space; a 41,000-sf Rock Spa; 13.5 acres of water activities; 30 restaurants and more. Currently, the Seminole Hard Rock houses 469 rock 'n' roll-themed guest rooms, complemented by 40,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space.

## Grand Hyatt Baha Mar

For some attendees, gaming can be an escape from the pressures of the business world. But when a planner selects a gaming resort in the

Caribbean, the entire meeting can feel like an escape. Still a fairly new option in that destination is the Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, which opened in April 2017 on the island of Nassau in the Bahamas. The 1,800-room oceanfront resort is home to the Baha Mar Convention, Art and Entertainment Center,

and offers 200,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space. Other property highlights include the 30,000-sf ESPA Spa, Jack Nicklaus Signature Design golf course, and a multicultural selection of cuisine at more than 20 restaurants, bars and lounges. Attendees can easily get into the Bahamian spirit by relaxing at the nearby Beach Sanctuary or simply taking in the resort's Bahamian art, courtesy of local artists.



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## Atlantis, Paradise Island

Paradise Island in the Bahamas is home to another top-tier gaming resort that also features formidable meeting facilities. The Conference Center at Atlantis, Paradise Island includes the 50,000-sf Imperial Ballroom, over 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.

Connected to the Conference Center is Coral Tower, where the attendees of Audubon, PA-based Globus Medical, Inc. lodged during their annual Global Sales Meeting in January.

Dianna Leigh, director of meetings, exhibits, and travel for Globus Medical, Inc. appreciated the logistical convenience within such a large property.

"We utilize breakout rooms and typically our agenda is so packed that we give them little time to get from one session to another. And we were really lucky that all the breakout space was connected to the general session area," she notes.

An exceptional event during the program was a product fair held at the Café at the Great Hall of Waters. The marine habitat backdrop created a striking ambiance for the approximately 400 attendees as they explored product displays, networked and enjoyed food and cocktails.

In arranging this event and working on the program as a whole "the CSM was top notch," Leigh says. "He was with us the entire time from morning



Credit: Grand Hyatt Baha Mar

The Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, which opened in 2017 on the island of Nassau in the Bahamas, offers attendees a chance to visit the island's famed Cable Beach.

until our events were over. With a large property like this, planners may fear



**Dianna Leigh**  
Director of Meetings,  
Exhibits and Travel  
Globus Medical, Inc.  
Audubon, PA

**"[The Atlantis team] did a really good job of being there to navigate for attendees in case they should take a wrong turn."**

that attendees are going to get lost in the shuffle trying to get from point A to B. Their team did a really good job of being there to navigate for attendees in case they should take a wrong turn. And there was one time when our general session had unexpectedly ended early and we were transitioning to another location, but we weren't setup and ready. Convention services pulled everybody they had on the floor and put them at different points through the resort, so they made sure all of our members got where they needed to be. It was a last-minute rush with all hands on deck, but it worked out really well."

The remarkable service quality helped to justify the three-year contract Globus Medical had signed with Atlantis.

"It was a little risky because we hadn't been to the property before," Leigh says. "But we are so excited because there are so many opportunities for us moving forward in the next three years; we have only begun to scratch the surface of what they have to offer. So every year is going to be something different for the attendees."

To call properties like Atlantis "gaming resorts," while technically accurate, the fact that they are home to diverse forms of leisure and entertainment can make each meeting a unique experience. Even more significantly, their convention staffers can be as proficient as those in any "meeting hotel." **C&IT**



Credit: Atlantis Paradise Island

Atlantis Paradise Island, also in the Bahamas, has long been a favorite gaming resort for planners. It offers dozens of beach activities for event attendees seeking a watery escape.

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Unique venues go beyond cookie-cutter buildings and vanilla guest service. One such venue is Hotel Xcaret Mexico (above), along the Riviera Maya on the east side of the Yucatan Peninsula and west of Cozumel.

# Venues With One-of-a-Kind Features Impress Potential Attendees With Unique Locales

By Christine Loomis

The word unique may mean different things when it comes to venues in which to set an event. A venue might be unique because of its intriguing architecture, design or singular space. It might be one-of-a-kind among similar facilities, such as museums. Or what a venue offers planners might be unique, as in atypical amenities or concessions. We set out to find venues across North America that can fairly be called unique in one way or another.

## In the East Ellis Island

There's only one Ellis Island. "It's so American," says Jaclyn Bernstein, President & Partner/owner of ACCESS New York Metro, a DMC. "So many people had family that came through here they can relate personally to it. It's a one-of-a-kind venue. It's stunning on its own because of its incredible history. When you dress it up, it's unlike any other venue."

The Registry Room or "Great Hall" is a primary venue.

"When I take clients on site visits to Ellis Island, I'm able to say that everyone who came through Ellis Island came through this room. That's amazing," Bernstein says. "One of every four Americans had someone in their family who came through here."

One unique option is to arrange a check of attendees' families ahead of the event. When they arrive, they see

documents with information about family members and their long-ago journey to America. "International visitors can also learn about family members who emigrated to America," Bernstein adds.

Ellis Island houses the National Museum of Immigration, which features exhibits on immigration at the facility and elsewhere, making it uniquely American and uniquely New York. That's a big draw for groups.

The facility is also one of the larger New York City venues, able to accommodate a reception for 1,200 and a seated dinner for 900. Because it's part of the National Park Service, Bernstein points out, it's budget-friendly compared to most other museums.

"When you book Ellis Island it's all yours," Bernstein notes. "It's your own private National Park that also happens to have spectacular views of Manhattan and the Statue of Liberty."

The experience includes a ferry ride to and from the island provided by Hornblower Cruises. Groups typically get a sunset cruise on the way out and a city-lights view on the way back.

And many impressive extras can be added. "You can have fire boats spray water in corporate colors. You can have fireworks. We've done police marching bands and concerts," Bernstein says. "Groups can also book park rangers, historians and costumed entertainers who interpret the island's history."

While events indoors in the historic building are popular, Bernstein says some groups opt for a BBQ in an outdoor area facing the Statue of Liberty — the



Selecting Ellis Island as a meeting venue gives attendees a link to American history.

only food that can be cooked on the island as there's no kitchen. Everything has to be brought in under strict guidelines, and not until the facility closes to the public at day's end.

But Bernstein says, "We use a group of vendors who know the complex rules and regulations associated with bringing goods into the park and it's possible to set up an event for 900 in an hour."

One of Bernstein's favorite events to set up is a dinner on long feasting tables like those used by the immigrants on the island. She adds up-lighting on the historic vaulted ceiling and eye-catching table décor. "The dinner can be very formal or casual, and most planners get very emotional when they see it for the first time."

In a way, Bernstein says, attendees are mirroring the journey of their ancestors, arriving by boat, landing on the island and being ushered into the Great Hall. What better way to honor incentive or corporate guests than by letting them experience those journeys?

Simply put, Bernstein says, "Ellis Island embodies New York and Americana at its best."

## William Aiken House

There's no shortage of opulent historic venues in Charleston, SC. That's where Liz Cole Carbone, event planner with Fox Events, set a client's annual meeting in late 2017. The group of 100 doctors was lodged at The Dewberry Charleston and set an evening event in the historic William Aiken House.

"This is a beautiful destination with numerous accommodations, venues and numbers of culinary experiences and historic activities for planners to draw on," Carbone says. "You truly can create a unique and unforgettable experience for guests that encompasses all that Charleston has to offer."

The William Aiken House is a stunning 1810 mansion that features formal dining rooms and parlors with museum-caliber artwork, a two-century-old magnolia tree anchoring the courtyard, manicured lawns and an elegant pergola. "It provides the epitome



"When you book Ellis Island ... [it] also happens to have spectacular views of Manhattan and the Statue of Liberty."

**Jaclyn Bernstein**  
President & Partner/Owner  
ACCESS New York Metro  
New York, NY

of Southern charm while being in a central location," Carbone says. "It also offers the best in terms of the culinary experience and unparalleled service."

The home's varied spaces helped create a spectacular evening. "The function was a combination of a cocktail hour, symphony orchestra performance and a tented five-course dinner for 100," Carbone says. "William Aiken House was the perfect location because of its multiple areas, which made every part of the night amazing. We wanted a space that would not only wow guests but was also something you can't see in any other part of



The William Aiken House is a mansion built in 1810 that offers a total immersion in old Southern charm.





Hotel Xcaret Mexico provides a stunning setting and offers a unique, all-inclusive concept for meeting and incentive travel planners.

the country. We wanted the guests to truly feel special."

The group utilized most of the property. "We started the night in the historic and vibrant ballrooms, then moved out onto the pristine lawn for a wonderful performance by renowned musicians, and we finished with a chic tented dinner under the magnolia tree. Every step of the night presented guests with a new experience that continued to wow."

William Aiken House is one of the historic venues in the Patrick Properties Hospitality Group's portfolio. The hospitality group's staff was a positive for Carbone. "They go above and beyond, from making the client feel valued and

**"The MIM staff knew exactly how to execute an executive event that offered a relaxed, interactive atmosphere."**

**Tammy Mathews**  
Corporate Events Planner  
Jenzabar  
Harrisonburg, VA

understood to making the job of the planner seamless. The pre-event client experience is one of the best in the Southeast. The client left the pre-event planning meeting and tasting raving

about the food and service. The night of the event, the team worked flawlessly to create the perfect event that the client envisioned. They exceeded all expectations."

To planners considering Charleston, Carbone advises getting the Patrick Properties team involved early. "You can really feel the love this team has for its properties. They are so good at expressing that to the client and they make sure everything is taken care of from the very beginning."

#### Midwest and Central States Harley-Davidson Museum

In July, Mike Underwood, president of Underwood Events, took a client group of 1,000 to the Hilton Milwaukee City Center, and held an event at the Harley-Davidson Museum during the program. "The client wanted a venue and experience that was not only quintessentially Milwaukee, but also in stark contrast to the gala-style event scheduled for the evening prior. In addition, they preferred an outdoor space where guests could socialize and network in a casual environment while still enjoying an upscale aesthetic."



Credit: Hotel Xcaret Mexico

**"The location, convenience and excellence of the Pearl Campus was a huge factor in selecting the venue."**

**Nanci Malcolm**  
CMP  
Caterpillar, Inc.  
Peoria, IL

Underwood says the museum offers flexible event options with branded and customizable design choices in indoor and outdoor spaces. Among other draws are the museum's close proximity to downtown. "The food service provider also operates the onsite restaurant," he adds, "so food and



The Harley-Davidson Museum offers an experience for everyone, not just fans of the iconic motorcycle brand.

beverage options are prepared nearby under the guidance of an executive chef."

The Harley-Davidson Museum, he adds, "is a reflection of Milwaukee's history, but not in a typical museum-style venue. A bold design and laid-back style merge into a venue that has an identity all its own." And it's not just for motorcycle fans.

"The museum is a large, flexible space with water access, plenty of parking and built-in entertainment. Wide-open spaces can accommodate outdoor events, indoor gala-style outings and multiday meetings with ample breakout space."

Underwood's group used The Garage, a 10,400-sf industrial-styled space, as well as 5th Street, which is adjacent. "The event had a street-party theme, but The Garage gave us added flexibility in case of inclement weather, which made the decision easy" he says.

Additionally, he notes that the staff at the museum and Levy Restaurants really helped with the planning process. "Their knowledge of the space, its flexibility and uniqueness made organizing an event at the facility an enjoyable project. The dedicated on-site event staff was helpful and easily available from setup through strike. Levy Restaurants offers custom-made bar and food stations that add to the aesthetic of the event. The design of the venue is reflected in the smallest detail, including the color of its banquet chairs."

Many of the attendees were surprised at how much the venue had to offer, even if they were not motorcycle enthusiasts," Underwood says. "Those who were, however, were in hog heaven! We worked to create a casual, welcoming and comfortable vibe that had guests enjoying the event right up to the last song."

Working ahead with the venue staff can lead to surprising results, Underwood notes. "Their collective knowledge can make the planner or client aware of options they may not have considered on their own."

**[The Harley-Davidson Museum] is a reflection of Milwaukee's history, but not in a typical museum-style venue ... [it] has an identity all its own."**



**Mike Underwood**  
President  
Underwood Events  
Wauwatosa, WI

#### Southwest Pearl Stable, San Antonio

Pearl Stable, says Nanci Malcom, CMP, with Caterpillar, Inc., "is a wonderful and unique venue that is so refreshing and also part of Pearl campus, which includes shopping, dining, a one-of-a-kind luxury hotel, farmer's market, green spaces and a culinary school. Plus, it's the last stop on the city's famed River Walk."

Pearl Stable was the venue of choice for Caterpillar's annual shareholder's meeting in June, a group of 200. Hotel Emma, within Pearl campus, served as lodging and setting for the board meeting.

"The location, convenience and excellence of the Pearl campus was a huge factor in selecting the venue, and we knew it would also be a 'wow' factor," Malcom says. "While there, we were planning to have groups visit a large Caterpillar facility in Sequin, Texas, an easy 30-minute drive. We were able to walk three minutes from the hotel to the Stable where our meeting was held. This unique and fabulous venue was very flexible in accommodating our needs. We were able to bring a few Caterpillar products (engine and machines) to display. It was a huge

success. I only wish we could bring our annual meeting there every year."

