

# www.TheMeetingMagazines.com **CORPORATE** & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR GLOBAL MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

FAMILY  
FRIENDLY  
MEETINGS

+

LAST-MINUTE  
MEETING  
CHANGES

+

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



MGM RESORTS

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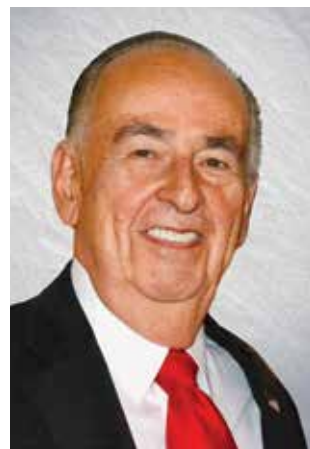
Photo by Sarah Peterson

Last-minute meeting changes can be stressful for planners, but there are a few ways to handle them. **PAGE 30**



## Have You Noticed The Difference?

As you read this issue, you will see a new design illustrating our award-winning editorial content in a bright and easy-to-read format. From cover to cover, the Corporate & Incentive Travel updates enable our active meeting planner subscribers to easily digest our timely editorial content in an uncluttered environment. Our goal for almost 37 years of serving the meetings industry is to deliver helpful



information to enable meeting planners, key decision makers and corporate executives to successfully plan and execute events. Please send me your comments with any suggestions and let me know if you like our new look.

In this issue, you will find a number of timely topics covered, including how planners are increasingly looking at booking meetings and incentive programs at sea. Most cruise ships today offer all the conveniences of fine resorts and hotels, but at all-inclusive rates. Contributing to the growing popularity of meeting at sea are the fixed costs and added value such as built-in entertainment. Also, meetings at sea may prove less distracting and tend to have attendees participate in most

functions since there isn't any opportunity to wander "off property."

Our cover story highlights a segment of the industry that offers the ultimate challenge. Planners involved with pharmaceutical, medical and bioscience meetings face many obstacles that sometimes can cause them to trip up. While training is key and keeping up with the various compliance rules is important, the collection of reporting data and seeking tips from experts are a must.

For land-loving planners, take a look at the feature in this issue on the Bahamas and Caribbean destinations that offer a luxury combination of land and sea activities. Also in this issue, we cover why Southern California is very popular with planners. With numerous hotels and resorts to satisfy any planner's needs, the destination also boasts favorable, year-round weather making it perfect for outdoor activities and events.

**Harvey Grotsky**  
Publisher

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## AWARDS

## Cvent Gives Hilton Prague the No. 1 Spot for Meetings & Events

PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC — Hilton Prague was named the top hotel for meetings and events in Europe by industry-leading event management technology company, Cvent, Inc. It is the second year in a row Hilton Prague is being recognized as No. 1 amongst Top 50 meeting hotels in Europe. The annual list was compiled by analyzing MICE booking activity through its Cvent Supplier Network,

**It is the second year in a row Hilton Prague is recognized as No.1.**

which sourced more than \$14.7 billion and more than 40 million room nights in 2017. Michael Specking, Hilton Prague general manager said: “I am honored that Hilton Prague has been repetitively recognized. A full renovation of our almost 800 rooms is nearly complete, and our flexible 54,000 sf of meeting and convention space, bright atrium lobby, three restaurants, two bars, and 21,500 sf of leisure facilities offer group guests all the amenities they look for when attending events. Add to this our hotel’s central location and most importantly a great team focused on delivering high standards of service, Hilton Prague is the real creative metropolis with everything under one roof and is the right choice for inspired events of all kinds.” [www.news.hilton.com/prague](http://www.news.hilton.com/prague)



Hilton Prague  
Named No. 1 amongst Top 50  
meeting hotels in Europe.

Courtesy of Hilton Prague

## MARKET RESEARCH

## IRF Report: Incentive Program Owners Define Success

WASHINGTON, DC — The Incentive Research Foundation is pleased to release its signature study, 2019 Voice of the Market: The Use of Non-Cash Rewards & Recognition, a qualitative study of the professionals who manage reward and recognition programs. Based on a series of extensive interviews conducted by the IRF, the study details what front-line program owners prioritize when designing, implementing and executing incentive rewards and recognition programs. The IRF research team interviewed 45 program owners representing a broad cross-section of the U.S. business market and a range of non-cash reward and recognition programs. Respondents spent

anywhere from \$25,000 to millions of dollars annually on programs that included one or more of the following types of rewards: travel, award points, merchandise, gift cards and branded items. 2019 Voice of the Market: The Use of Non-Cash Rewards & Recognition reports that program owners are largely satisfied with the success and outlook of their programs. Key findings include: Many program owners reported they were not yet aware of the many services and deep expertise available in the industry. Program owners broadly defined incentives and rewards, so they use a wide variety of tools in pursuit of people-driven results. Across all types of reward and recognition programs, owners used the energy and enthusiasm of the participants as the primary success indicator. [www.theirf.org](http://www.theirf.org)

## TECH

## Las Vegas Moves Forward with First Underground People Mover

LAS VEGAS — The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) Board of Directors recently approved a \$48,675,000 contract with Elon Musk’s The Boring Company to design and construct a people mover for the Las Vegas Convention Center that could rapidly and safely carry passengers in autonomous electric vehicles via a

loop of underground express-route tunnels. “The Boring Company is excited to contribute to the future of Las Vegas, and work with leaders who have a vision for transportation,” says Steve Davis, president of The Boring Company. The contract highlights three underground passenger stations, a pedestrian tunnel and two vehicular tunnels with an expected total length of approximately 1 mile, an elevator/escalator system for passenger access to stations, pedestrian entrances, exits and coverings from the elements, landscaping, and tunnel lighting, power and video surveillance systems, a fully equipped control room with cell phone, Wi-Fi, intercom/PA, remote data and ventilation/life safety systems. “Las Vegas will continue to elevate the experience of our visitors with innovation ...”

**“Las Vegas will continue to elevate the experience of our visitors with innovation ...”**

ing, and tunnel lighting, power and video surveillance systems, a fully equipped control room with cell phone, Wi-Fi, intercom/PA, remote data and ventilation/life safety systems. “Las Vegas will continue to elevate the experience of our visitors with innovation, such as with this project, and by focusing on the current and future needs of our guests,” says Steve Hill, LVCVA president and CEO. [www.lvcva.com](http://www.lvcva.com)

## EXPANSIONS

## BENCHMARK Adds the Extraordinary Skamania Lodge

THE WOODLANDS (HOUSTON), TX — BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, has announced that the Skamania Lodge, in Stevenson, WA, has joined its expanding Benchmark Resorts & Hotels portfolio. The 258-guest room Skamania Lodge sits on 175 densely forested acres overlooking the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, just 45 minutes from Portland, OR. The resort, owned by Pebblebrook Hotel Trust, is renowned for its Cascadian-style architecture, natural woods, state-of-the-art conference center built to IACC standards, authentic Northwestern cuisine and awe-inspiring, 360-degree Gorge views. Nearby are more than 70 waterfalls, including the famous Multnomah Falls, which, at 620 feet, is the fifth-highest waterfall in the United States. The Skamania Lodge

## TIPS + TRENDS

## Cvent Unveils Top-10 Meeting Hotels in the United States



Omni Nashville Hotel  
took Cvent's No. 1  
spot in the U.S.

Courtesy of Omni Hotels & Resorts

TYSONS, VA — Cvent, a market-leading meetings, events and hospitality technology provider, recently released its annual lists of Top Meeting Hotels for meetings and events worldwide. The lists were compiled by analyzing meeting and event booking activity through the Cvent Supplier Network (CSN), one of the world’s largest venue sourcing platforms. More than \$16 billion and more than 42 million room nights were sourced through the CSN in 2018. Cvent’s Top Meeting Hotels lists rank hotels based on group business performance according to various criteria, including total requests for proposals (RFPs) and conversion rate.

The Omni Nashville Hotel took the No. 1 position in the U.S. this year.

“Being recognized as the highest-ranking hotel on this year’s list is a testament to our team and our continued dedication to providing exceptional service and amenities that event organizers and attendees look for,” said Tod Roadarmel, area director of sales & marketing, Omni Nashville Hotel. “With three properties in the Top 10 from Nashville, we are proud to be leading the list and to support Nashville’s position as a prime destination for meetings and events.”

Here are the top-10 meeting hotels in the United States.