Noting the atmosphere, shape and history of the building as a draw, Malcom says her group used the entire middle of the Stable, with the stage for directors and seating for 175 on the main floor. "We also utilized 1/3 of the corridor for check-in, morning break and passage to main doors."

Pearl Stable was a hit with attendees. Malcom notes that many took the time to look into its history, which dates to the late 1800s when it housed brewery draft horses. As for logistics, Malcom says the staffs of Pearl Stable and Hotel Emma "worked beautifully together, making sure every detail was thought through and things flowed well."

Word has gotten out that Pearl is a fabulous venue, she adds. "Plan early!"

#### Out West MEET Las Vegas

Trish Wright, owner of Celebrity Style Events and founder of Divas in Business, brought a group of 150 women business entrepreneurs to Las Vegas in October. "Las Vegas is a mecca for conferences and expos and gives women an opportunity to not only get away but also build their businesses while meeting like-minded professionals from across the county," Wright says.

As for MEET Las Vegas, she adds, "It has an affordable downtown Las Vegas location and is an amazing space that's very versatile and offers a great staff and affordable catering options."

For Wright, the venue's uniqueness relates to services and budget. "It has



MEET Las Vegas offers a downtown venue with 40,000 sf of customizable event space and wireless connectivity.



excellent amenities without the huge add-on fees of hotels," she says. "We chose the entire second floor. Guests were greeted with our company logo on large screens, great lounge chairs, stylish chairs and acrylic podium."

Another plus was the way information was handled pre-event. "Everyone involved in our event was included in emails so there was no back and forth to several different people and departments. I felt everyone was up to speed the entire process."

To planners considering the venue, Wright says simply, "Prepare to wow your guests." Her own group is rebooked for 2019.

**"Since the venue is not located downtown, attendees commit to staying versus wandering out to other locations."**

**Stacey Stine**

Co-founder

Magnify Communications

Windsor, CA

#### **Musical Instrument Museum**

Tammy Mathews, corporate event planner with Jenzabar, brought a group of educators to Arizona for a special invitation event in January. "Phoenix is easily accessible and served by many

airlines, which helps keep costs reasonable. The surrounding area offers both luxury accommodations and outdoor activities," she says.

The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa served as a base for lodging and most functions, but the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) was chosen for an executive-level event. "It's only minutes from the conference hotel and the venue was very flexible with timing, menus and entertainment options. The MIM staff knew exactly how to execute an executive event that offered a relaxed, interactive atmosphere," Mathews says.

"We were looking for something

different from the standard dinner meeting. MIM offered an excellent catered menu and private gallery exhibits. Music is a very relatable topic and our attendees found common interest as they explored the Target and Artist Galleries. This experience lead to many interesting discussions and stories from our executives!"

The group used the South El Rio space. "MIM staff recommended two galleries within that space, the Target and Artist galleries," Mathews says. "The transition was smooth from our executives enjoying cocktails and exploring the galleries to the dinner being served in this distinctive space. The space

contributed to great conversations and exclusivity.

"Anytime you can offer an exclusive location or venue you've captured your attendees' interest," she adds. "MIM offered private viewing of some of the world's rarest musical instruments. A long-lost guitar had just been added to the gallery so there was definitely excitement to see that exhibit up close."

Mathews worked primarily with Amanda Kozak at the museum. "She was very knowledgeable about how to make our program work to meet



**"William Aiken House was the perfect location because of its multiple areas, which made every part of the night amazing."**

**Liz Cole Carbone**

Event Planner

Fox Events

Mt. Pleasant, SC

our objective to offer a unique interactive setting with superb dining options. The venue is stylish, the function space

## **10 Intriguing Event Venues**

### **Non-Traditional Event Venues-Experiences that Move Mindset**

So many business events are held in the traditional settings of hotel ballrooms and convention centers. These venues deliver value in many ways — adjacency to other activities, flexibility as a blank canvas for design purposes, and technical capability. That said, there is more to consider as it relates to venues for business events.

A recent survey by EventMB identified that 47% of event planners think the venue influences whether or not someone attends an event. So, why not offer something unexpected?

Every market offers many interesting venues for your events. With a bit of creativity, you can make your event stand out through a non-traditional venue. It may be time to discover what's out there.

We asked our PRA Event Producers to share a few of their favorite event venues. From dude ranches and space shuttles to breathtaking waterfront or skyline venues, below are a few of their top picks.



The Cocoraque Ranch is the perfect place to give event guests a taste of the Old West. Activities include horseback rides, cattle drives and rodeos.

- 1 The Elevated Acre (New York) — One of the first ways to make a meeting memorable is to hold it outdoors. The Elevated Acre combines the fresh air and open spaces of a public park with the privacy of a hotel ballroom. An acre of landscaped garden and lawn, it's located on the roof of 55 Water Street, a high-rise building in the Financial District. It includes views of the Brooklyn Bridge, New York Harbor, and more. Capacity: 600 guests
- 2 Nike Store on Michigan Avenue (Chicago) — The Nike flagship store on Michigan Avenue is more than a retail experience. It delivers a total event immersion. Host an in-store VIP experience for guests to mix personal fitness and out-of-the-box networking. Dedicated Nike experts help attendees test products, purchase gear, or showcase the various venue spaces. Enhance the experience with local professional athletes on site, or live workout classes to amplify your team's energy level. Capacity: 1,000 guests
- 3 Wings Over the Rockies (Denver) — Located at the former Lowry Air Force Base, Wings Over the Rockies is Colorado's official Air & Space Museum. A WWII-era hanger built in 1939, this venue sits in the heart of the historic Lowry neighborhood. An inspiring 44,800-sf hanger houses over 50 iconic aircraft and aerospace exhibits, which provides an amazing backdrop to any event. Capacity: 3,500 guests
- 4 Cocoraque Ranch and Pavilion (Tucson) — If you are looking for an immersive desert experience, this ranch outside Tucson is the best-kept secret. This secluded,

private desert setting has a rustic atmosphere and unspoiled desert terrain amidst a 16,000-acre working dude ranch. With more than 1,000 years of history, guests will get a firsthand look at the true Wild West. Capacity: 500 guests

- 5 Pier 27 (San Francisco) — The San Francisco Cruise Ship Terminal on Pier 27 is one of the city's newest event venues, making it an ideal location for progressive events. Captivate guests with stunning 360° waterfront views of the entire Bay. This sustainable and LEED certified terminal offers infinite configurations and free-flowing ideas that will leave attendees' hearts in San Francisco. Capacity: 3,000 guests
- 6 The Temple House (Miami Beach) — Transport guests to more places than one at this unique venue experience. A full 360-degree projection mapping technology gives you the firepower you need to create a visually immersive experience. The 15,000-sf Temple House, in the heart of Miami's South Beach, brings creative freedom to present your story and elevate your brand. Capacity: 600 guests
- 7 Brooklyn Bowl (Las Vegas) — As one of the most popular places in the world to hold business events, Las Vegas has no shortage of fantastic hotels, arenas and other venues. So, why not hold your event at a bowling alley? Of course, Brooklyn Bowl is no ordinary bowling alley. In addition to its two levels of 16 lanes each, it also has a sizable concert space, a fantastic restaurant, plus VIP areas for smaller meetings. Capacity: 2,500 guests
- 8 Samuel Oschin Pavilion (Los Angeles) — Home to the Endeavour space shuttle. For those looking for an out-of-this-world venue, the Samuel Oschin Pavilion is the place to explore. Guests will enjoy cocktails and dinner



The Samuel Oschin Pavilion boosts the 'wow' factor to outer space. Starry-eyed attendees can see the Endeavour space shuttle up close.

- under the wings of a national treasure. What other crown jewel can say they've traveled to space and back 25 times? Capacity: 1,000 guests
- 9 Quantum Leap Winery (Orlando) — Fine wine experiences deliver sophistication when done well. The Quantum Leap Winery can be used for tastings, tours and more. It's a bit smaller than some of the other venues we've reviewed and used. The tasting room holds up to 175 guests, whereas the venue as a whole can hold 400. In the right circumstance, Quantum Leap will make your event unforgettable. Capacity: 400 guests
- 10 USS Midway (San Diego) — All aboard! Known as the longest-serving naval aircraft carrier in the 20th century, this floating venue rising 50 feet over the water is a hallmark for business events. The 4-acre outdoor deck features unparalleled 360-degree views of San Diego Bay. More than 30 remarkably restored naval aircraft serve as a backdrop for an amazing event experience. Capacity: 3,000 guests.

*Courtesy of PRA*



works and the MIM staff made it a very easy event to plan. They are pros!”

Attendees offered more than the usual “Thank you,” Mathews notes. “Compliments included personal comments about how enjoyable it was to see specific artist exhibits and musical instruments. Many exhibits triggered past experiences and made personal connections with our attendees.”

For groups considering MIM, Mathews says, “Have a clear objective and tell the MIM staff what you want to accomplish. Amanda responded quickly to all my inquiries and provided helpful suggestions. Clear communication at the beginning makes the end result successful.”

## The Presidio

The Presidio, a 1,500-acre park on a former military post in San Francisco, has multiple venues, including the Golden Gate Club. Stacy Stine, co-founder of Magnify Communications, says of the park, “It offers great views of the water, bridge and green landscape, which makes for a relaxing attendee environment, which in turn creates more attendee engagement.”

Each year she works with Raise in

The group buys out Golden Gate Club. “Our goal was to create an off-the-grid vibe; a retreat vibe. It’s a great space with a helpful staff that’s easy to deal with and flexible in accommodating requests.” She praises the event and catering staff in particular. To make it easy for guests, Stine recommends a parking buyout as well.

In addition, she says the park offers planners options. “Presidio restaurants make for great VIP and team dinners following the event.”

After four years, Stine says the Presidio continues to work well for this conference. “Attendees always provide positive feedback.”

## Mexico

### Hotel Xcaret Mexico

Xcaret, a combination theme park, ecological park and resort area set along the Caribbean Sea on Mexico’s Riviera Maya, is also a superb meeting destination.

Lisa Neylon, CIS, with Meeting Expectations, brought 80 guests of Core Associates to Xcaret for an “All-Fun Inclusive” event in January. The company has had many meetings in Mexico but Neylon says this one provided an experience unlike any other. “Xcaret is amazing! It’s easy from the minute you get off the plane in Cancun where complimentary provided transportation is waiting. Xcaret defines what all-inclusives should be.”

Among the positives are newly refurbished rooms and adult and family-friendly areas that are separate. “The meeting space is unique in expressing the ambience of Mexico,” Neylon says, “and the hotel provides the staff and luxuries of a four-star experience. The cuisine options are stupendous and include both healthy and indulgent options.”



The Golden Gate Club at the Presidio, a former military post, was built in 1949 as the service club for enlisted men.

She calls the entire process one-stop with many inclusions. “This venue is unique with what is included — the experience of the park and resort as well as the defined meeting space and exceptional service.”

Neylon has nothing but praise for

“The meeting space [at Xcaret] is unique in expressing the ambience of Mexico, and the hotel provides the staff and luxuries of a four-star experience.”

**Lisa Neylon**  
CIS

Meeting Expectations  
Algonquin, IL

the staff, including Diana Patricia Martinez, group sales manager and conference service manager Rodrigo Meraz. The overall experience, from meetings to leisure time was equally positive for attendees — the group plans to return in 2020.

Planners, Neylon notes, should consider the entire experience as they make decisions because Xcaret provides so much. And for those worried that the park might draw attendees away from meetings, Neylon says that’s unlikely. “Planners should know you won’t lose your attendees at any required meetings as the meeting space itself is a destination and attendees can’t wait for the next meal.”

C&IT

“Guests were greeted with our company logo on large screens, great lounge chairs, stylish chairs and acrylic podium. Prepare to wow your guests.”



**Trish Wright**  
Owner  
Celebrity Style Events  
Columbus, OH

the Presidio, a conference of about 250 that connects emerging venture capitalists and limited partners. “The location really helps to capture and maintain your event attendance. Since the venue is not located downtown, attendees commit to staying versus wandering out to other locations for meetings, etc.”

**Group Photo**

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## Golf & Spa

Golf resorts such as Rosen Shingle Creek Orlando remain popular as planners continue using the game to attract attendees.

# G-O-L-F Resorts are the Remedy

Credit: Rosen Shingle Creek Orlando

## Planners incorporate the game's popularity, and destination amenities, with meeting agendas

By Cynthia Dial

Putting together an incentive program rewarding top producers for their over-the-top results is a challenge. Add to the mix the simultaneous task of offering such an enviable event that it entices attendees to re-create their prime performances ensuring qualification the following year, and the assignment morphs from a mission to an uber undertaking.

So, what's a planner to do? The answer lies in a four-letter word, though not an inappropriate slang, mind you. The answer is golf. Today's in-the-know planners who capitalize on the game's ever-growing popularity by incorporating golf into meeting agendas are realizing results.

Here's the deal. By luring employees who only dream of playing some of the nation's most celebrated courses with the promise of an actual visit to one of these resorts, company contenders are upping their games — professional ones, that is.

.....  
**"[The Ojai Valley trip] is a 'must-do' bucket list item for not only my fellow associates, but also for their spouses and significant others who treasure the lifetime memories ..."**  
 .....

**Steven W. Tomson**  
 GM, Sales/Marketing  
 Jack Henry & Associates, Inc.  
 Monette, MO

### Ojai Valley Inn

Of Jack Henry and Associates, Inc.'s once-a-year recognition event for its top 125 performers (and their guests) — an all-expenses-paid golfing trip to Southern California's Ojai Valley Inn — Steven W. Tomson, the corporation's general manager, sales/marketing,

says: "I've been hosting this event for 12 years and it is a 'must-do' bucket list item for not only my fellow associates, but also for their spouses and significant others who treasure the lifetime memories and friends created by this yearly rendezvous."

The results are in with *Forbes* recently distinguishing Jack Henry — one of the country's leading providers of technology solutions — as America's 12th-Best Large Employer in 2018. As planner of his company's annual outing, Tomson says: "I oversee the entire sales and marketing organization — approximately 400 professionals — and this incentive is a meeting/pleasure reward for those whose efforts are responsible for our year-after-year growth in sales success."

Why Ojai Valley Inn one might wonder? Tomson's answer is simple and singular: "Climate first and foremost." He explains that with Jack Henry's fiscal year running July 1 through June 30 the goal is to unleash this celebration as soon as possible in recognition of

the past year's success, thus the meticulously-timed late July/early August event. "With qualifiers from all over the country, we want temperate weather, gentle breezes and overall comfort, and the Ojai Valley offers that combo and more," says the planner of this Spanish Colonial-style resort with its red-tile roof, white plaster walls, innumerable arches and terra-cotta floor tiles throughout.

Tomson describes the Ojai golf course as a premier layout with full utilization of the topography.

"It's not an over-designed resort course but a throwback to a purer period of time when precision, patience, touch and feel were the centerpieces of golf — long before the days of 'grip it and rip it.'"

An additional back-in-the-day feature is the tradition of caddie services. Recognizing its uniqueness are *Golf Magazine*, which named the course's Hole #2 among the "World's Greatest Holes" and *Golf Digest's* award of 4.5 stars and the acknowledgement of the course as one of "75 Best Golf Resorts in North America."

Beyond golf, however, is a plethora of enticements. On-property inclusions are apiary and immersive beekeeping programs as well as The Farmhouse at Ojai, the resort's new culinary event center. There's also easy access to Pacific Ocean beaches and cities such as Los Angeles and Santa Barbara. Add to the mix off-road jeep tours, horseback riding, wine tasting in Ojai Valley, Santa Barbara sailing and city excursions and



Spa Ojai at the Ojai Valley Inn can provide dozens of treatments and relaxing activities for attendees. The inn also has The Farmhouse at Ojai, its new culinary event center.

even biking to the beach (though 10 miles, it's all downhill with the option of wine tasting at the end).

"There's never a 'most-popular' activity," Tomson says. "Our group ranges from 25 to 65 years old and from subdued to thrill seekers, but what I most enjoy hearing at the closing dinner are spousal demands: 'You better make your sales quota this year because I want to come back next summer.'" The planner's assessment: "For those who want to journey out and take on the great outdoors — Ojai is perfect." He continues: "And for those who want to simply relax and reconnect with their loved one — Ojai is perfect."

Designed in the 1920s by George C. Thomas Jr. (also architect of the Riviera, Bel Air and Los Angeles Country Club courses), Tomson's advice to other planners considering golf at Ojai is specific.

"Connect closely with your designated corporate sales representative, in addition to Mark Greenslit, the course's director of golf since 1995 (also an award-winning PGA Class-A Member)."

The team is comprised of complete professionals, engaged in not only the skill of the game but in the spirit of the experience. They will serve as tremendous ambassadors on behalf of the course, the resort and the community in which the Ojai Valley Inn is the centerpiece.

Bottom line for the Jack Henry exec: "I'm a 16 handicap and play golf for the pure joy of being outdoors, enjoying the views and experiencing the venues, but most importantly for the laughter with friends and strangers alike. I've teed up all over the world and like to say, I've played some of the worst golf on some of the greatest courses. But I've never had a bad round because of those with whom I've shared the experience."

With respect to golf at the Ojai Valley Inn, Tomson says, "It is an especially wonderful, memorable, peaceful, rewarding and comfortably challenging happening for all who play — regardless of skill level."



Credit: Innisbrook

Innisbrook, a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort in Palm Harbor, FL is a popular pick for planners who want golf as a part of their events.



## Innisbrook, a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort

Concurring with Tomson's bucket list assessment is Kim Sky, CMP, manager, strategic corporate meetings and events for Chicago-based company CNA, a property casualty insurance corporation with a more than 100-year history working with various corporate industries.

Having selected Innisbrook, a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort in Palm Harbor, Florida, as site of CNA's April 2018 National Sales Meeting for a group of 65, she shares one piece of the selection-process puzzle.

"Among the various outdoor recreational options is a premium golf experience — the noteworthy Copperhead course — host course of the PGA TOUR's Valspar Championship and a 'must play' on most golfers' bucket lists."

The setting is pristine. Near the Gulf of Mexico on Florida's West Coast, the rolling terrain is punctuated with tall pines and stands of cypress; and among its nearby attractions are the Busch Gardens Tampa Bay amusement park, charter fishing and more. But for Sky, it started with airlift. Located about 25 miles from Tampa, the impressive array of airlines servicing the area (including Air Canada, American Airlines, British Airways, United Airlines and Southwest) is important to the company with

locations in Canada and Europe, as well as the United States.

Though arriving with a trio of goals — to review past performance, strategize a future action plan and facilitate team building — prime-time down time was critical to the meeting's success.

"The resort offers everything in a nutshell, from various-sized conference center buildings to beautifully landscaped outdoor dining and activity areas," Sky says. "The setting provides a perfect balance for the group — allowing attendees to focus on their objectives, while also affording them a natural escape to clear their heads."

Important to Sky is that with everything at your fingertips in one location, there's no need to bus attendees off property. "With Innisbrook's natural surroundings, spacious condo guestrooms, attentive staff, creative food and beverage, top-of-the-line spa, resort guest shuttle service — all in addition to views that engulf and transport you to another time — this is where you can 'be in the present.'"

In the F&B scene, the CNA group hosted a chef's table for the leadership team. "The chef was talented and personable, and the meal was one the team remembers to this day," Sky says.

The entire group enjoyed dinner at the on-site restaurant Packard's

.....

**"[Innisbrook] offers everything in a nutshell, from various-sized conference center buildings to beautifully landscaped outdoor dining and activity areas."**

**Kim Sky, CMP**

Manager

Strategic Corporate Meetings and Events  
CNA  
Chicago, IL

.....

Steakhouse. Overlooking the signature Copperhead golf course, this eatery is celebrated for such offerings as aged premium beef steaks, cold-water lobster tails and fresh-from-the-boat fish, all accompanied by Floridian micro-brews.

In addition to Copperhead, Innisbrook has three other courses — all nestled among tree-lined fairways, rolling hills and small lakes and all designed by architect E. Lawrence Packard. Copperhead was designed with the goal of being a fair challenge to all levels of play but also a worthy venue for the pros playing from the tips. The Island Course is equally challenging and distinctly pictographic with Spanish moss swaying from its multitude of trees (it's the course on which Phil Mickelson won his 1990 NCAA Men's Championship.) The North Course (also known as "Baby Copperhead") was enhanced with new greens in fall 2017, and longer is the South Course, which is also sporting new greens.

Of importance to Sky is the golf staff she describes as professional, accommodating and trained to get groups off and running on a timely basis. To best ensure an at-the-top-of-the-game experience the planner offers these tips: 1) Do your homework, 2) Secure course maps, 3) Confirm the player level that best fits each course, 4) Check the reviews and industry awards and 5) Talk with the Pro.

Giving encouragement to planners who may be considering a golf outing at this Florida resort, Sky is definitive: "Go for it!" Some planners shy away from golf, thinking it is only for talented players, but it's just a small group experience in a beautiful destination — one that brings people together. Innisbrook celebrates the rich history of golf and the courses offer players of every level a chance to be a small part of that history. So, whether a group has avid golfers or participants only interested in playing in a scramble for fun, Sky deems the resort as one that offers something for players of every level.

## Sea Island Resort

Another beckoning southeastern golf getaway is Sea Island, a private, coastal Georgia resort isle and legendary host known for its genial service and genuine hospitality — it is the only U.S. resort to host a G-8 Summit of world leaders. Home to four Forbes Five-Star experiences — accommodations including The Cloister (a 209-room Mediterranean masterpiece) and The Lodge (an intimate, fairway-surrounded 48-room hotel reminiscent of an English manor), The Spa (a 65,000-sf haven of pampering) and the Georgian Room (a restaurant known for its carved stone mantel, hand-painted china and refined Southern cuisine) — its three golf courses are equally impressive.

Originally created in 1929 and redesigned by Tom Fazio in 1999, the Seaside course is complemented by two additional courses, the Retreat (a course redesigned in 2001 by Davis Love III and his brother, Mark) and the Plantation (a course being completely redesigned by Love Golf Design and expected to open in the fall). The early 2019 renovation of the Golf Performance Center includes an all-new 17,000-sf, state-of-the-art center featuring such facilities as six instruction and club-fitting bays and a putting studio designed by Sea Island's director of putting instruction, Phil Kenyon, an internationally-recognized golfing specialist. Among the destination's off-the-links options are 5 miles of private beach, a 16-court



The Loews Ventana Canyon Resort is popular among planners who include golf in their events because of its championship-quality courses designed by Tom Fazio.

tennis center, a beach club, yacht club and shooting school.

Sea Island Resort's sister property, The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, has an equally impressive array of awards, from having the distinction of being the longest-running Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five-Diamond designated resort to hosting innumerable national and international golf tournaments. Its history is rich as this is where Jack Nicklaus won his first major title, the 1959 U.S. Amateur. This history is displayed in the recently refreshed Golf Club's Heritage Hall, which guides guests and golf members through 100 years of the sport's history through photos and displays. Though noted for championship courses designed by elites Donald Ross and Robert Trent Jones Sr., non-golfing attendees also have options: menu planning with a Broadmoor chef, a pickleball round robin, stair climbing at Seven Falls, fly fishing classes and falconry. Set on 5,000 acres (including its Wilderness Experience properties), there's the additional accompaniment of 185,000 sf of meeting space, three swimming pools (one outdoor, one indoor and one heated lap pool) and 20 restaurants, cafes and lounges.

## Loews Ventana Canyon Resort

Selecting Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson, Arizona, as site of a January 7-10, 2019, sales meeting of approximately 75 representing MindPlay — a developer of educational

software created to teach children and adults how to read (with a special focus on children with dyslexia) — Nora Quintero explains her company's reasoning. Citing the main factor as staying within budget, while still being able to provide guests with a beautiful resort, Quintero elaborates. "We picked this resort because of location, price, golf course and the quality of the food. We felt Loews Ventana Canyon provided a great meeting location and appreciated the staff's attention to detail, with one of the most important deciding factors the room accommodations, as other resorts seemed in need of room renovations."

The resort recently completed a soft goods renovation at its signature restaurant, the Flying V Bar & Grill, this year will see a renovation of the Kiva ballroom and on the golfing front there's a new fleet of golf carts, as well as a planned clubhouse redo in 2019. There's also news on the food scene with the innovative culinary concept, Flavor by Loews Hotels. Built on partnerships with local artisan food and beverage vendors, this resort's Flavor affiliations are the Tucson Tamale Company, Barrio Bread and the Dragoon Brewing Company.

In addition to 36 holes of Tom Fazio designed championship golf, the resort's made-in-Arizona group activities include the on-property, half mile Window Walk nature trail, koi pond, certified butterfly garden and stargazing. Giving a special shout-out to the resort's vistas, Quintero says: "The views



Credit: Sea Island

Sea Island Resort in southeastern Georgia, is about an hours drive north of Jacksonville, FL. It offers a Forbes five-star spa and championship golf courses.



“Returning to Westin La Paloma has definitely been a motivator for those who look forward to it each year and want to attend.”

Kari Willis, President & Co-Founder  
E Factor, Tustin, CA



of the Santa Catalina Mountains from the golf course, restaurants and rooms were breathtaking. Our guests from the East Coast couldn't say enough about the Sonoran Desert landscape."

### The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa

Sharing an affinity for Tucson is Kari Willis, president and co-founder of E Factor, a company designed to give clients, consumers and guests an "experience" they won't forget — thus the "E" factor.

Additional perks to the planner were multiple on-property locations and the ability to walk to the golf course from the resort.

"The conditions of the course, the climate and the resort all on one property make this a premier event and golfing location," Willis says. She deems Westin La Paloma "A hidden gem for corporate retreats and conferences."