- No. 1 Omni Nashville Hotel
- No. 2 JW Marriott Austin

- No. 3 ARIA Resort & Casino
- No. 4 Fairmont Austin
- No. 5 Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center
- No. 6 Renaissance Nashville Hotel
- No. 7 Hyatt Regency Atlanta
- No. 8 Hilton Austin
- No. 9 Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego
- No. 10 The Diplomat Beach Resort Hollywood

According to Cvent, five new properties have broken into the Top 10:

- No. 4 Fairmont Austin
- No. 6 Renaissance Nashville Hotel
- No. 7 Hyatt Regency Atlanta
- No. 8 Hilton Austin
- No. 10 The Diplomat Beach Resort Hollywood

“The hotels featured on this year’s lists are elevating their group business strategy through innovative digital marketing and quick and complete online responses to RFPs — which is exactly what event professionals want,” says Chris McAndrews, vice president of marketing for Cvent Hospitality Cloud. “Our Top Meeting Hotels lists are consistently used by event organizers to find great hotels and by hoteliers looking to set themselves apart to increase their property’s group business revenue.”

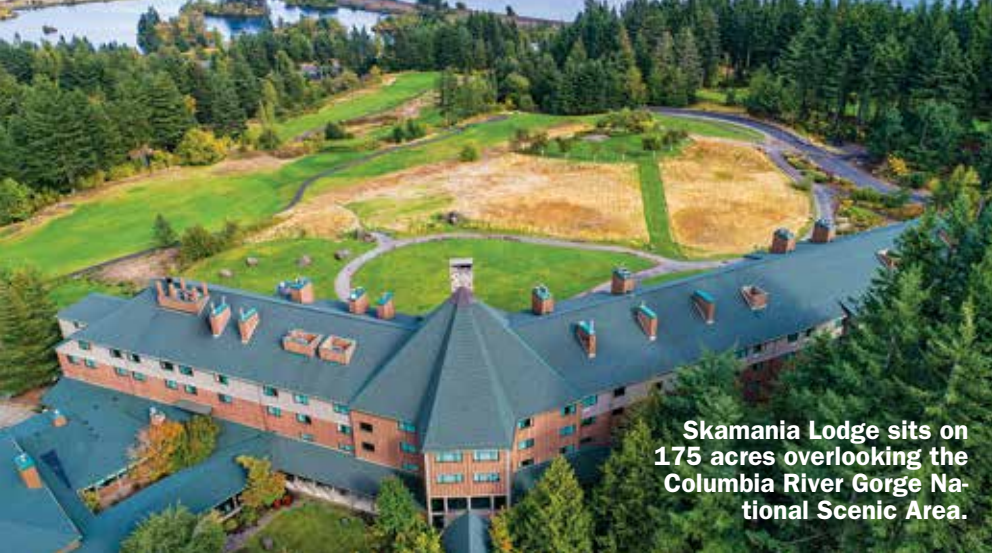
Visit [Cvent.com](http://Cvent.com) to view the full 2019 list of Top 100 Meeting Hotels in the U.S.



Courtesy of The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

**An underground people mover will carry passengers in electric vehicles via a loop of underground express-route tunnels.**





Skamania Lodge sits on 175 acres overlooking the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

Courtesy of BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company

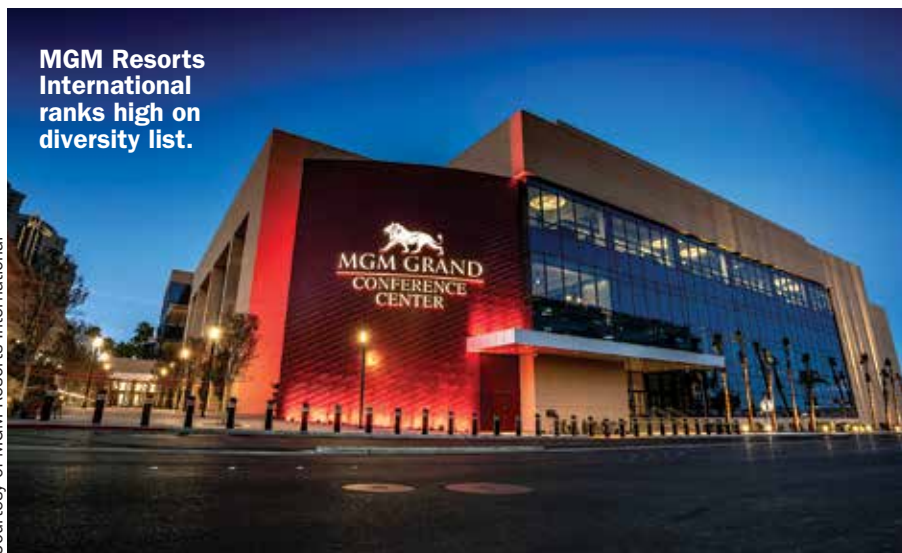
is a prominent resource for the Portland meetings market as well as for Washington State. Skamania Lodge's 22,000 sf of dedicated conference space includes 23 meeting rooms, exhibit and banquet facilities, which also features the warmth of burnished local woods, and the comfort and style of Native American textiles and art. Conference space ranges from 250 sf for more intimate gatherings, to a 7,000-sf ballroom hosting functions for up to 500 guests. The iconic Riverview Pavilion, with 2,500 sf of covered outdoor space, sets the scene for destination events. There are limitless opportunities for team building including: The Canopy Zip Line Tour; Aerial Park; Gorge Loop Fitness Trail; Pacific Crest Trail; and an 18-hole, par-70 golf course. "We are thrilled to welcome Skamania Lodge to Benchmark," says CEO Alex Cabañas. "Skamania is extraordinary in its hospitality, its remarkable beauty and its spectacular natural setting in the Columbia River Gorge. It is an iconic property that offers an immersive, authentic return-to-nature experience in an area showcasing some of the nation's most spectacular natural beauty." [www.pebblebrookhotels.com](http://www.pebblebrookhotels.com)

#### EXPANSIONS

### Hyatt Expected to Triple Canada Brand Presence by 2022

CHICAGO — Hyatt Hotels Corporation announced that more than 20 new hotels are expected to open in Canada by the end of 2022, tripling the global hospitality brand's

Courtesy of MGM Resorts International



MGM Resorts International ranks high on diversity list.

gion and are confident in the direction and future of Hyatt — across all brands." [www.hyatt.com](http://www.hyatt.com)

#### AWARDS

### MGM Resorts International Ranked No. 1 on DiversityInc's Top 8

LAS VEGAS — For the 14th consecutive year, MGM Resorts International has been recognized as a top company for diversity by DiversityInc, one of the nation's leading sources on workplace diversity management. DiversityInc's extensive annual survey yields an empirically driven ranking based on talent results in the workforce and management, senior leadership accountability,

**"We are proud to be recognized for this honor for the 14th year ..."**

talent programs, workplace practices, philanthropy and supplier diversity. "For almost 20 years we have worked passionately and diligently to weave inclusion throughout the fabric of our culture here at MGM Resorts," says Phyllis A. James, the company's chief diversity and corporate responsibility officer. "Diversity touches all aspects of our business — from our workforce to our guests, to our business partners and our communities around the world. We are proud to be recognized for this honor for the 14th year and will continue to keep diversity has a top priority." [www.mgmresorts.com/csr](http://www.mgmresorts.com/csr)

#### MILESTONES

### Hilton on Track to Celebrate 100th Hotel in Mexico by 2022

MCLEAN, VA — In its 100th year, Hilton announced it is on track to celebrate the 100th hotel milestone in Mexico by 2022. With several new deals announced this year and others in the works, Hilton plans to open approximately 10 hotels per year over the next three years, adding 30 new properties and more than 4,500 rooms to its existing portfolio of nearly 70 hotels in Mexico — the country with one of Hilton's largest portfolios. "As we continue expanding our robust portfolio in the Caribbean and Latin America, our team has strategically focused on growth opportunities in Mexico as the country continues to welcome a record number of travelers," says Juan Corvinos, vice president, development, Caribbean and Latin America, Hilton. "Today, Mexico represents Hilton's fastest-growing destination in the Caribbean and Latin America, and we are excited to continue this momentum with both existing and new partners to bring the Hilton Effect to new destinations across the country and the CALA region." [www.newsroom.hilton.com](http://www.newsroom.hilton.com)

#### EXPANSIONS

### Casino Del Sol and Casino of the Sun Unveil New Event Center, Expanded Convention Space

TUCSON, AZ — There are now two more reasons to host your next event in the Sonoran Desert: Casino Del Sol has completed a 9,600-sf expansion to its existing Conference Center, and its sister property, Casino of the Sun, just opened a brand-new event center, the Sunset Room, which hosts up to approximately 750 guests. The new Sunset Room at Casino of the Sun and ex-

**Live! by Loews - Arlington will add 250 jobs to the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex.**

Courtesy of Casino Del Sol



Casino Del Sol has completed a 9,600-sf expansion to its existing Conference Center.

panded Conference Center at Casino Del Sol adds to the Pascua Yaqui Tribe's already impressive meeting space offerings. Now with two ballrooms and plenty of pre-function space, Casino Del Sol boasts almost 110,000 sf of flexible indoor/outdoor meeting space "We expanded our conference and event center offerings to meet the needs of our guests and our community," says Kimberly Van Amburg, CEO of Casino Del Sol. "Our new and expanded event spaces will allow us to host even more events and accommodate almost any type or size of gathering or corporate function." [www.casinodelsol.com/meetings-groups](http://www.casinodelsol.com/meetings-groups)

#### OPENINGS

### LIVE! by Loews - Arlington Reveals New Details, Leadership Team

ARLINGTON, TX — Live! by Loews - Arlington is releasing new details, in-

cluding naming the executive leadership team for the hotel, opening in late August. The hotel is a joint venture between Loews, The Cordish Companies and the Texas Rangers and will bring an upscale hospitality experience to the Arlington Entertainment District, including Texas Live!, which opened in August 2018, and the new home for The Texas Rangers, Globe Life Field, opening in 2020. The 14-story hotel will showcase 300 guest rooms, including 23 suites, 50,000 sf of meeting and event space, a Tower Terrace, event lawn, outdoor infinity pool and private rooftop terrace. Food and beverage will be prominently featured with five signature restaurants and bars for dining and lounging. Additionally, upon completion, Live! by Loews - Arlington will add 250 jobs to the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. The hotel will partner with Arlington's workforce management sector from the University of Texas at Arlington and Tarrant Community College on recruitment efforts. [www.loewshotels.com](http://www.loewshotels.com).