Here's the scoop on the resort's golf. Featuring 27 holes of Jack Nicklas Signature golf, the Golden Bear originally

with such amenities as a newly created social putting experience — located adjacent to the patio bar and grill — it overlooks the course and a spectacular mountain backdrop. In addition to everything golf are the resort's 10 tennis courts, access to eight F&B venues, a state-of-the-art fitness center including a junior Olympic-sized swimming pool, a five-pool aquatic playground with a waterslide and mineral spa and The Red Door salon and spa by Elizabeth Arden.

"The group also enjoyed at-the-pool interaction, evening dinners, s'mores and more," Willis says.

She shares that between the pool's water misters, swim-up bar and food and drink, all served up a prime-time environment for a casual afternoon networking session. The resort's F&B offerings included a barbecue-themed dinner with dinner coming right off the grill directly in front of the attendees, a Mexican Fiesta with custom margaritas and an interactive make-your-own-s'mores night.

"We are a repeat customer with this event at this venue," Willis says. "Returning to Westin La Paloma has definitely been a motivator for those who look forward to it each year and want to attend. As a firm that travels all over the U.S. doing golf tournaments, this location is top notch — the staff is professional and the courses are beautiful."

Willis' tips for summer months: Be sure and secure your group with an early tee time and ensure that a lot of water stations are provided, in addition to cooling towels (which can also make great branded gifts).

Final words: "Details matter! Know your attendees and be sure your tournament speaks to them. If networking is a key component, be mindful of this with your pairings and make certain they go directly into networking time following the tournament," Willis says.

"If there will be vendors set up on the holes, be strategic with the number of these purveyors and their placement so as not to slow the pace of play. Try something new each tournament. And if you want something, ask for it. You won't get a 'Yes' or a 'No' if you don't ask." **C&IT**



Kari Willis, president and co-founder of E Factor, likes the golf options at The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa for her clients.

Having picked Tucson's The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa as site of a networking event for 100 C-Suite executives in June 2017 and 2018, Willis explains her choice. "This location is unique in that you get a five-star-resort experience and amazing golf, all in one location."

In her search, she sought specifics: An exclusive resort with more than 18 holes (Westin La Paloma has 27) — allowing attendees to play a different combination of holes over the two days.

designed it more than 30 years ago. *Golf Digest* calls it one of the country's "Top 75 Resort Courses" and *Golf Magazine* awarded it a silver medal. Following a \$3 million renovation, its La Paloma Country Club facility reopened in December



Tracy T

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## Extraordinary Incentives

Planners Are Giving Event Participants Activities Suited To Individual Tastes



Everyone has a different idea of a fun time, so what does a planner do with hundreds of people at an event? The answer: Do team-building exercises on the beach, surprise participants with a visit from burros at a nature/outdoors venue or take them tubing or zip lining.



Credit: Red Velvet Events, Inc.



Like everything in the meeting and events arena, incentive travel has transformed to meet the changing demands of the market. Twenty years ago, incentives were all about golf and spa, caviar and champagne toasts. Today, you'll find zip lining, corporate social responsibility activities, artisan mixologists and custom juice bars.

By Maura Keller

"Clients are looking for new destinations, unique experiences and program content that resonates with their participants," says Mindy Hanzlik, MBA, senior

solution designer at BCD Meetings & Events. "Many clients have changing demographics and motivators in their incentive audiences, and as a result they are reassessing what a desirable reward looks like."

As Hanzlik explains, modern incentive programs consider the personas with whom they are trying to connect, and build the incentive campaign and reward around them.

"Communications and promotional materials are delivered in the format and style the audience prefers, destinations

reflect their interests and 'bucket list' perceptions, and every element of the program — from check-in processes to room gifts to activities and evening functions — are designed to their tastes," Hanzlik says.

Jeff O'Hara, CMP, DMCP, corporate meeting planner and president of PRA New Orleans, says everybody within the incentive, meeting, and events industry knows the current buzzword is "experiential."

"With that said, what 'experiential' means is different to everyone, especially

program participants," O'Hara says. "A good planner will have dug into what will hit home for program participants and leave them feeling that they are truly special."

Within the incentive travel industry, O'Hara says things such as group tours are definitely on the wane, with the exception of international groups whose participants are not as familiar with the area.

"But these, too, generally have some destination immersion experiences and then more free time or individually customized experiences," O'Hara says. "You will notice that I use the word 'participants' rather than 'attendees.' The goal is to make people a participant in the destination rather than someone observing the destination. That is key to what people are looking for."

Over the past decade, president and event strategist of Red Velvet Events, Cindy Y. Lo, DMCP, has noticed a significant increase in true local experiences versus tourist destinations as part of incentive travel programs.

"If you were to come to Austin, and the participants are mostly entrepreneurs, we would organize a dinner with a successful Austin entrepreneur in their personal home so the group of visiting entrepreneurs can get that true local Austin welcome," Lo says. "And let's say the incentive trip is to a Caribbean island that was recently affected by the hurricanes, we would organize a half day where the participants get to meet the locals that were negatively affected by the hurricane and then spend the rest of the time rebuilding parts of the local community. The key is participants want to leave feeling refreshed and feeling like they are a better person after their incentive trip, so why not combine the best of both worlds?"

It's also important to note that today, incentive participants are more experienced, savvy travelers than in the past. As Caytie Pohlen-LaClare, meeting planner and founder of the LaClare Group, Inc. explains, there is usually more unscheduled time to allow the



Mindy Hanzlik, MBA, Senior Solution Designer  
BCD Meetings & Events, Chicago, IL

"Communications and promotional materials are delivered in the format and style the audience prefers, destinations reflect their interests and 'bucket list' perceptions, and every element of the program — from check-in processes to room gifts to activities and evening functions — are designed to their tastes."

participants to relax, spend time with their travel partner, and pursue their individual interests.

"Both planners and participants are looking for destinations that are safe, a hotel that is upscale, and a variety of recreation and dining options on property," Pohlen-LaClare says.

So what makes an incentive travel experience truly extraordinary? Quite simply, it should be one that leaves participants feeling they have experienced something they could have never created on their own, and that they feel truly rewarded for earning the incentive.

Hanzlik says extraordinary experiences should feel like they are built specifically for each individual participant.

"They are filled with unexpected moments of joy and unique, memorable experiences that give participants stories to tell," Hanzlik says. "They bring the destination to life and give participants a chance to authentically connect with the world around them."

Good incentives also help participants do things they might not be able to do on their own, or that they might not realize they wanted to do at all. They open a world of possibilities, make participants feel appreciated, and build loyalty to the host company and drive future performance.

"There are several attributes that can result in an extraordinary incentive travel experience," says Terrie Rickard, meeting planner and director of operations at ADI Meetings. "These include authenticity and creating a unique experience. Also it's important to find that magical blend of the company culture and the purpose of the event with a distinctive sense of the destination. And you must customize opportunities for participants to experience the most unbelievable 'bucket-list' moments that will give them new bragging rights after that trip."

At a recent 'winter wonderland' incentive trip to Lake Louise, Alberta, Canada, Rickard purchased exclusive



A major goal for planners is to find an activity or two that participants wouldn't do on their own or hadn't thought about doing. The effect is to make them feel they've truly earned the incentive, planners say.

Credit: ADI Meetings & Events



use of a snow-tubing mountain for the first day of an incentive program.

"This built immediate camaraderie, acclimated those less apt to travel to winter destinations, and it was great fun for those who normally don't partake in active winter sports like skiing, snowshoeing or snowmobiling," Rickard says.

Lo recently orchestrated an incentive trip for a company that started with the pre-promote. When the destination was revealed, officials threw a party at the company office for everyone and then they made a special recognition during the party for those who qualified, so the participants got an early taste of what to expect.

"Beginning seven days before departure, each day the employees arrived at the office for another teaser leading up to the departure," Lo says. "When they arrived at the island, each of them was welcomed as if they were the only important guests at the hotel. One evening was a special dress-up themed evening and instead of the participants having to worry about packing extra clothes, part of the preparation included getting into the theme at a 'dress up bar.' These special touches continued throughout the four-day reward trip."

Pohlen-LaClare says "experience" is the key word when it comes to incentive travel.

"Many travelers today want to step into the full, immersive experience of the destination," Pohlen-LaClare says.



**"You will notice that I use the word 'participants' rather than 'attendees.' The goal is to make people a participant in the destination rather than someone observing the destination. That is key to what people are looking for."**

**Jeff O'Hara, CMP, DMCP, Corporate Meeting Planner and President PRA New Orleans, New Orleans, LA**

"They want to feel like a local, not just an outside observer. Of course, the specifics will vary based on the participants. For some people, it may be gourmet dining at a private location, for others it may be visiting a hidden spot only known to the locals. The key is knowing your audience and what will appeal to them, and then creatively making it happen."

### Steps to Take

Meeting and event planners can utilize some key strategies to make an incentive experience something that goes above and beyond what participants expected. To do so, the key is to understand the group and research what will be a hit for them.

"We hear every day that the event has to be a once-in-a-lifetime, money-can't-buy experience," O'Hara says. "But of course every budget can't support a money-can't-buy approach, so instead of talking in platitudes, research the group, understand what their baseline of experiences are, and work with your local partners to create something that the participants won't expect and that they will find value in."

Indeed, research shows people are significantly more likely to remember

things they did not expect than things they did expect, regardless of how high quality the expected event was.

"Providing the unexpected is a key to people remembering and cherishing the experience," O'Hara says. "Unexpected does not have to equal expensive."

Pohlen-LaClare suggests five steps for planners:

- Work with top management to identify the "big goal" or the "why" of the incentive.
- Get feedback from past participants.
- Understand what has been done before, including the destination, hotels and activities.
- Utilize the local experts — they can provide valuable insights and access to hidden treasures and advice on what to avoid.
- Be brave. A planner must be willing to go above and beyond for the incentive experience to be above and beyond participants' expectations.

"With participants spanning several generations, diverse cultures and the expectation of personalization the norm, planners must create once-in-a-lifetime experiences that leave their participants informed, inspired and

ultimately ready to build on business objectives," Rickard says.

Some key areas on which Rickard says meeting planners need to focus include:

- Place — Discover unique locales and authentic experiences to draw participants into local culture and engage with the community.
- Unity — Customize group activities to build better relationships between customers, employees and management.
- Exclusivity — Arrange complete buy-outs of venues and hotels to maximize participant experience.
- Individuality — Tailor experiences to individual physical adventure levels and cultural interests.

Brent Turner, meeting planner and senior vice president of strategy at Cramer, says the company recently partnered with a Fortune 500 insurance company on their large-scale tri-annual incentive conference. This weeklong event started with the basics: a beautiful, premium location filled with high-quality activities, food, drink, and entertainment.

To elevate the participants' experience while connecting the conference to business objectives, the Cramer team added in three notable changes including:

- An Innovation Zone. Through a hands-on, self-directed journey, the participants got to see, make, and experience the business' historical accomplishments, current R&D, and external "new-to-them" innovations that will change their business, jobs, and lives.
  - Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Through self-selected activities, participants volunteered to give back to local and global communities in ways that aligned to the business' core CSR focus.
  - Unique technology. By deploying Klik's wearable technologies, participants could seamlessly network, pay, and — through heat maps of places across the expansive property — quickly find their friends and the most popular activities.
- Turner is seeing an increased focus



New Orleans is a popular destination for groups of all sizes. Participants can find plenty to do and the city often hosts large gatherings.

and investment in five key areas for incentive travel:

- Unique stories. From local history to local activities to local community engagement, how can our participants find, learn, volunteer, do, and leave with an only-at-this-one-place story?
- Original design. From announcements and invitations to unexpected swag

to experiential learning, how can we give back to and recharge the participants' whole selves?

"With workforces more digital, diverse and distributed than ever, it is also harder than ever to build unique, retentive, high-performing cultures," Turner says.

The day-to-day workforce is losing the classic pillars of culture building such as



**"Many travelers today want to step into the full, immersive experience of the destination. They want to feel like a local, not just an outside observer."**

**Caytie Pohlen-LaClare, President/Owner The LaClare Group, Inc., Minnetonka, MN**

to onsite materials, how can design elevate the ephemeral prestige of this incentive trip?

- Smart technology. From streamlining communications to gamifying their onsite experience, how can modern event technologies remove friction and add joy to the participants' journey?
- Brand alignment. From CSR to aligning brand values, how can the participants' experience be rooted in the purpose and passions of their employer's brand?
- Wellness inclusion. From the expected mental and physical health retreats

storytelling around water cooler 'campfires,' modeling behaviors through in-hallway interactions, showcasing with on-message office space design, and more. This classic culture of building pillars still exists when employees attend events. And this realization has led to progressive and modern businesses now seeing incentive travel as a platform for culture building and ambassador training."

### Evaluating the Results

Incentive travel programs have become a more tactical component in a company's strategy for employee or customer recognition, reward and retention



Unique locales or destinations go a long way to making participants feel special.