Courtesy of Live! by Loews - Arlington





# How to Help Your Millennial Employees Succeed in the Meeting & Event Industry

BY ALINA OROZCO



Millennials comprise nearly 35 percent of the American workforce, and with the event industry projected growth of 10 percent by 2024, more and more millennials will be entering the most stressful job as rated by CareerCast — event coordinator — for the sixth year in the row.

“As someone incredibly passionate about this industry, my hope is that millennials don’t allow the stresses of this career get in the way of the greater things and miss out on the amazing experiences and opportunities this career path can provide,” says Pawnta Shadab, vice president of events & marketing at Elite Productions International (EPI).

So, how do we ensure lasting success instead of a quick burnout for millennials in our industry? We merge the best practices between all generations and pave the way for millennials to utilize their in-

nate skills such as tech, while combining tried-and-true practices of the older generations.

## Millennials Are Greatly Contributing to the Planning Industry

Millennial contribution to the industry has been indispensable, especially in advancing the role of technology at meetings and events. Millennials certainly know and understand tech, and are excellent in utilizing their expertise at live events, from mobile event apps that provide instant feedback from attendees to second-screen technologies that turn smartphones into additional viewing devices, or wearable technology and social sharing.

“Millennials are deeply and inextricably integrated with the tech that has been available to them for as long as they can remember. While this can definitively be problematic, it also means they are leverag-

ing tech at a level that seems foreign to other generations,” says Bobby Dutton, director at Groove Boston.

## Millennials Can Utilize Tech Savvy to Cultivate Connections

According to a recent survey by Cvent, millennials were 50 percent more likely to say social media and blogs are highly influential when it comes to evaluating a venue, compared to older generations. Millennial planners rely on online reviews, ratings and opinions, rather than word of mouth or other trusted industry sources.

Millennials were also 37 percent less likely to source directly through a venue, valuing convenience rather than an established relationship with a vendor. While older generations center their businesses around repeat customers.

“Over 50 percent of our business is repeat, so we strongly emphasize the importance of keeping those relationships strong. There is no better way to begin a relationship than looking someone in the eye and having a conversation together,” says Francesca Lombardo, creative marketing direc-

## Finding the Balance

Event planners are typically meticulous about their work and appreciate every detail. While these are crucial traits, they can also become self-sabotaging. The email trail and the to-do list leading up an event can become overwhelming, and millennials need to know how to delegate as well as balance the work.

Millennials get a bad rap, but lazy isn’t an adjective most employers would use to describe their millennial employees. A recent Project Time Off survey found that young people see themselves as “work martyrs,” and 48 percent of employees born between 1981 and 1997 hoped their bosses would think of them as such.

About 25 percent of millennials felt nervous when requesting time off, as compared to 14 percent of Generation X and 6 percent of baby boomers.

“In this day and age, we have the ability to make ourselves available literally 24/7. Therefore, integrating work into your life when it makes the most sense for you personally is the best way to achieve a balance,” says Alisa Walsh, director of

“According to a recent survey by Cvent, millennials were **50 PERCENT MORE LIKELY** to say social media and blogs are highly influential when it comes to evaluating a venue, compared to older generations.”

tor at Lombardo’s, a wedding and event venue.

While millennials may have an aversion to one-on-one interaction in person, with tech in the mix, millennials can create other connections and cultivate relationships in the industry by incorporating FaceTime calls or Google Hangouts and other programs to achieve the same goal.

Millennial aversion to using the phone can delay and complicate a simple transaction with a client or a vendor, so they should consider the most effective method to relay messages or information, be it a phone call, email, or in-person meeting. Regardless, one of the most invaluable skills of the job is listening and hearing what is truly being said.

“In this industry, we have to learn to adapt to different communication styles. Some clients are comfortable texting, others prefer we meet in person. It’s all about being flexible and open minded,” Shadab says.

business development at EventWorks.

“If you feel most productive in the early morning, wake up and blast a few emails out, then go work out or meet friends during lunch to reenergize. It’s more about creating an environment where you will perform your best both personally and professionally,” Walsh says.

Event planning is a stressful, often glorified and misunderstood job, and with an influx of millennials coming in, we have to work to create a healthy environment.

“I keep a work calendar and social calendar, which helps me balance my life. I schedule myself time to be with friends and family, exercise, take trips, etc.,” Lombardo says.

Though I believe that if we work together by marrying the tech resources millennials bring to the table with the existing industry practices we will create an incredible future workforce, and one that is less stressed.



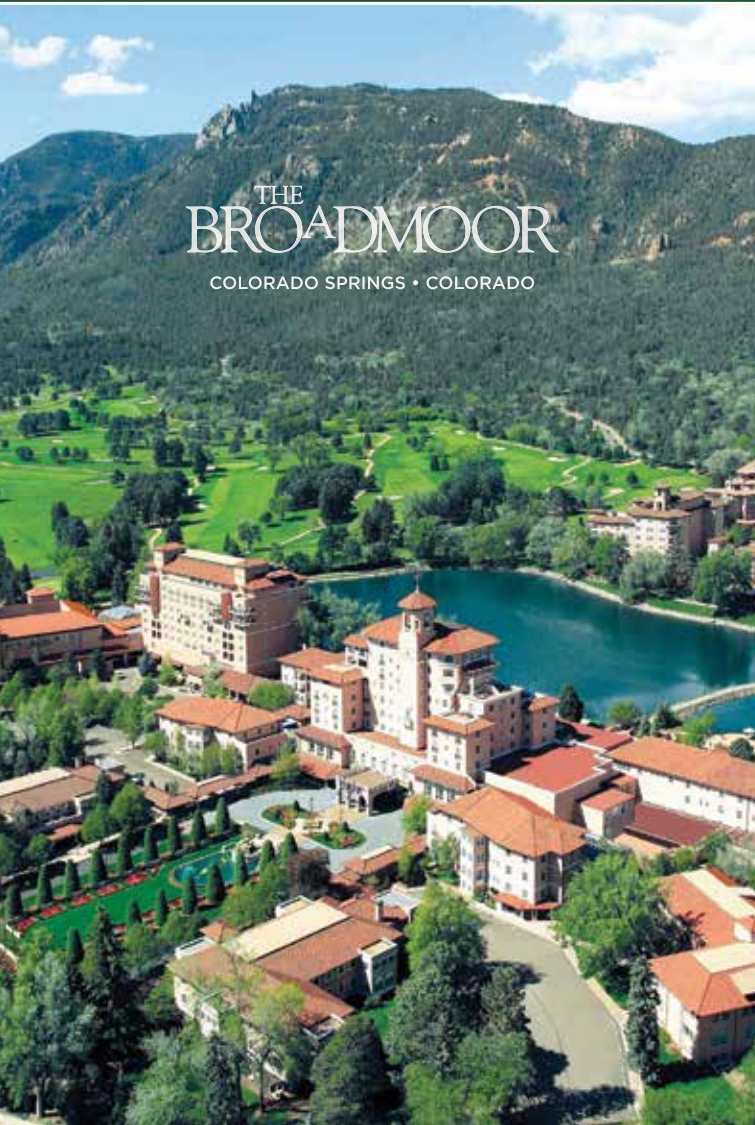
## ALINA OROZCO

Orozco has been in digital marketing and social media since its inception and enjoys watching trends and helping brands develop their digital identity. At Elite Productions International, Orozco is responsible for showcasing the innovative designs and creativity of the team on a daily basis — as well as crafting their online presence. Learn more about Elite Productions International by following them on Instagram @epievents.

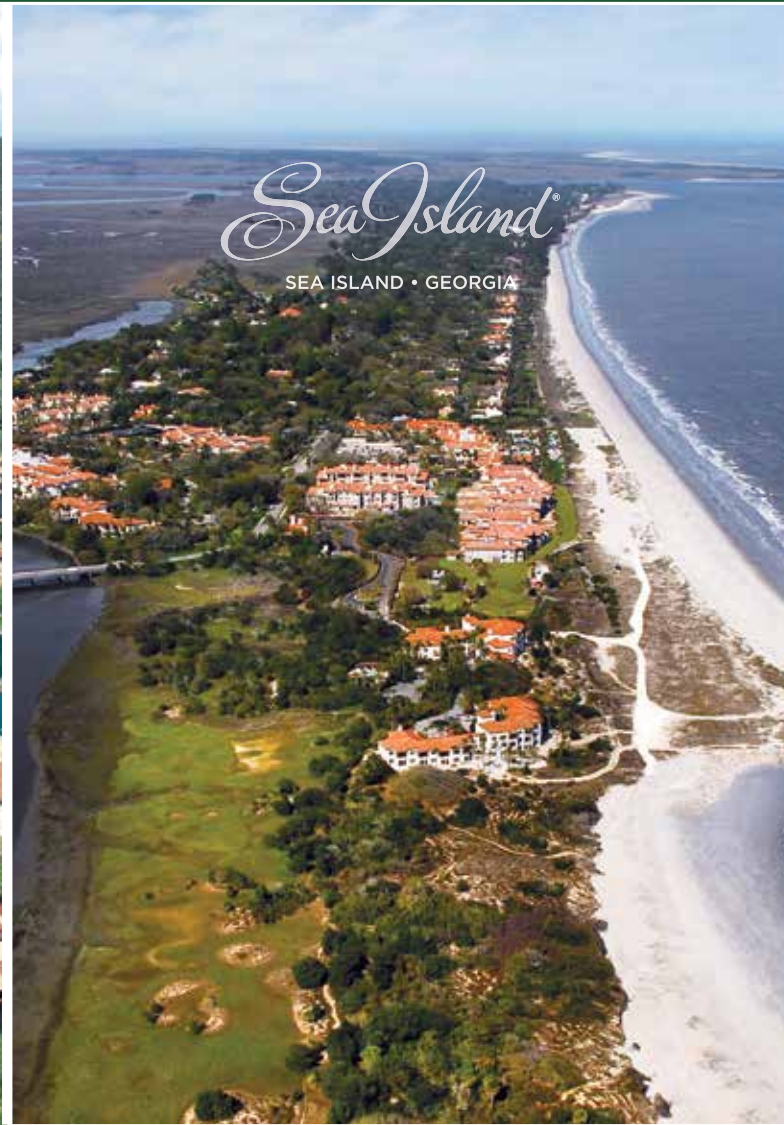


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Planners  
are Leaving the  
Shore Behind  
and Meeting at Sea

# Meetings & *Incentives* at Sea

By Sophia Bennett

Courtesy Silversea Cruises



**T**here are plenty of compelling reasons to consider a meeting or incentive trip at sea. “From the immersive exploration experiences at each destination to the spacious comfortable suites onboard, from the exquisite cuisine at all restaurants to the expert personalized service at every turn, your attendees will be able to experience the ultimate memory-making travel reward with every luxury included,” says Katina Athanasiou, CITP, senior vice president of charters, incentives and events for Regent Seven Seas Cruises. Add the image of blue-green water and the thought of salty sea air ruffling your hair, and booking an excursion on a cruise ship or charter vessel may seem like a no-brainer.

### Things are Different at Sea

But organizing an event at sea has some major differences from doing one on shore, and planners need to be aware of them before they dive headlong into floating excursions. Unlike a meeting at a hotel, it’s vital that everyone arrive on time or they will literally miss the boat. Motivational speakers and trainers can’t fly in just for their session, which can limit programming choices. And most ships don’t have the same function and breakout space offerings as hotels, which can cause some headaches.

However, many of these difficulties can be overcome with some knowledge and advanced planning. “The most important thing is being open minded,” says Freddy I. Muller, vice president, charter and incentive sales for Silversea Cruises. “You’re not going to be working with a square box most of the time.”

Whether you are putting together your first or fiftieth floating meeting or incentive trip, there are a few things that can make the experience easier. Don your sailor cap and get ready to set sail on an excursion through the world of planning meeting programs and incentive trips at sea.

### Advantages of Cruising

“Cruising is something that’s relatively new. This goes on the leisure side and the meeting and incentive side,” Muller says. “One thing that’s helped build the popularity of cruising is the fixed cost and added value. If you were to compare a five-star cruise to a five-star resort, you could expect to save about 30 percent.”

That’s because many cruise lines offer all-inclusive packages for people participating in meetings and incentive trips. On a Regent Seven Seas trip, according to Athanasiou, packages can include all meeting space, A/V equipment and technology services, unlimited Wi-Fi, unlimited shore excursions, pre-paid

gratuities, onboard daytime activities and evening entertainment.

“Attrition is much more lenient on a ship than a hotel, which is great for incentive programs when you don’t know how many winners you have until your program is complete,” says Gary Bertolucci, account manager with the meeting and incentive trip firm Gavel International. “The beverage packages are great. Everyone can drink what they like where they like. It’s not based on consumption if you do a package. That’s very helpful for controlling costs.”

Besides saving money, the all-inclusive nature of cruising events makes them easier for planners. “It’s a one-stop shop,” says Jerilyn Giacone, director, charters, meetings and incentives for Crystal Cruises. “If they go to a hotel that’s not all inclusive, they have to piece together hotel, meals, entertainment and more.”

Meetings at sea may prove less distracting than gatherings in other locations. “A benefit of having your corporate event at sea is that your attendees tend to participate in most to all of your functions because there isn’t the opportunity to wander off for competing experiences, like there is at a hotel,” says Athanasiou. “Also, on a ship, you know exactly who is on board at all times, so this offers more security, both for your event as a whole and for sharing confidential information with your group.”



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Planners say one advantage of hosting meetings aboard a cruise ship is that the ship can be more cost efficient because pricing is all-inclusive.



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As attendee activities go, no hotel can compete with a visit to the Galapagos Islands, offered by Celebrity Cruises.

Giacone adds, "Once planners get their group on the ship, there's such a great opportunity for relationship building and bonding, whether it's between their clients or their employees who have won the award," she says. Whether they're participating in activities on the ship or sharing the adventures they've had on off-shore excursions over dinner, attendees have plenty of shared experiences to talk about.

There's another reason to consider hosting incentive trips or meetings at sea: People love them. "The evidence is in the repeat programs we get," Giacone says. "We have companies that come to us multiple times and tell us that participants were motivated by a cruise. They worked hard for it."

## Entertainment Options Abound

From a pure entertainment standpoint, there's a lot to be said for meetings at sea. Depending on the ship, the list of activities can read like that of a full-service resort with casinos, night-clubs, live music, dance performances, spas, fitness centers with exercise classes, pools and lounging areas, educational lectures and cooking classes.

The entertainment available on a cruise ship is only part of the equation, however. The opportunities for on-shore excursions are often equally, if not more, appealing to participants. "One of the great things about an incentive trip at sea is you can give your winners a great variety of destinations in a one-week period," Giacone says. "You can see lots of different cities — more than you would ever be able to do on a land program, or that would cost a lot more to do through a land program."

Bertolucci says it's important to get

on land occasionally. "We like to do something to get groups off the ship on certain days and nights by doing private excursions or private events somewhere," Bertolucci says. "That can be dinner in a palace if you're somewhere in Europe, or a beach buyout during the day, where you buy out a beach club and have activities and team building." Organizing groups for activities such as boating, jet skiing and volleyball also provides great opportunities for networking.

Cruise lines are even offering a way for participants to get involved in corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs on their trips. Celebrity Cruises recently started sailing on their new Celebrity Flora ship, which was built specifically to sail in the Galapagos Islands. "We designed our new ship with dynamic positioning to 'anchor' without anchors and solar panels to supplement electricity, and our guests have planted over 38,000 trees," says Lisa Vogt, associate vice president, incentives, meetings and charter sales for Celebrity Cruises.



Photo by Michel Verdure / © 2019 Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings

The Norwegian Pearl offers the Vienna Meeting Room and other amenities similar to hotels.

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Many planners who choose to host meetings aboard a cruise ship, such as one from Royal Caribbean International's fleet, say the F&B is just as good or better than land-based hotels and resorts.

Courtesy Royal Caribbean International Tim Aylen/BVS



Also available is the first-ever cruise ship glamping experience, which offers participants a chance to camp out under the stars on the top deck.

### Cruise Your Own Way

Massive ocean liners loaded with thousands of leisure travelers aren't the only option for companies hosting meetings and other events. Many cruise lines have ocean or river ships small enough that a single company can buy them out entirely. "The level of customization and branding opportunities are immense and the comfort and security of knowing 100 percent of the guests are your attendees is immeasurable," Athanasiou notes.