Credit: BCD Meetings & Events



strategies. Rickard explains that planners and participants are looking for impact — namely how are these incentive travel programs providing an impact on participant performance and engaging them in company brand messaging and strategic objectives.

Hanzlik explains that tangible incentive results vary by program. They're tied to the business objectives and behaviors that the host outlines up front in their qualifying period.

"It may mean increased sales or revenue. It may mean customer or brand loyalty or employee engagement. It may be tied to the overall satisfaction of the participant," Hanzlik says. "Event success can be measured in return on investment, return on objectives or return on engagement. To effectively gauge the success of an incentive, planners must first work with their customer to understand what results they're targeting, and then build out a plan for measuring these key metrics."

While extraordinary incentive trips should also offer tangible results to all the parties involved, that is often easier said than done.

O'Hara explains that measuring ROI seems to be a tricky target for a lot of companies. Everybody knows it is important, but not everybody does a good job of determining how to measure it and how to document it.

"That is understandable because there are a lot of subjective factors involved, but setting some goals for each incentive program and communicating them to everyone involved is key," O'Hara says.

There are several ways to measure the success of an incentive:

- Financial return on investment. Did the employees or customers produce more profit for the company as a result of the incentive program relative to what the program cost?
- Engagement return on incentive. Are the employees or customers more engaged with the company as a result of the incentive program?
- Relationship return on incentive. This



Events in which participants can take part make an impression. In fact, planners say they use surprise events to ensure participants have a more memorable and enjoyable experience.

is harder to measure but takes into account the quality time your employees or customers spend with the key leadership of the company during the incentive program.

As a planner, Lo always likes to see which individual is a repeat qualifier year after year. For these special people, Lo likes to suggest giving them extra special recognition as it's not easy to qualify and you want to make the incentive trip

surveys are nice, the feedback often tends to be, 'I didn't like the chicken' or 'My hotel bed wasn't great.' More telling insights that should be gathered are things such as the percentage of eligible people that declined the trip, the percentage of repeat qualifiers, and whether you can or should raise the bar on qualification for next year.

According to Turner, while measuring culture is still an evolving field of study,



**"Altogether, the best-defined and produced incentive travel programs drive value for the business — retention, motivation and culture — while truly standing out as unique, memorable experiences for the employees."**

**Brent Turner, SVP, Strategy and Technology**  
Cramer, Norwood, MA

coveted by the entire team versus not being automatic.

"There should be higher performance post-trip by the participants and higher loyalty, which should in turn reduce turnover," Lo says. "Overall, the biggest benefit should be that the company culture should be positively reinforced after a trip like this. Remember, people quit over bad managers and a toxic company culture. A well-planned incentive trip should reinforce the positives and help the team bond as a company, especially across departments."

And O'Hara says while post event

planners can partner with their human resources and internal communication colleagues to uncover the impact of incentive travel through litmus measurements (e.g., employee net promoter scores (eNPS)) and employee involvement (e.g., increase in job applications via employee referrals).

"Altogether, the best-defined and produced incentive travel programs drive value for the business — retention, motivation, and culture — while truly standing out as unique, memorable experiences for the employees," Turner says. "When done well, it's a win-win." **C&IT**



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## Lasting Impressions

Whether an attendee, vendor or planner, all sides appreciate unforgettable service

By Derek Reveron

Everyone involved in planning and attending a meeting benefits from memorable service that wows attendees.

Attendees benefit because they leave the meeting with memorable stories to share with friends in person and via social media. Vendors and suppliers benefit because they gain more business from planners and a reputation for delivering excellence. Planners benefit because the repeated stories about unforgettable service boost their professional "brand."

Indeed, providing memorable service for attendees is the lifeblood of the planning business.

### Good Service Creates Trust

According to Heidi Foels, producer for metroConnections, a Bloomington, MN-based conferences and event services company, "Memorable services are vital when working in a fast-paced industry such as ours. We are often planning six or seven programs at once, which can take valuable time if we're researching new vendors every time."

Foels notes that, most often, planners



Puppies are a sure-fire way to help attendees remember an event.

Credit: Red Velvet Events, Inc.

reach out to suppliers and vendors they can trust to provide outstanding service.

"We want the ones we can trust will do the job to our standards; the ones that we consider true partners," says Foels.

"Memorable services result from partnerships, which makes planning fun and less stressful," she adds. "Attendees benefit from these partnerships solely in the fact that we look like one well-oiled machine."

Trusted suppliers enable planners to spend more time on providing memorable service.

"Planners can tackle additional items on our to-do lists when we can trust a vendor to get the job done in the terms specified and with impeccable service,"

Foels said. "I can't count the number of times I've had to babysit or micro-manage a vendor to ensure expectations are met."

According to Cindy Y. Lo, DMCP, president and event strategist of Austin, TX-based Red Velvet Events, "Providing memorable service is incredibly important because attendees have lots of options, so it's important to sell the meeting or conference as a differentiator and continue to inspire and wow them. In return, I would also expect that attendees can help communicate via word of mouth what you've done and build a positive cycle."

A seller's market for hotels, more service charges by the properties and tight

planning budgets have all increased pressure on planners to provide memorable services for attendees.

"One of the biggest challenges is clients' budgets," says Donna McGovern consultant at New York City-based, Events & Lifestyle Management. "The budgets don't always support hotels that can provide the best service."

Lo says issues related to meeting budgets and exceptional service will persist.

"This will never go away in my humble opinion," says Lo. "Everything has gone up in price just because of inflation. And the more unique an experience is, generally the more dollars it requires."

Lo challenges her team to not take "No" for the first answer when trying to negotiate top service on a tight budget.

"If the concept is strong, we need to do our best to secure those types of experiences that appeal to the audience and to execute it to the 'Nth' degree," says Lo.

In addition, social media raises expectations for customer service because planners can compare offerings by hotels, vendors and suppliers faster and more thoroughly.

### Emergencies Handled

Meanwhile, planners are rethinking how they view service, according to Convene's 2017 Global Meetings Research Report.

"As working styles evolve, planners are thinking about their needs in terms of service rather than space," Lo says.

Planners expect excellent service from properties ranging from small independent hotels to swanky resorts. And properties say they are doing more than ever to provide service that wows planners and stands out from competitors.

However, the quality of hotel services can vary, even among five-star properties. It's possible to book the same five-star brand in two different cities and experience important differences in service.



"Memorable services result from partnerships, which makes planning fun and less stressful. Attendees benefit from these partnerships solely in the fact that we look like one well-oiled machine."

**Heidi Foels**, Producer  
metroConnections, Bloomington, MN

Variation in service makes it easier for truly exceptional service to stand out.

Kate Stockton, CMP, president of Philadelphia, PA-based Stockton & Partners Meetings and Events, offers an example of a supplier who became a long-term partner after coming through in an emergency.

Here's what happened:

A company's annual award dinner featured a national touring band and a problem surfaced before show time.

"After running through the list of audio equipment with the house AV, we realized at set-up that we didn't have the correct microphones. The house AV could not find the right microphones."

Stockton called a local AV vendor with whom she was familiar.

"He dropped everything, put the correct microphones in his car and drove them over before the band got to rehearsal," says Stockton. "Since then, this company has become our go-to for production."

Stockton cites another incidence involving last-minute help from a vendor that resulted in a long-term relationship.

"Our meeting client decided to add a vendor exhibit just two weeks before the event," says Stockton. "We were using an historic hotel with no exhibit area, limited large space and no loading dock. Since we had no more space at the hotel and other local venues were booked, we moved forward with a large tent."

The hotel worked with local authorities to get an expedited permit for the large tent and a storage and moving system to handle materials shipped at the last minute.

According to Stockton, "The hotel added staff to manage the receipt and re-shipping of hundreds of pallets of materials. Their willingness to work outside of the box to make the exhibit area come to life secured our appreciation as well as our client's business for the next two years."

Sometimes memorable service results from teamwork during a sudden on-site emergency. That's what happened during a corporate evening at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, says Amberlee Huggins, president of Falls Church, VA-based CSI DMC.

The only two elevators in the building stopped working just before dinner was served.

"We had 400 people to feed a three-course meal to before the entertainment performed," says Huggins. The primary kitchen at the Library of Congress is in the basement and the event was on the top floor."

Everyone pitched in to get dinner to attendees on time, including the catering company, florist, DMC, lighting vendor, waiters and two mime entertainers. "We acted as a 'chain gang' along the



"One of the biggest challenges is clients' budgets. The budgets don't always support hotels that can provide the best service."

**Donna McGovern**  
Consultant  
Events & Lifestyle Management  
New York, NY



**“Providing memorable service is incredibly important because attendees have lots of options . . . In return, I would also expect that attendees can help communicate via word of mouth what you’ve done and build a positive cycle.”**

**Cindy Y. Lo, DMCP**, President & Event Strategist  
Red Velvet Events, Inc., Austin, TX



stairs, working together to get meals from the basement to the top floor so waiters could serve guests as expected.”

The ad hoc team performed seamlessly. “Attendees never knew what happened,” says Huggins. “The service was phenomenal, and our client was delighted.”

### Relationships Matter

Foels cites an example of memorable service that resulted from what she describes as a “perfect” relationship with a vendor.

“One of the best service experiences I had this year was working on a program with one of our partners,” says Foels. “Our team quickly realized this partnership was ideal for the opportunity to partner.”

“We got a request for a large production and exhibit area for 1,000 attendees in a shared space,” Foels continues. “Our partner was known for its exhibit build-outs while we provide production expertise.”

Foels and her team created a special environment for the exhibit area.

**“[The vendor’s] willingness to work outside of the box to make the exhibit area come to life secured our appreciation as well as our client’s business for the next two years.”**



**Kate Stockton, CMP**  
President  
Stockton & Partners Meetings and Events  
Haverford, PA

“We needed to ensure that our spaces complemented one another in branding, design, look and feel,” says Foels. “Weekly meetings with our vendor aligned visions, and a shared workspace all played major factors in achieving success. There was a ton of collaboration and trust that went into this project.”

Having a dedicated vendor as a partner made the event memorable.

“Attendees on-site referred to us as one team; one company,” says Foels. “This is the ultimate goal with any partnership.”

Planners agree that memorable service need not be expensive, over-the-top efforts. Small things that take little time and effort can leave a lasting impression.

According to Huggins, “Sometimes it’s as simple as adding a concierge level of care at an activities desk or walking attendees to their designated area. Regardless of the added touch, memorable services should be designed so that people talk about them.”

McGovern offers this example: “I was doing a site inspection for a client meeting in Amsterdam and stayed at five different luxury hotels,” says McGovern. “I had filled out a ‘Getting To Know You’ form for the company helping me source the meeting.”

The form was sent to all five hotels. One of the form’s questions was “Do you like coffee or tea?” McGovern’s reply was “Both, but I’m secretly addicted to blueberry coffee.”

The five hotels included the five-star Conservatorium Hotel, which read the information on the form

and incorporated it into McGovern’s stay.

“For example, I had gone to the spa and when I returned to my room, a blueberry coffee protein shake was waiting for me in my room with a note,” says McGovern. “This small gesture and attention to detail made me feel special and at home while traveling for business.”

“It is the little things that make a big difference,” McGovern adds. “The Conservatorium was so attentive that it became the only choice.”

Lo offers other examples of small but memorable gestures she offers planners.

“If we know the planner recently had a child, we’ll actually make sure to give them something useful during their site visit that they can bring back home for their child,” says Lo.

Another exceptional gesture involves chocolate. “If we know they love chocolate, we’ll make sure that all of the places we will be doing business with are made aware in case they want to customize their welcome gift,” says Lo. “The more you can build on that authentic relationship, the better communication there is, and everyone is more eager to work together regarding service.”

Other examples include an instance where a hotel staffer volunteers to drive to a restaurant to retrieve a purse a woman left behind, and an attendee calls about a problem with the hot water or television just before leaving the guest room. When the attendee returns, the problem is fixed and there is a handwritten note from the hotel staffer apologizing for the inconvenience.

### Great Service, Great Event

One of the biggest benefits of providing memorable service is its impact on helping planners achieve meeting goals, including content retention.

According to Huggins, “Memorable services, coupled with great content, are the cornerstone of great meetings. The content of the program may be excellent, however if attendees have bad service experiences, it can

distract them from engaging fully in the meeting content.”

Huggins adds that the goals of many meetings today include providing a sense of engagement beyond content retention, and memorable service can help provide that.

“Everyone wants to feel looked after and great services create the bridge between an ordinary happening and an exceptional experience,” says Huggins.

All planners have experienced memorable service at properties and think it should be the rule not the exception. To improve the chances of obtaining exceptional service, planners should screen properties and other suppliers to ensure they do the following:

- Anticipate the needs of attendees and planners rather than having to be asked.
- Cater to the uniqueness of meetings and don’t provide off-the-shelf, cookie-cutter service planners can get anywhere. According to Lo, “Anytime our team customizes an experience or welcome amenity to the individual versus a generic experience or gift, we get way more positive feedback and often times a lifelong client because of our thoughtfulness.”
- Provide top-shelf service in every area, including fast and quality RFP responses, responsiveness to on-site needs, food and beverage, communication, site visits, and providing enough support staff. (About 17 percent of planners think venues usually don’t provide enough support staff for events, according to the 2017 Convene report.)
- Offer efficient, attentive, timely, friendly and patient service.
- Ask for references when screening properties on how they have handled requests for tailored, over-the-top service for comparable meetings.