A full-ship buyout may sound prohibitively expensive, but it isn't always

the case. Giacone works with a company that typically takes 100 people on its incentive program and needs 50 rooms. They typically bought a group room block on an ocean ship, but one year, she crunched the numbers and discovered they could buy out a river ship with 53 rooms for just a little more upfront cost. What made the difference, she noted, was that the river ship package included the cost of shore excursions, while the ocean ship did not.

An added benefit to doing a full ship charter, Bertolucci says, is that it's easier to keep the group together and focused. There aren't other people to strike up friendships with or activities planned for times when people are scheduled to be in meetings and classes.

### Get Organized to Overcome Challenges

Cruises may be all fun and games for attendees, but they do present a few challenges for meeting planners. "Ships have limited real estate, so to speak," Giacone says. "There's limited space for meetings. Also, you can't fly in speakers because the ship is always moving."

To deal with that, it's important to be flexible, she says. "Be prepared to think creatively, and be open to new ideas and maybe a different way you can program the incentive experience. Maybe we can't do it the same way as a hotel, but we're really open to working with planners and providing solutions. If you need to do a banquet and we don't have room on a ship, we can help arrange a banquet during a shore excursion."



Photo by Michele Verdure / Courtesy of Oceania Cruises

The pool beckons on the MS Insignia, one of the Regatta Class ships for Oceania Cruises.

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Ensuring people make it onto the ship is one thing; making sure items such as welcome packets, room gifts and program décor get onboard is another. "Incentive programs tend to have large shipments of program materials," Athanasiou says. "The items not needed immediately can be shipped to a secure storage facility and loaded onboard the ship on the first day of the cruise. Items needed in attendees' suites upon arrival can

As an alternative, remember that custom charters might be an option for

Event planners who have never had a meeting or incentive trip at sea might ask the cruise line to connect them with professionals who have. "We're always willing to introduce you to another planner who has done a cruise program with us to trigger conversations and talk about best practices and what they learned on their last voyage," Muller says. Those conversations can be just the ticket to success with cruising events.

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## MEDICAL/PHARMA MEETINGS //



### Pharmaceutical, Medical and Bioscience Meetings Present the Ultimate Challenge

BY DEREK REVERON



# A HEALTHY PLAN

They must handle logistics as well as track, collect and report all forms of payments and “transfer of value,” including gifts, speaking fees, taxes and gratuities, involving doctors, researchers and other Health Care Professional (HCP) attendees.

They must report the data, including attendee credentials and demographic information, to client companies for reporting to regulatory authorities. They must comprehend and keep up with complex and constantly changing laws, rules and regulations governing HCP attendees. They must negotiate with hotels to surmount the combined challenges of a seller’s market for hotels; caps on F&B and guest room spending; limits on using luxury properties; and notoriously short meeting lead times in the pharmaceutical industry.

The obstacles will increase as the healthcare industry, the world’s largest employer, continues rapid growth, increasing demand for medical meetings. Planning medical meetings has so many obstacles that even veteran healthcare industry planners trip up.

#### TRAINING IS KEY

According to Jacqueline Beaulieu, HMCC, director of strategic marketing and client engagement with Poretta & Orr Inc., an event, exhibit and strategic marketing company, “One of the biggest mistake planners make is not being prepared and sufficiently trained. One way to address this to have a foundation of information and I think the HMCC course “Healthcare Meeting Compliance Certificate” that Meeting Professionals International offers is a must-have first step for anyone that is a medical or healthcare meeting planner,” Beaulieu says. “Many pharma companies are including in their contracts a prerequisite for planners to have the HMCC designation,” Beaulieu adds. Also, the Events Industry Council offers the CMP-HC certification.

In addition to obtaining training, planners must keep a keen eye on changes in regulations governing pharmaceutical meetings. According to Amber Heintz, CMP-HC, HMCC, account director at Bishop-McCann, a meeting, incentive and event company, “Be aware that what was compliant

yesterday may not be compliant today, so stay plugged into resources that keep you up-to-date.”

#### COMPLIANCE RULES VARY

“Another mistake some planners make is assuming that all companies’ business practices are the same,” Heintz says. “Be aware that there is an element of interpretation when it comes to some compliance issues. Practices may vary from company to company.”

Indeed, one of planners’ biggest headaches results from the differing rules of the several authorities that govern the compliance and reporting of HCP spending. A key regulatory organization, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturing Association (PhRMA), limits transfer of value to physician attendees to \$100 at HCP-facing meetings.

Other regulatory sources include the Advanced Technology Association Code of ethics; the U.S. Open Payments Laws, part of the Affordable Care Act, which allows the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to levy financial penalties for incomplete, late or inaccurate reporting; and the Sunshine Act, which requires public reporting of payments to



Courtesy Deposit Photos



doctors and hospitals. In addition, each U.S. state and foreign country have their own rules as do medical industry organizations within every nation.

According to Pat Schaumann, CMP, CSEP, DMCP, HMCC, president and CEO, Medmeetings IQ LLC, "There are 88 countries with some type of healthcare compliance-required reporting. Every country does it differently and every company does it differently." Keeping up with all the regulations can make a planner's head spin. No wonder medical meeting planners sometimes make mistakes.

## COLLECTING, REPORTING DATA

Here are some common missteps, according to experienced pharmaceutical meeting planners.

Schaumann says a key error is not checking changes throughout the planning and meeting process that can change transfer of value. "Changes occur in registration, airfare, hotel etc. that may exceed the required limitations on transfer of value and this should be monitored throughout the planning process," Schaumann says.

Waiting until the end to compile HCPs' spending data is a big no-no. "Constantly monitor changes before, during and after meetings to catch potential infractions," Schaumann says. "Know the compliance rules of companies, countries, and/or clients."

Laura Konwinski, senior director, global compliance, BCD Meetings and Events, agrees. "Records should be checked frequently, especially when it comes to attendance verification and meal function participation," Konwinski



Courtesy Deposit Photos

advises. "Incomplete or inaccurate documents can cause a lot of problems down the road."

## TIPS FROM EXPERTS

Heintz offers the following advice to help them HCP reporting process go smoothly. "Automating the process assists will avoid mistakes," Heintz says. "Advising HCP attendees before the meeting what will be reported allows them to decide if this is something they want to participate in. Additionally, advise your vendors (venue, transportation, etc.) and internal teams at the beginning of the planning process what information you will need to collect."

Schaumann, suggests taking the following steps before and during meetings to assure accurate collection of spending data.

- Make sure all the pre-planning that includes budgets and compliance regulations are not changed by on-site planners or sales reps.
- Pay attention to where HCPs are primarily licensed. This will affect what the limitations will be on F&B, hotel rates, gifts, etc.
- Check international rules and regulations that foreign attendees must follow.
- Determine if the state where the meeting is held has its own Open Payment regulations that differs from the U.S. Open Payment rules.
- Track onsite anything that is perceived as a possible rule violations. Have a process in place to record the incident, time, parties involved and possible solutions.

## BOOKING HEADACHES

Myriad laws on HCP spending is one of several issues that often make finding the right hotel a struggle. Planners must overcome the combined challenges of a seller's market for hotels; limits on spending, room rates and using luxury properties; and lead times typically shorter than those for other types of meetings. Good communication with hotels from the start is crucial due to the complexity of medical meetings.

Says Beaulieu, "Yes, it is a seller's market and some healthcare business is not as attractive as it once was to some properties." Beaulieu's advice: "Be up front from the start about the potential of short lead times. Have a plan to address it with the hotel," she says. "One thing that could be considered is a multiple meetings deal. This could make it a bit more palatable for the hotel."

According to Schaumann, upon first contacting a property the first question planners should ask is, "Do you have experience with medical meetings? If not, keep moving up the chain until you find the right person in the hotel to work with. If a property or venue does not have an experienced medical meeting contact, it would be advisable to choose another property," Schaumann says. "This is hard to do but working with a hotel that does not understand the complexities of medical meetings will make the process harder."

## TOO LUXURIOUS?

Many properties are essentially off limits to medical meetings for two reasons: The properties are genuinely luxury properties with room and F&B rates that make it impossible or difficult to meet spending limits and caps. Or the properties only appear to be swanky and planners and stakeholders believe it might create the impression of excessive spending. The latter reason alone often causes planners to avoid a property.

According to Schaumann "It's rather sad that some hotels and venues are overlooked because of the 'business appropriateness' of the properties. Resorts, gaming destinations and four or five-star hotels, cruise ships, etc. work hard to overcome the stigma of perceptions."

But it is getting somewhat easier for planners to deal with the perception issue.

"It has become somewhat better as medical companies realize that HCPs need to be engaged and there are ways that these venues can accommodate their budgets and preferred

"Be aware that there is an element of interpretation when it comes to some compliance issues."

## AMBER HEINTZ, CMP-HC, HMCC

Account Director  
Bishop-McCann  
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"Incomplete or inaccurate documents can cause a lot of problems down the road."