Establishing a good relationship with hotels goes a long way toward getting service with that extra touch.

According to Huggins, “As a DMC professional that works closely with hoteliers it’s important to connect and ask about the challenges hotels have during peak periods so that you can better plan and prepare together. I have seen hotels across the USA in both seller’s and buyer’s markets, and no matter how busy hoteliers are, they are hospitality professionals.”

“Yet they are also human — and we all like to work with and for people we like, so be reasonable, flexible and look for ways to work together in a collaborative way towards a successful outcome,” Huggins says. “They talk about you, just as you talk about them, and that news travels like wildfire in the hospitality industry.”

Obtaining top-notch service from hotels and other suppliers requires planners to screen for practices that lead to delivering excellence.



**Amberlee Huggins**, President  
CSI DMC, Falls Church, VA

Lo says planners should seek suppliers who show dedication to providing value and help planners achieve meeting goals.

“They listen to what the client really wants to achieve both from a business goal and design perspective,” says Lo. “The larger the program, the more important it is to really hear out what the client’s end goals are because if it’s possible to make a planner look like a rock star, they will want you to return for repeat business.”

Lo adds that planners are often frustrated because they say many suppliers don’t listen to their requests and push their own unattractive ideas.

“I always remind our team that we are only as good as our last event,” says Lo.



Planners often use themed décor during an event to help leave an indelible memory for attendees.

### Communication Is Key

In addition, Lo reminds her team that memorable service can’t happen without good communication between planners and their partners.

“Always over-communicate,” says Lo. “I always try to coach our team that usually when something goes wrong, it’s because we made an assumption ver-

**“Sometimes it’s as simple as adding a concierge level of care at an activities desk or walking attendees to their designated area. Regardless of the added touch, memorable services should be designed so that people talk about them.”**

sus over-communicating and clarifying anything that might lead to confusion. This may mean additional phone calls and emails, but when both parties are on the same page, service and other things always go much smoother.”

Attendees can receive competent, average service, have a good time and think a meeting is successful. But truly memorable service adds an indelible memory that can make attendees smile every time they think about a meeting experience and relate it to others.

As Huggins puts it, “Service often drives the sense of connection to the experience. Memorable services provide the framework for how people engage mentally and emotionally to the event/meeting before it even starts.” **C&IT**



## Destination

# Arizona A DESTINATION IN THE DESERT

Tucson and Scottsdale Blend the Best of Native American, Mexican and Western Cultures

By Maura Keller

Nestled between four mountain ranges, Tucson is the second-largest city in Arizona. Its temperate climate, stunning vistas, and year-round outdoor lifestyle make it an ideal meeting and event destination. Likewise, Scottsdale offers unprecedented beauty and amenities aplenty. Just ask Jill Philippe, national account executive for Kuoni Destination Management. The company recently hosted its annual leadership meeting at the Sanctuary Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa in Scottsdale, where 50 top executives networked, celebrated the successes of the year, and brainstormed future strategies.

**"Our attendees had the opportunity to learn and buy from local artisans, including a Native-American sand painter from the Navajo Nation Reservation and a Hopi silversmith/jewelry maker."**

**Jill Philippe**, National Account Executive  
Kuoni Destination Management  
New York, NY



### A Unique Experience

"The event embraced Scottsdale's southwestern influence with unique designs and a memorable cultural program that blended the Native-American, Mexican, and Western cultures," Philippe says. "Our attendees had the opportunity to learn and buy from local artisans, including a Native-American sand painter from the Navajo Nation Reservation and a Hopi silversmith/jewelry maker."

If Mother Nature is a source of inspiration for meetings and events, then look no further than Sanctuary. Terraced high on one of Arizona's best-known landmarks, Camelback Mountain, the resort features compelling views of Paradise Valley from every vantage point. Offering 9,000-sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and catering space, Sanctuary provides the ideal venue for small groups, business professionals and associations seeking an exceptional attention to detail to ensure a productive, focused and well-orchestrated meeting.

"Spending time outdoors is a lifestyle that is enjoyed all

year in Scottsdale," Philippe says. With over 300 days of sunshine in Arizona each year, meeting professionals can take advantage of the variety of outdoor meeting and event spaces offered at Sanctuary, which includes two lawns and a garden terrace, totaling 5,500 additional sf. Along with the inviting weather, the greater Scottsdale area is home to world-class shopping, museums and professional sports, all just a 20-minute drive from Sanctuary.

Tracy Stuckrath, president and chief connecting officer at thrive! meetings & events, also recently hosted several events in Tucson, including a national franchise conference, an international senior management conference and a national sales/operations meeting.

### Tucson Has It All

"For meeting planners, Tucson is great because it is small, yet also a large vibrant city," Stuckrath says. "The hotel options give a variety of options to choose from to fit the groups. Downtown Tucson has a lot of great options



Credit: Loews Ventana Canyon Resort

Loews Ventana Canyon Resort offers attendees quick access to some of the best outdoor activities in Tucson, including the resort's Window Walk nature trail and access to the Ventana Trail and Sabino Canyon for hiking to the 80-foot natural waterfall.



**“Tucson’s natural landscape is not only beautiful, it invites [attendees] to partake in its magnificence through a variety of outdoor activities — hiking, cycling, horseback riding, rock climbing, and astronomy.”**

**Tracy Stuckrath**, CSEP, CMM, CFPM, CHC  
President & Chief Connecting Officer  
thrive! meetings & events  
New Bern, NC

for dining and the outdoor activities are endless. It affords the opportunity as well to have programs outside after a long day of meetings inside. For attendees, Tucson’s natural landscape is not only beautiful, it invites them to partake in its magnificence through a variety of outdoor activities — hiking, cycling, horseback riding, rock climbing, and astronomy.”

And food enthusiasts will revel in Tucson’s many offerings as the city is the first in the U.S. to be designated a City of Gastronomy by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), making it a true foodie destination.

“We held all of our events on-site,” Stuckrath says. “I did tour the Pima Air & Space Museum, which is a fantastic venue to host an off-property event. The outside facilities at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson also have venues that make it feel you are off-property, but are still on property.”

Located on 100 acres in the Sonoran Desert, the

398-guest room Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson is a warm weather, nature lover’s paradise that offers a little something for everyone. From the resort’s beautiful Window Walk nature trail and quick access to Ventana Trail and Sabino Canyon for hiking to the 80-foot natural waterfall, 36 holes of Tom Fazio golf and award-winning Lakeside Spa, meeting attendees can experience relaxation and adventure all in one place.

Brenda Klink, executive assistant and meeting planner with Broan, orchestrated a national sales meeting for about 120 people at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort. “The Tucson area is beautiful, the weather is sunny and amazing. There is great food everywhere and something for everyone — from hiking, to golf, to museums, to craft beers,” Klink says. “And the people are friendly and welcoming everywhere you go.”

Klink found that Loews Ventana Canyon Resort offers a great amount of meeting space with more than adequate space for any kind of event or display. “It also offers unparalleled, and professional support from every staff member,” Klink says. “They work with planners to get to really know their group, needs and expectations. Also, the resort is tucked away in the foothills, but still with plenty of things to do. It’s easy to keep your group together and happy.”

### Stunning Accommodations

When planning a meeting or event at any resort, meeting planners’ attention is often focused on the type of accommodations available for attendees of all levels — from C-Suite executives to keynote speakers to team members who want to work a little and play a little.

Eight villas at Sanctuary Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa are available to VIPs and executives who crave privacy or want to host smaller events and meetings. These



Attendees enjoy the 2018 Tour & Travel Exchange sponsored by Kartagener Associates Inc. in Tucson at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort. They plan to return in 2020.

multimillion-dollar homes feature exceptional décor, extensive patios, swimming pools and sweeping views of the desert landscape.

Also, Sanctuary’s intimate size reinforces privacy for each meeting group, with close proximity to guest casitas and facilities, including the acclaimed Sanctuary Spa, which offers group wellness programs designed to rejuvenate and

alternates between Tucson and Scottsdale.

For Kartagener, Tucson offers great weather and venues that ensure he keeps delegates in-house throughout the show, which maximizes the networking opportunities for all delegates.

“Major destinations offer far too many distractions, which do not allow us to ensure our delegates are interacting with

inspire. For active groups, a vast infinity-edge pool, tennis compound, hiking and biking trails and fitness center are available along with golf privileges at Phoenix/Scottsdale’s most renowned courses. Sanctuary Spa underwent a top-to-bottom renovation and expansion in April 2018, introducing a fresh new look throughout and a brand new feature, the Women’s Quiet Room.

### Affordable Amenities

Henry Kartagener, meeting planner and founder of Kartagener Associates Inc., operates a travel trade show, Tour & Travel Exchange, every year in Arizona. He brings together 50 tour operators based in the United States and Canada with 50 suppliers from Asia, Africa, South America and the Middle East. The show



Sanctuary Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa in Scottsdale offers beautiful vistas of the desert landscape offered by Camelback Mountain. Planners like the resort for its small size, which offers attendees privacy. The Sanctuary Spa was completely refreshed and expanded in 2018.



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**"I would be remiss in not pointing out that value for money is a major factor in selecting Tucson. I have shopped the show in no less than 15 other cities and the savings is over 50 percent when comparing in the month of June."**

**Henry Kartagener**, Founder and Meeting Planner  
Kartagener Associates Inc.  
Hoboken, NJ



Talking Stick Resort in Scottsdale offers something for everyone, including challenging golf, fine dining, indoor and outdoor meeting spaces, two retail outlets and a casino.

one another throughout the three days of our show," Kartagener says. "I would be remiss in not pointing out that value for money is a major factor in selecting Tucson. I have shopped the show in no less than 15 other cities and the savings is over 50 percent when comparing in the month of June."

### A Healthy Option

Keeping distractions at bay is the highlight of Canyon Ranch Tucson, which works with meeting planners to create meetings or incentive programs that inspire participants, encourage innovative thinking, reinvigorate their passion, and lead to increased productivity. Whether a meeting planner is looking for a corporate retreat, incentive or board meeting, Canyon Ranch offers extensive team-building opportunities, lectures that boost attendees' brainpower and an environment that re-energizes attendees and fosters optimism.

In addition, Canyon Ranch can arrange special classes, events or excursions customized for group, such as a private outing with a Canyon Ranch chef to a local farmer's market or specialty grocery store for tips on selecting the best fresh ingredients. Then there's a cooking demo and private lunch featuring the ingredients gathered at the market.

Or perhaps an afternoon with a Canyon Ranch exercise physiologist would appeal to attendees. Each program could be tailored to topics such as "Exercise: The Fountain of Youth" or "Chasing Your Athletic Dreams at Any Age." In addition, Canyon Ranch recognizes the stressful and demanding role C-Suite executives experience in their roles as company leaders. So the resort developed an Optimal Wellness Program specifically for company leaders, complete with one-on-one consultations, measurable and trackable results, ongoing support and take-home tools, and discounts for executives and their families.

### Amenities to Satisfy All Attendees

Kartagener recognizes the importance of incorporating some fun and activities into each event he plans. For instance, at a recent trade show Kartagener developed, attendees enjoyed a food tour of Tucson, which Visit Tucson helped organize.

"Our delegates loved it and some who sell tours to Tucson are planning to add that activity to their tour program," Kartagener says. "One evening at our outdoor dinner we had a few telescopes with an astronomer to explain what our guests were viewing. It was a huge hit!"

Offering a wealth of entertainment amenities is the cornerstone of Scottsdale's Talking Stick Resort's success. In addition to offering more than 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, Talking Stick Resort boasts six restaurants ranging from quick bites to fine dining, 11 bars and lounges, two retail outlets, a concert showroom, a cultural art display, resort pools and cabanas, and an award-winning casino.

Likewise, El Conquistador Tucson spans 80 acres and boasts award-winning amenities ideal for groups of all sizes. Some of the celebrated amenities include the resort's own horse stables, a mini-Western village ideal for BBQ-centered team-building events, Native-American flute players, and three pristine golf courses. In addition, meeting planners can host a cocktail soiree at the resort's sunset point, which showcases stunning mountain landscapes and painted sunsets.

Kartagener stresses the importance of meeting planners partnering with Visit Tucson or other tourism boards in the planning process of a meeting or event. "They are a wealth of knowledge and eager to work with any meeting or event planner," Kartagener says. "In my 40+ years in tourism, Visit Tucson is without question the most helpful and pro-active CVB I have encountered."

Stuckrath also recommends meeting planners work with Visit Tucson. "They were a great partner in searching for the venues," Stuckrath says. "Make sure you check the airlift for your group. Tucson does have direct flights from a lot of major airports, but not all. That being said, I think it is worth the trip."