## LAURA KONWINSKI

Senior Director, Global Compliance  
BCD Meetings and Events  
Tampa, FL





locations,” Schaumann says. “Planners should at least explore their options as many properties can show they are not ostentatious.”

Beaulieu advises planners not to categorically rule out luxury or luxurious-looking properties altogether. “Paying particular attention to how a property is marketed to attendees could make a difference,” Beaulieu says. “A hotel that is prohibited by one medical company may not be prohibited by all.”

## NEGOTIATION FRUSTRATION

Even after narrowing down choices, it can be unusually difficult to negotiate a contract due to the buyer’s market and complex needs of medical meetings. As result, planners of pharmaceutical meetings may face more rejection from hotels than their peers. “Planners need to understand that hotels may say ‘no’ to your business,” Schaumann says. “This should not be taken personally. Sometimes, with all the specialized requirements of F&B caps, room caps, non-disclosure agreements, short time turnarounds and space usage, it could be a loss for the property. Many hotels do everything possible to meet the needs but realize they can’t lose money.”

One approach all planners should take to tough negotiations is to try to create a financial win-win for both parties. However, that’s more difficult with medical meetings.

Heintz offers the following negotiation advice. “Be up front on your spending caps so the hotel knows what they are agreeing to and why the food and beverage minimum may or may not be an issue for you,” Heintz says. “If the room rate is an issue, be

up front about it or choose a non-peak time of the week or year. Since lead times are getting shorter and shorter, know what you are looking for and only include hotels that fit this expectation,” Heintz says. “Be specific about what you need and what you are open to. Ask for concessions that will actually make a difference to the specific program without simply providing a general laundry list.” Finally, Heintz says, “Ask would I want my business? Is what I am asking for mutually beneficial?”

## HOTEL PARTNERSHIPS

Properties that understand the complex needs of pharmaceutical meetings make a planner’s job much easier. “Such hotels are truly invaluable to the overall success of pharmaceutical meetings,” Heintz says. “They understand what is being asked of us and work side-by-side to find a solution that works for all. It saves time in trying to explain why we need the amount of space we do, why we need to stay within a certain spending restriction for F&B, and that understanding is everything.” Hotels that know little about how medical meetings function can contribute to compliance issues.

According to Beaulieu, “If hotels don’t understand the healthcare meeting planner’s world, it could cause problems down the line from understanding menu caps to how a company’s bill is broken out. Lacking understanding of the implications of not following a company’s requirements could cause costly difficulties such as fines.”

But it’s not easy for planners to find and establish good long-term working relationships with hotels knowledgeable about medical meetings. According to Danielle MacFarlane, CMP, director, meetings solutions with BCD Meetings & Events, “Finding these partners can be a challenge, but it’s worth the time to educate them to make future bookings easier.”

But it is getting easier to find knowledgeable hotels.

## HOTELS SEEK TRAINING

“Some hotel salespeople attend pharma-specific trade shows, and some national hotel sales contacts are great resources,” MacFarlane says. “Several hotel brands align their national sales offices by vertical

markets including medical meeting markets and are knowledgeable about their assigned markets.”

According to Schaumann, “Many hotels are taking training and receiving their HMCCs to better prepare them for medical meetings. There are several hotel chains that offer HMCC training several times a year.”

Hotels are ramping up training because they want larger shares of the surging medical meetings market. According to Schaumann, “It is projected there will be over one million medical meetings within the U.S. this year. Hotels know that they need to capture this audience and be prepared to understand compliance and the terminologies that their medical client prospects will use.”

Properties must also understand the many medical-meeting rules that apply to F&B, an area that Schaumann says remains tough for hotels and planners to navigate. “When I wrote my first edition of ‘Breaking the Code to Healthcare Compliance’ in 2013, food and beverage was the No. 1 challenge in planning medical/life science meetings,” Schaumann says. “As I write the fifth edition of the book now, it is still the No. 1 challenge in healthcare compliance reporting.”

Planners offer the following advice on how to plan meals that comply with medical-meeting regulations.

Keep in mind that spending caps don’t necessarily mean boring, tasteless food and beverage. “It simply means creative planning,” Heintz says. “Meal planning should be a partnership with the hotel chefs to ensure your program can benefit from their expertise in this important area.” Consult with a hotel’s chef after finding out what other groups are meeting on the property. “What are they offering?” Heintz says. “Could there be cost savings if menus are similar and can the chef buy in bulk?”

Schaumann agrees. “If anyone can manipulate the menu and work with pricing caps while being creative, it is the chef,” she says. “Ask the chef what is being served to other meeting groups within the hotel and, if possible, use the same menus. This could help with spending.”

## COPING WITH CAPS

There are several developments, Schaumann adds, that are making it somewhat easier to comply with meal spending caps. “Some companies set their own food cap limitations internally and share them with their HCPs (in the registration form) what they will be spending on meals,” Schaumann says. “They offer options where particular HCPs may exceed the internal limitations.”

“The HCP can then pay the difference on their own or the company will offer vouchers for the HCP to use at a food outlet within the hotel,” Schaumann says. “Or a medical sales rep may take the HCP to an appropriate restaurant.” Although assuring compliance with meal caps can be frustrating, Schaumann advises planners to avoid bending basic rules to comply.

“I would caution planners not to ask the hotel, restaurant or venue to upgrade their menus by having them charge a



**Pat Schaumann, CMP, CSEP, DMCP, HMCC, President and CEO, Medmeetings IQ LLC, says planners should “Know the compliance rules of companies, countries and/or clients.”**

fee such as space rental when there isn’t a fee,” Schaumann says. “Any time you move monies you are creating a risk,” Schaumann continues.

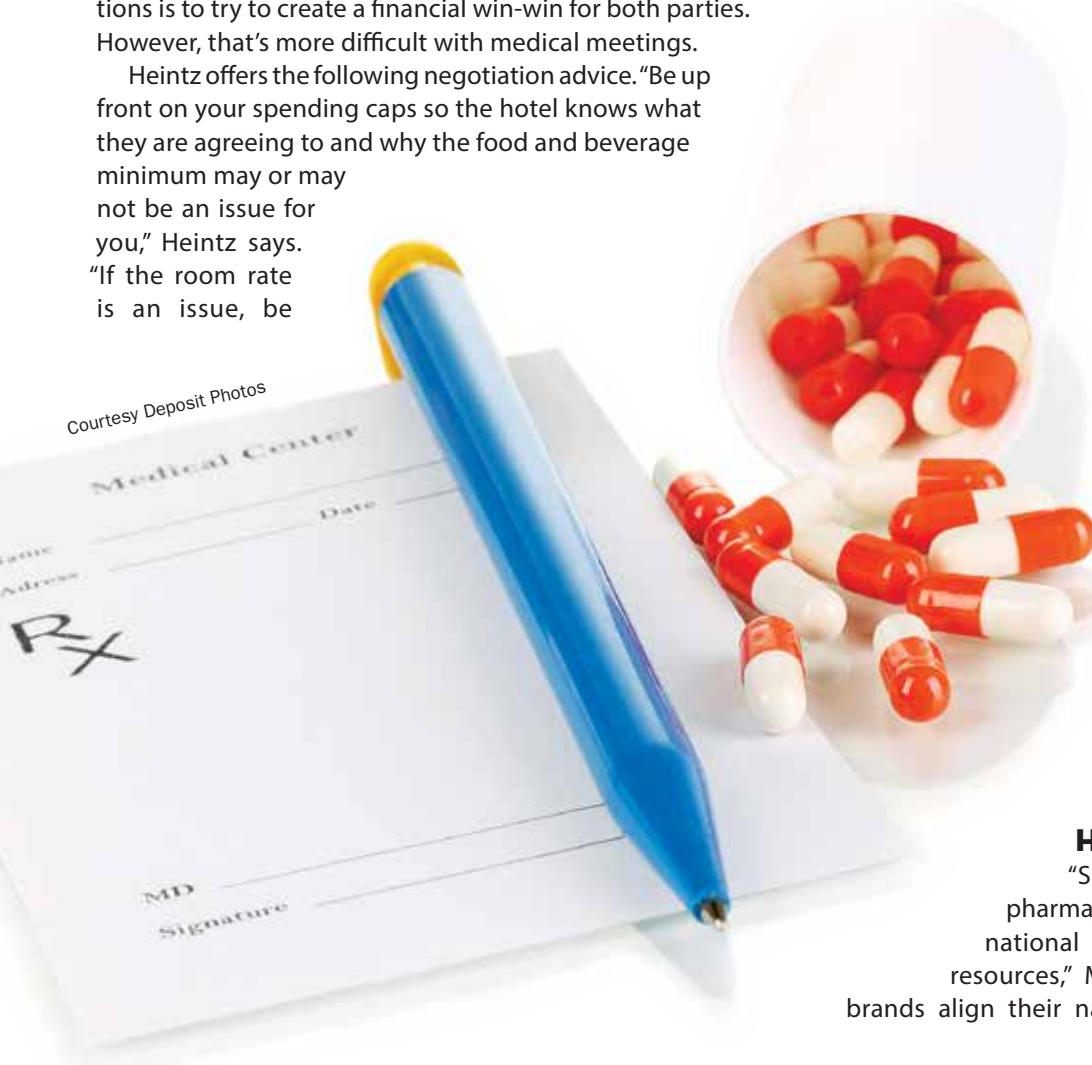
“Venues put the actual spend into the appropriate buckets (such as catering) once your program is over. They won’t lie about how money was spent. An audit would find that the actual spend on F&B was not accurate as reported. This could be construed as a violation (of spending caps).”