### What's New in Tucson


Tucson is undergoing a wealth of development and exciting changes, all of which is sure to delight both meeting planners and attendees. In downtown Tucson, the number of locally owned small businesses at the Mercado San Agustin (MSA) food and retail complex has doubled. These 13 new shops and eateries are housed permanently inside converted shipping containers, next to a new 500-seat outdoor festival venue for public events.

Tucson's all-new City Park is expected to open by fall 2019 on Congress Street in downtown Tucson. This multiuse

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The Loews Ventana Canyon Resort is a popular venue. It offers myriad Western-themed activities for event attendees.

**“The Tucson area is beautiful, the weather is sunny and amazing. There is great food everywhere and something for everyone — from hiking, to golf, to museums, to craft beers. And the people are friendly and welcoming everywhere you go.”**

**Brenda Klink**, Executive Assistant  
Broan  
Hartford, WI

complex currently under development will house a food hall, two restaurants, an entertainment venue with a bowling alley and a pinball arcade, a bar, a private event space, and connecting ground-floor patios. The top level of the five-story structure will offer a 2,600-sf rooftop deck for events such as concerts or conferences.

In March 2018 Tucson celebrated the completion of the Loop, a 131-mile system of paved, shared-use paths and short segments of buffered multiuse bike lanes that spans the metro area, allowing cyclists, pedestrians, joggers and equestrians an opportunity to enjoy the scenic Sonoran Desert on vehicle-free pathways. The Loop connects parks, trailheads, bus and bike routes, workplaces, restaurants, hotels and motels, and shopping and entertainment areas.

In the world of corporate and incentive travel, timing is everything. That’s why meeting planners should pay attention to the unique events happening in and around Tucson to make the most of attendees’ experience in this beautiful locale.

For instance, the Tucson Jazz Festival is the only major jazz festival in January in the country. It presents 10 days of live music featuring legends and emerging talents of all jazz genres — from straight-ahead to contemporary — at

outdoor and indoor downtown venues such as the Fox Tucson Theatre and Rialto Theatre. There is also the free Downtown Jazz Fiesta presented on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

The Tucson Desert Song Festival fills concert halls in February with singing in orchestral, chamber, choral and solo formats. Performers include internationally celebrated soloists and the Tucson Symphony Orchestra (Arizona’s oldest continuing professional performing arts organization, formed in 1929), Tucson Chamber Artists, UA Presents, Arizona Opera and others, in conjunction with master classes and lectures at University of Arizona School of Music.

Tucson’s Rodeo Parade salutes Tucson’s Old West spirit every February. The Tucson Rodeo is the first major outdoor event on the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association schedule and the parade is the largest non-motorized parade in the country. This event dates to 1925, when local ranch hands saddled their horses and hitched up their buggies for the annual “celebration of the cowboys.”

The Agave Heritage Festival is an annual weeklong fiesta on or near May 5 in Tucson for people 21 and older that celebrates the art, science and cultural traditions behind the production of agave-based spirits. The fiesta extols the indigenous agave plant with a tradeshow, seminars, and tastings of tequilas, mezcals, sotols and bacanoras at Hotel Congress and several other downtown Tucson venues. The full week allows for strong influences, such as guest speakers and cocktail-making demonstrations, from both sides of the United States-Mexico border.

Wine aficionados within a group of attendees in Scottsdale will be drawn to the city’s newest farm-to-table concept. Recently Scottsdale introduced five Arizona wine tasting rooms in Downtown Scottsdale. Each tasting room tells the story of the region’s 100 award-winning wineries. Called the Scottsdale Wine Trail, visitors from around the globe purchase a “passport” and receive reduced-cost wine tasting experiences.

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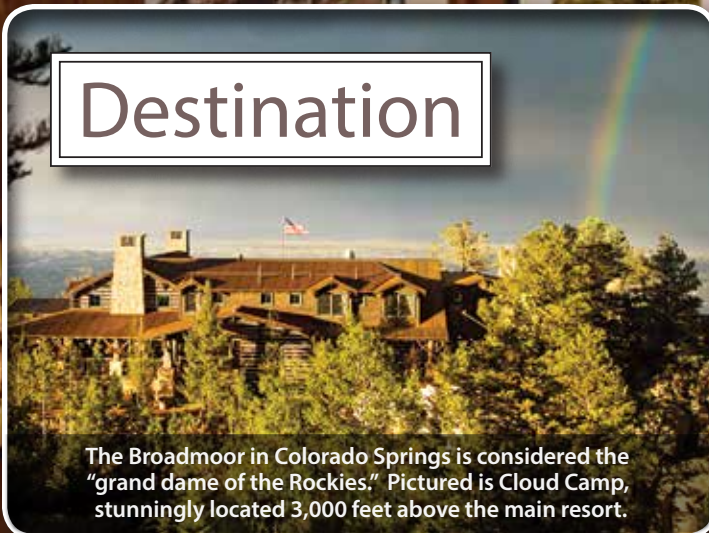
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## Destination



The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs is considered the "grand dame of the Rockies." Pictured is Cloud Camp, stunningly located 3,000 feet above the main resort.



Credit: The Broadmoor

**F**rom the mountains to the prairies, and from tiny ski resorts to laid-back dude ranches, when it comes to hosting meetings against a variety of memorable backdrops, Colorado just about has it all.

Though solidly identified as one of America's Western states, Colorado is not far from the geographical center of the country, making it a prime target for a centrally located meeting site. The farthest major cities from Denver — Boston and Miami — are just a 3.5-hour flight.

But in the end it was strong support from the team at VISIT DENVER and other local players that ultimately sold the SAS Institute on the city — enough so that the analytics software developer subsequently booked two more conferences at the Colorado Convention Center, in 2024 and 2028.

# Colorado Cool

**From Skiing to Dude Ranches to Hiking, Denver and Surrounding Areas Offer Venues Galore**

By David Swanson





TWO MEN AND A TRUCK held its annual meeting at the The Broadmoor in 2017. Company officials liked the venerable resort so much, they returned this month.

Credit: Two Men and a Truck

## Working With the CVB

I think it's important to reach out to a local CVB," says Ken Bland, principal events project manager for North Carolina-based SAS Institute. "A lot of people don't use the local convention and visitors bureau. They're not all equal, but they know how the city operates. We had one of our best experiences working with them in Denver. They introduced us to a lot of people, and provided a wealth of information."

The company's annual SAS Global Forum was held last April at the Colorado Convention Center, drawing 3,500 attendees. Bland says that Denver's location and accessibility were important considerations for his event.

"We are a global company," Bland adds. "Around 30 percent of our attendees are international, so we try to find destinations that would be a good draw for both our domestic and international attendees. Colorado is certainly a draw, and Denver is a good hub — it's easy for our international guests to get to."

**"We had one of our best experiences working with [the local CVB] in Denver. They introduced us to a lot of people, and provided a wealth of information."**

**Ken Bland**, Principal Events Project Manager  
SAS Institute  
Cary, NC



tation to and from hotels and a convention center, because that can get quite costly," explains Bland, who says the SAS Global Forum spread guests into 28 different hotels at a range of price points around downtown Denver. "We want walkable cities."

SAS Institute used the 1,100-room Hyatt Regency Denver at the Colorado Convention Center as the anchor hotel for the event. Bland notes there are no hotels connected directly to the convention center, but the Hyatt Regency is across the street, and the hotel gave SAS a large block, "almost 1,000 rooms on peak," says Bland.

Although SAS used the Hyatt Regency for only one smaller partner forum, the hotel features more than 60,000 sf of meeting space, including the 30,000-sf Centennial Ballroom, with its 30-foot ceilings. Built in 2005, the hotel received a renovation last year. Bland calls the Colorado Convention Center "a beautiful facility," and that it met all the needs of SAS Global Forum.

In December, the convention center drew national attention for allegations of collusion and bid rigging at the start of construction on a \$233 million expansion. The work, originally projected to be completed by late 2022, was intended to add an additional 235,000 sf of usable space to the facility (which currently totals 2.2 million sf). As the scandal continues to play out in the pages of the *The Denver Post*, the project's future is uncertain.

"At a lot of the convention centers we use Centerplate is the caterer and they have a lot of history and data about our event," Bland says. "For example, Denver Centerplate was able to share data from our Dallas event — the number of meals served; the menus. They're all independently managed, but when we run into Centerplate we alert them to our past events and they work their magic."

## DMCs Can Make a Difference

SAS Institute also worked with local DMCs.

"We don't usually work with more than one DMC, but what we like to do is bid out all parts of the program," Bland explains. "As we started going through proposals, it was very clear to us that some were stronger in one area than another. In the end we used Imprint Group for our welcome reception and Kick Back party, and then Access Destination Services had a really

How connected? In 2018, Denver International Airport celebrated a milestone when it became the fifth airport in the country to serve 200 destinations, with flights to 26 international cities. And in November, DEN was named the country's best airport in *The Wall Street Journal's* first-ever airport rankings.

Another criterion: walkability. VISIT DENVER reports that downtown Denver boasts 11,000 hotel rooms within walking distance of the convention center.

"We don't want to provide mass transpor-



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Credit: VISIT DENVER

Dining in the street in Denver's historic Larimer Square is a favorite pastime for event attendees in Colorado's capital city.

good proposal on airport greeters and temp staff. Another DMC, Max/Livie, Inc., was also able to provide us some significant savings."

Bland says the SAS Kick Back party was held at Broncos Stadium at Mile High and offered gaming activities both virtual and physical. One corner depicted winter, and had skiing games; the corner for spring offered mountain climbing, etc.

"Our attendees loved that," he adds.

But it was the support from VISIT DENVER that sealed the deal for SAS Institute.

"That's one of the reasons we decided to sign two more years," Bland says. "We had terrific service from corporate citywide sales manager, Tyler Adams and convention services manager, Theresa Blankenau. When you work with the folks who are trying to attract business for the town, they can offer a nice package from a branding perspective, and they were willing and able to step in for negotiations with individual hotels."

Just a few decades ago, Denver was often mocked as a cow town. In 2016, *U.S. News & World Report* named the city the best place in the nation to live. Denver is also one of America's fastest-growing cities, and its 12-city metropolitan area has become the nation's 15th-largest, with a population of 3.5 million.

One of these outlying cities is Aurora, a major suburb, located southwest of the city, and roughly equidistant to both the Denver International Airport and Denver, the state capital.

### First-Class Hotels and Resorts

The big recent news, of course, is the opening in December of the state's largest convention hotel, Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center. Offering 1,501 guest rooms and more than 485,000 sf of meeting and convention space, Gaylord Rockies is situated just seven miles from the Denver airport (compared to 24 miles for the Colorado Convention Center). The resort works hard to capture the local setting, which includes waterfalls over boulders, elevators designed to look like old mine shafts, and guest rooms with aspen tree-inspired carpets. In the convention center, elements depict ski tracks, snow drifts and snowflakes. Gaylord Rockies features eight dining venues, and such local F&B partnerships as a

collaboration with Aurora's award-winning Dry Dock Brewing Co. Sprawling over an 85-acre property, the resort includes a full-service spa and fitness center, a 22,000-sf aquatic area with a lazy river and three waterslides, an arcade, miniature golf, and bike rentals.

But although much of the state is defined by what happens in the Denver metro area, there is much to draw meeting planners to other destinations spread around the state, including to the second-largest city, Colorado Springs. Located 72 miles south of Denver, the city is also home to one of the state's largest meeting properties, the Broadmoor, the "grand dame of the Rockies," built in 1918.

"The Broadmoor is a venue unlike no other," suggests Cindy Wilhelm, executive assistant to president and CEO and special events coordinator for TWO MEN AND A TRUCK, the nation's largest franchised local moving company. The company held its annual meeting at the resort in 2017 and returned this month. "We [went] back to the Broadmoor this year because we experienced the best customer service we have ever received and we absolutely love this property," Wilhelm adds. "The accommodations are first class, the meeting space works very well for us, and there are so many fun things to do right on site."

Wilhelm says the annual event draws between 450 and 525

**"Hotel Talisa is an upscale, beautifully renovated hotel with gorgeous meeting, banquet and guest room space. The décor speaks of a calm stream in the Colorado mountains on a perfect day, with a soothing color palette and simply stunning design."**

**Bonnie Zeigler**, Senior Project Coordinator  
Pfiedler Education  
Denver, CO

attendees, flying in from across the U.S., and from Canada, Ireland and the U.K. The company typically alternates its meeting between the east and west, but the proximity to Denver provided an opportunity for some attendees to drive and save on airfare.

Although Colorado Springs is not the easiest airport to fly in and out of, Wilhelm notes that Denver International is not far from the Broadmoor, and flights are usually more affordable. Colorado Springs Airport has increased service and now makes the destination more accessible. The airport is now served by American Airlines, Delta, Frontier and United Airlines.

"The first year, we had a lot of attendees fly into Colorado Springs and there was some weather in the area," Wilhelm says. "Several attendees were delayed due to cancellations and delays."

This year, Wilhelm is recommending Denver as a gateway,

and the Broadmoor offers shuttle service to and from the airport, which can be booked in advance.

"Once you arrive at the Broadmoor, all of your worries go away," Wilhelm says. "The first time we went for a site visit, we were hooked."

Wilhelm gushed enthusiastically about the Broadmoor's meeting space.

"I can't say enough about it. All the meeting space we need is available to us and is always in great condition and set up in a timely manner. We are considered a medium-sized group but we do require a lot of space — they offered us as much as we needed and we used it. I have never found this ideal of a space at any other venue in my 12 years of meeting planning."

Wilhelm says the Broadmoor's F&B offerings are first-class and she appreciated the resort's on-site A/V services. But it was smaller touches — from booking certain attendees near specific facilities, or providing refrigerators in rooms — that won her over.

"We are a pretty easy group, hard-working and very appreciative, so any little extra things a hotel does, does not go unnoticed," Wilhelm adds. "[Their staffers have] been a godsend. The experience these [staffers] have, and the knowledge, sets me at ease. I know they will take care of our needs, whatever they are."

While TWO MEN AND A TRUCK did not use the space, the Broadmoor's Cloud Camp provides an intriguing option for smaller groups looking to "head to the hills" for a quintessential Rocky Mountain experience. Perched at 9,200 feet, groups can stay and meet at Cloud Camp where 22 well-appointed lodge rooms, cabins and the epic one-of-a-kind Fire Tower Suite provide rest and relaxation in luxury accommodations.

The 1,500-sf Overlook is a dedicated space for small meetings of up to 60, with spectacular 360-degree views and guest/group activities such as pickle ball in the clouds, hot tubbing among the pines, hiking, and dining in grand style.

Although Colorado Springs is set against a backdrop that includes both the sculpted rocks of Garden of the Gods Visitor & Nature Center and the massive flank of Pikes Peak, for a



Credit: Garden of the Gods Visitor & Nature Center

Garden of the Gods Visitor & Nature Center in Colorado Springs offers views of Pikes Peak and other natural flora and fauna.

**"Once you arrive at the Broadmoor, all of your worries go away. The first time we went for a site visit, we were hooked."**

**Cindy Wilhelm**, Executive Assistant to the President and CEO and Special Events Coordinator  
TWO MEN AND A TRUCK  
Lansing, MI



true Rocky Mountain experience you'll want to head for the hills — to one of the resorts that caters to both skiers in the winter and hikers in the summer, and meetings and conventions year-round.

The allure of the mountains even inspired Denver-based online teaching company Pfiedler Education to review in-state options for a recent event.

Bonnie Zeigler, senior project coordinator at Pfiedler, says the company chose Vail and Hotel Talisa, A Luxury Collection Resort, for its Fellows Symposium in February.

"We rarely do meetings in our home state," Zeigler says. "But Vail is a great destination, and preferred by our faculty. Hotel Talisa is not in Vail Village, but a little ways down the road. There is a shuttle that runs often from the hotel to the village, and I found this to be a benefit because it adds to the feeling of calmness and remote mountain feel. For a hotel to have both an airport nearby and be a ski location is somewhat unusual."

"Hotel Talisa is an upscale, beautifully renovated hotel with gorgeous meeting, banquet and guest room space," Zeigler adds. "The décor speaks of a calm stream in the Colorado mountains on a perfect day, with a soothing color palette and simply stunning design. Talisa has ski-in, ski-out capability as there is a lift right to the hotel, and a rental shop on site."

With its 58,000-sf athletic club, Hotel Talisa is ideal for active meetings. In addition to ski slopes, the hotel offers snowmobiling and dog sledding. While in summer, cattle drives, mountain bike tours, fly fishing, golf and rafting round out the activities. The hotel has three restaurants, but with so many dining options in Vail, dine-arounds and progressive dinners are also popular.



The 285-room resort encompasses 40,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space, and every meeting room has extensive windows providing natural light, many with views onto Gore Creek.

"There are numerous options within the hotel to host events of varying sizes," says Zeigler, though she cautioned on the ceiling height in the Zermatt Ballroom, the middle-sized of three ballrooms. "We used a set screen from the floor but will use the drop-down from the ceiling in the future for better visibility. Zermatt isn't a great choice for projection, as there is much natural light in the room. However, all that light and the views make for a beautiful meeting or reception space."

Hotel Talisa had a variety of pre-set menus but created menus to fill the needs of Pfiedler. Zeigler adds that the restaurant menus and menus for private events went far beyond typical hotel food.

"I highly recommend the game sausage on the breakfast menu," Zeigler says.

She also praised the resort's conference services staff. "Alexis Mackintosh-Zebrowski, the conference services man-



The Hotel Talisa, a Luxury Collection Resort, Vail, was the venue of choice for Pfiedler Education's Fellows Symposium in February.

ager, is simply delightful. She was so helpful in choosing our menus and helping to accommodate our course director with some very specific requests. Every single staff person I interacted with was pleasant, friendly and helpful."

Zeigler notes that the only potential challenge to conducting an event in Vail, especially in winter, is the weather. Here, the Coloradan offers sage advice:

"Keep in mind, if a flight is delayed, the shuttle companies cannot always make changes to reservations. I always recommend flying into Eagle/Vail over Denver, as a trip to Denver can become gruesome in the winter due to weather and or traffic. Google Maps will say Denver to Vail is a couple of hours. However, ski traffic with good weather can still make for a very long drive and it is not uncommon to be sitting still on the I-70. If guests do choose Denver International, make sure they leave five to six hours prior for the flight home."

**"... Although there was another big group [in the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa] at the time, we weren't overshadowed, and we felt like we were the only group in the entire hotel — we never felt ignored or that we weren't important."**

**Todd Gabello**, Director, Meetings and Events  
Agiliti  
Minneapolis, MN

Ironically, a Colorado location was intended to be a punishment of sorts for one recent leadership meeting. The team of a dozen from medical equipment provider Agiliti was told if they made their fourth-quarter 2018 numbers, they'd enjoy a meeting in Florida.

"They didn't make their numbers," explains Todd Gabello, director of meetings and events for Minneapolis-based Agiliti. "But we still wanted to give them a nice experience following a trade show they were attending in Denver. It's a great city, and we started talking with the Hilton in Denver. But I got a proposal from the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa and it intrigued me. Talking to Robert Rapp, the Park Hyatt's meeting connection manager, about what the experience could be is what sold me. Rate-wise, they were higher than going to the Hilton, but when I spoke to our team leader he felt that it could be cool."

Following the trade show in January the group drove to the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek, just west of Vail. The 190-room hotel offers a state-of-the-art conference center and more than 20,000 sf of meeting space, much of it with floor-to-ceiling windows.

"Because we were a group of 12 people in a resort that was large, I was concerned that we would be sidelined by a larger group that was spending more money," Gabello says. "But although there was another big group in-house at the time, we weren't overshadowed, and we felt like we were the only group in the entire hotel — we never felt ignored or that we weren't important."

A highlight for the group was an off-site team-building event with Sage Outdoor Adventures. The outfit operates a private ranch and offered a snowmobiling adventure for the Agiliti group, along with horseback riding, fishing and rafting in summer.

"The team loved every second of it," says Gabello, who adds that he had only two weeks to turn around plans for the meeting. And yet, "I've been doing this for nine years and this was one of the easiest meetings I've ever done. Robert [Rapp] checked in with me every day, before he was going home — he's one of the top three people I've ever worked with."

"And at the end when I talked to our vice president he said to me, 'Remember how we said we were going to punish them? They all want to come back here next year.'"

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## On The Move



CONKLIN

The Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau has named **Andy Conklin**, executive vice president of sales and marketing. Prior to this, Conklin was vice president of sales responsible for Trump Hotel properties around the globe.

Château Élan Winery & Resort, has announced **Kevin Rosa** as director of sales and marketing. Rosa's previous roles include task force sales and marketing for Strategic Solution Partners



ROSA

and director of sales and marketing at Villas of Grand Cypress, The Don CeSar, Turnberry Isle, and The Sagamore.

Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach has welcomed **Frank Cavella** as director of sales and marketing. Previously, Cavella led as director of sales and marketing at Naples Grand Beach Resort for 14 years.

AC Hotel Houston Downtown has appointed **Cathalin Leija** as director of



CAVELLA



LEIJA

sales. Leija has previously directed sales and marketing for Houston Marriott at Hobby Airport, JW Marriott Houston Downtown, The St. Regis Houston, and The Westin Houston Galleria.

Ocean Reef Club promotes **Rudy Gonnella** as director of conference sales. Most recently, Gonnella handled the Mid-Atlantic region and national accounts in addition to operations and sales with other luxury brand hotels. **C&IT**



GONNELLA

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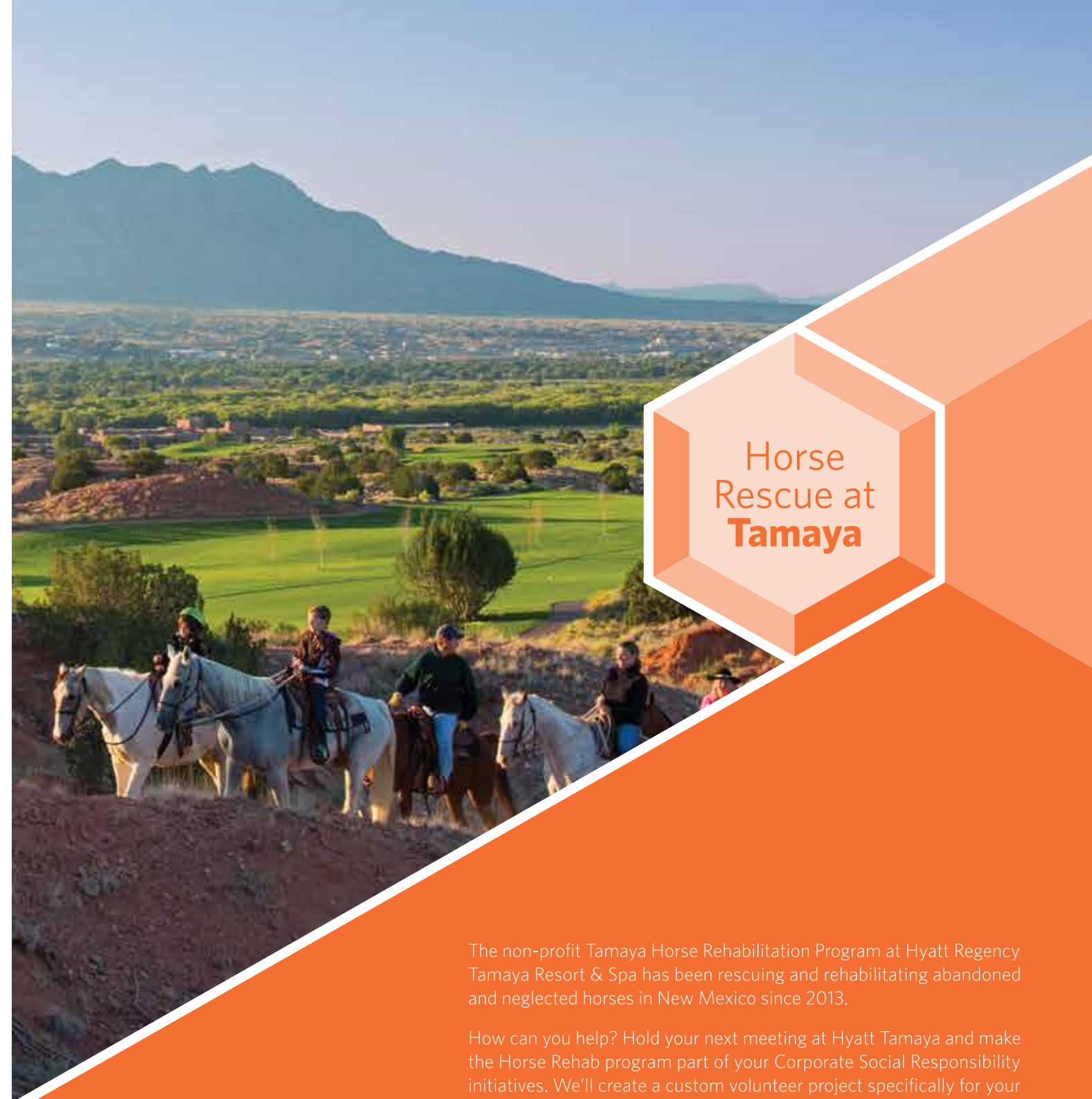
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## Horse Rescue at Tamaya



The non-profit Tamaya Horse Rehabilitation Program at Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa has been rescuing and rehabilitating abandoned and neglected horses in New Mexico since 2013.

How can you help? Hold your next meeting at Hyatt Tamaya and make the Horse Rehab program part of your Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. We'll create a custom volunteer project specifically for your group. After your hard work, have some fun at a private group rodeo and dinner at the Stables.

You can also support Tamaya Horse Rehab during our 2019 Fundraiser Week. Visit **[biddingforgood.com/TamayaHorseRehabWeek](http://biddingforgood.com/TamayaHorseRehabWeek)** or call **505.771.6039** for more info.

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