## PHARMA MEETINGS GROW

Expect the number of pharmaceutical meetings to rise due to the demand. Most HCPs receive an average of 16 event invitations a year but attend about eight, according to the report by American Express Meetings & Events titled, “In-Depth Look at Medical Meeting Content: What Drives HCPs to Attend, Engage and Learn.” Also expect rules and regulations governing HCP spending to become more numerous and complex. As a result, planners will need to work even harder to keep up with the growth in meetings and changes in regulations.

Schaumann’s advice to planners is: “Stay educated and know the best resources. Keeping current with changing laws and regulations is daunting.”

**C&IT**

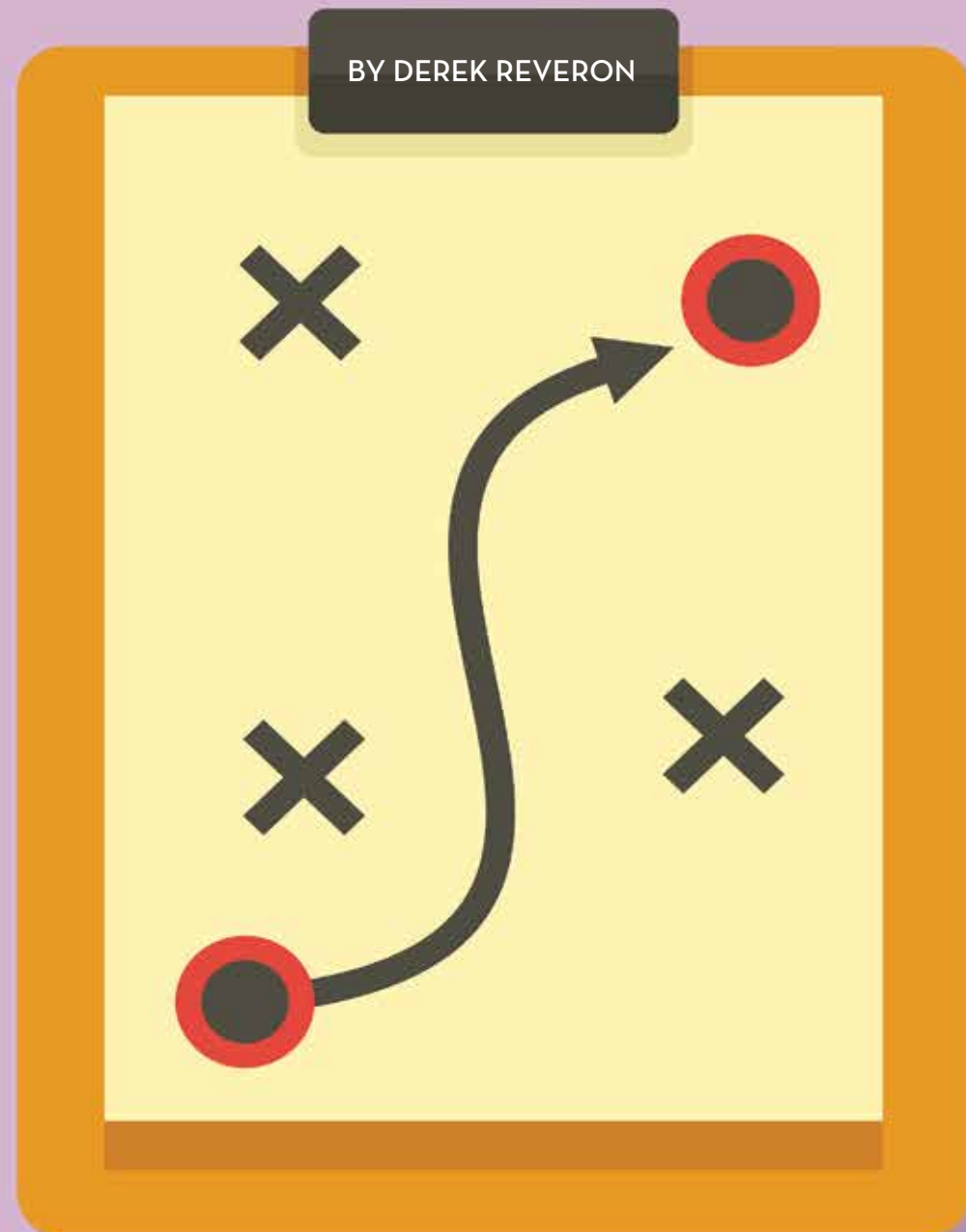


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# STRATEGY SESSION

BY DEREK REVERON



*Here's  
Some  
Advice  
About  
Dealing  
With  
Late  
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**Y**ou spend months planning a meeting and finalize plans shortly before the start date.

Days before the meeting, the corporate stakeholder wants to change the theme and replace some speakers.

Due to the changes, you must rebrand the meeting with new signage, change programs, notify attendees and alter several other details. Your stress levels rise as you undertake "last-minute madness."

Late changes are inevitable, and some have little or no significant impact on attendee experiences and meeting goals. But other changes can threaten to derail a meeting.

The bigger and more numerous the changes, the more they jangle planners' nerves.

Planning is one of the most stressful professions of all even without unexpected problems. However, last-minute changes can boost planner stress to an unnerving level.

A survey of planners shows that 76 percent of respondents cite last-minute changes as one of the most stressful aspects of planning.

According to Terri Woodin, CMP, vice president, marketing and global meeting services for Breckenridge, CO-based Meeting Sites Resource, "There is a reason meeting and event planning is fourth behind fire, police and air traffic controllers in stressful jobs. When things threaten to fall apart at the last minute, it may seem like a plane is going down, but you can control things with communication and planning," Woodin says. "Remember, everyone is looking to you to lead them and if you freak out, so will they."

## Common Changes

Some last-minute surprises occur more frequently than others.

According to Maralynn Adams, CMP, owner and senior event director of Campbell, CA-based The Corporate Event Group, LLC, "Changing agendas is very common, which can affect how many meeting rooms I need, timing and resources — and possibly my sanity," Adams says.



Photo by Sarah Peterson

**Rachel Sieracke of CSI DMC puts on the finishing touches before a meal. Hot food is important, so a speaker who goes long can cause a problem.**

She cites a particularly stressful example. "Recently, a client suddenly needed six additional meeting rooms a few weeks before the event, and you can't just pull those out of the sky."

The meeting space in the hotel was booked. "We ended up having to use suites for meetings, which increased costs considerably because we had to book for two nights to secure availability," Adams says.

She adds, "Hotels typically won't comp sleeping rooms as meeting space like they will for meeting rooms, especially when they know that you're desperate," Adams says. "And paying to change out the furniture in suites is no fun, either."

Common late changes Woodin has faced include cancellation or addition of sleeping rooms; changing F&B counts and meeting space counts and sets; sudden changes in weather forcing outdoor events to be rushed inside; protests impacting the arrival and transportation of attendees; and cancelled flights.

## Flight Headaches

A.J. Bownas, CMP, general manager of Washington, DC-based CSI DMC, says one the most common and frustrating late-occurring problems results from changed airline reservations.

"We provide support for arrivals and departures and, having put manifests together, it is expected that 20 percent of these flights will change," Bownas

says. "With VIP groups it's more like 50 percent. A casual 'I switched my flight' has effects with greeter schedules at the airport, driver schedules and making sure manifests are updated for everyone in the chain."

Bownas has also handled seemingly countless last-minute head-count changes.

"It is often the case that numbers creep up after registration for an event has 'closed' then drops off the day prior to the meeting and onsite," Bownas says. "That's why it's important to get past meeting history to know if a group generally gets a 20 percent no-show rate, is always sold out or needs to add VIPs the day of the meeting."

The most difficult last-minute changes are those that hardly ever occur and those out of a planner's control.

According to Woodin, "These are ones that involve security risks, weather, strikes, etc. because there is only so much you can do, like managing what is in front of you."

Bownas cites an example of a situation out of his control.

There are times when attendees show



up at the last minute to gain entry to popular private tours or venues that are very protective about who enters.

"On these occasions, we give as much fair warning to attendees as possible, reminding them of deadlines for submitting details on attendance, and beyond that we have to respect the rules that are in place," Bownas says.

### A Near Disaster

Danielle Miles, manager of conferences and meetings for Minneapolis-based metroConnections, responded to a very unpredictable last-minute occurrence that nearly ruined a meeting.

"A water main broke shortly before the meeting was set to begin at a hotel," Miles says. "I needed to source hotel rooms elsewhere. Luckily, I had taken 20 minutes out of my site inspection at the hotel we booked to also tour an adjacent property and meet with them. I knew before the panicked call from my client that the neighboring hotel had similar function space and room capacities."

So, Miles called the nearby property. "It quickly provided accommodations for much of our group," Miles says. "Once the water issue was resolved, we were able to resume the general session part of our program in the originally-contracted hotel space with a steep discount on all services."

Adams thinks changes involving crowding more people into existing space not designed for the increase is one of the most difficult issues.

"I'm totally down with more attendees who want to attend your event but scrambling to accommodate 1,000 people with a space and budget that you have for 500 people can make me extremely twitchy," Adams says.

Ignoring the meeting agenda can also bedevil planners onsite at the last minute.

Many planners say one of the biggest potential problems that cause last-minute meeting changes is traffic.

Photo by Sarah Peterson



"... we give as much fair warning to attendees as possible, reminding them of deadlines for submitting details on attendance, and beyond that we have to respect the rules that are in place."

### A.J. BOWNAS, CMP

General Manager  
CSI DMC  
Washington, DC



"A well-crafted meeting is like a game of Jenga," Adams says. "You start yanking out basic foundational blocks and all of the items that rely on them crumbles."

Adams cites the following example: "What if your keynote speaker runs 30 minutes over on their session before lunch?" Adams says. "Can you guess how many attendees will remember the overcooked and lukewarm food over the 30 minutes of extra content they received?"

### Lean on Experience

Last-minute changes can't be prevented altogether. But veteran planners can use their experience to anticipate potential problems and have strategies in place to keep meetings on track.

Woodin offers the following advice, especially for in-house corporate planners who deal with executives known to make last-minute changes.

"You cannot prevent most unpre-

dictable, last-minute changes because of what causes them in the first place," Woodin says. "However, if you have an executive that always seems to make changes onsite, then manage the person's expectations during planning to help prevent late changes."

Woodin adds, "Also set expectations of what can be managed onsite, including the havoc created for the facility or hotel as well as costs that can be associated with possible changes. Communication is the key."

Also, Woodin advises, ask yourself key questions in advance.

"If flights are cancelled how are you communicating to attendees and to the hotel for rooms, meeting sets and F&B?" Woodin asks. "If bad weather causes an outdoor event to be brought indoors, does your contract already include a backup room and can you make the call early enough so the hotel staff can make it happen?"



"When things threaten to fall apart at the last minute, it may seem like a plane is going down, but you can control things with communication and planning."

### TERRI WOODIN, CMP

Vice President, Marketing and Global Meeting Services  
Meeting Sites Resource  
Breckenridge, CO

### Changing Business Needs

Some last-minute corporate meeting changes are caused by the sudden sale or purchase of a business right before booked meetings take place. In that case, Woodin says, keep the following in mind when more or less space is suddenly needed.

"Businesses are in a constant state of change and hotels are full, so when an organization purchases other companies and suddenly you need more rooms and more space, think outside the box," Woodin says. "Everything is usable space at a hotel. Work with them to modify sets and use restaurants closed during the day for a comfortable solution."

Tracking the types of last-minute changes that occur most frequently can help anticipate and address chaos.

According to Miles, "Tracking changes is a design for operating better next time. In the over 20 years I have been planning, I've made many mistakes, but never the same one twice. It's helpful to track changes and conduct a full post-meeting debriefing with internal and external planning teams on successes and improvements in the planning process moving forward."

Adams agrees: "Tracking last-minute changes with a simple form listing the change, the date, the estimated cost if possible as well as what you did to affect things positively or even negatively can be valuable," Adams says. "I hold a lot of that info in my head but logging them is more helpful."

Adams doesn't have a specific checklist that would help avoid last-minute changes, "but I do have a number of

questions that I ask and items that I bring up through the pre-planning process that help guide me away from crisis situations I've survived in the past," Adams says.

### Budget Extra Funds

Having a contingency fund for last-minute and emergency issues is also helpful.

"I always have a contingency fund budget line," Adams says. "I do my very best to use the last 25 years of planning experiences to think of all the things that could go wrong, but there are still surprises. More often than not, you'll need money to deal with them. The fund has saved my butt and my client's a number of times. There is always some unexpected cost or an 'Oh, I forgot!' item that pops up. Who thinks they'll ever need emergency popcorn and machines wafting the smell of freshly popped popcorn into a room filled with a thousand people? It happened to me."

Some of the trickiest last-minute issues result from requests which can significantly impact factors such as cost, meeting goals, attendee experiences and programs.

The late requests can come from an executive or stakeholder who has worked with the planner from the start, or another who hasn't. In either case, planners must agree to the changes or explain how they can upend a meeting.

Jennifer Collins, CMP, president and CEO of Silver Spring, MD-based JDC Events, has dealt with last-minute executive changes several times. "We have worked with clients whose presi-

dent or other leader would inevitably add a new session or other aspect to an annual event," Collins says.

### Anticipate Changes

Collins foresaw a last-minute change by keeping her ear to the ground, so to speak.

"Once, we heard that additions would be the result of the leader having met someone at a lunch or other event when out and about," Collins says. "So, we came to expect that we would have to add a session or speaking arrangement at some point during the event. This expectation was helpful in that we were able to provide space holders in anticipation of it occurring. It didn't entirely make it easy, but because we knew it would be a possibility, it helped to lessen the shock."

Strategies for dealing with last-minute changes may be somewhat different for in-house corporate planners and third-party planners. It can be tougher for internal corporate planners to make the case against drastic last-minute changes, and they must typically comply or persuade the executive to compromise.

On the other hand, the concerns of external third-party planners include securing repeat business from the client and protecting the planner's professional brand with a successful meeting.

### Useful Advice

Both internal and external corporate planners can use the following tips to handle last-minute changes from corporate bosses and other stakeholders.

- Keep records of last-minute changes and categorize them by type of meeting to determine which occur most often and why. For example, do the changes tend to be room counts, speaker cancellations, technology, set-ups, etc.
- Create back-up plans for areas most vulnerable to last-minute changes.
- Include stakeholders in key meetings to lessen the chance of surprise change demands. Getting continuous buy-in from stakeholders should be part of the planning process.
- Designate an "emergency response



team” to respond to last-minute changes and empower it to make quick decisions.

According to Catherine Chaulet, president of Washington, DC-based Global DMC Partners, “It may be incredibly useful to appoint a few people on your team or hire temporary staff to focus on troubleshooting changes or issues that may come up so that you have a dedicated staff ready to deal with last-minute changes.”

Chaulet says last-minute changes that aren’t actually difficult to handle may seem over-burdensome and stressful because planners have such heavy workloads. “So, pre-delegating last-minute changes to team members who have a slightly lighter workload or hiring temporary staff for this purpose could go a long way,” Chaulet says.

### Speaker Issues

As a range of last-minute problems involving speakers can flare-up, use the advice below to help resolve issues.

- Build extra time into the agenda, set-up, travel, logistics and other key elements.
- Have a contingency plan for speakers and entertainers. When booking through a bureau, include in the contract possible replacements the bureau can provide due to a late cancellation.
- Bring in speakers, especially keynoters, one or two nights before they are scheduled to speak. Allowing speakers to fly in at the last minute is asking for problems.

According to Miles, technological problems are among the most frequent speaker-related problems to flare-up at the last minute. “A presenter may have trouble loading content onto a screen, a Lavalier Microphone isn’t working, or a projector goes down and now everyone is uncomfortably shifting in their seats,” Miles says.

Having an overall program producer on hand can address such last-minute tech issues. “This role is invaluable in ensuring not only that back-up systems are in place but also that they are tested,” Miles says. “Working with presenters



Maralynn Adams, CMP, Owner and Senior Event Director at The Corporate Event Group, LLC, says “A well-crafted meeting is like a game of Jenga.”

to rehearse presentations before they get on the big stage sets all players up for success.”

Consider in advance how to rearrange the schedule if a speaker cancels. Or have a company officer or local speaker ready to substitute.

### Stand Your Ground

Some planners make themselves vulnerable to last-minute changes. Here’s how: Suppose, throughout the planning process, an executive or stakeholder makes suggestions that the planner approves. Suddenly, right before the meeting, the stakeholder makes another, more significant suggestion. The stakeholder, accustomed to planner approval of changes, expects acquiescence. But giving in could ruin the meeting.

When faced with such a situation, consider the following advice from experienced planners:

- Don’t be a pushover simply to avoid making waves. In planning, the customer isn’t always right.
- Listen carefully to the request and use it to start a conversation about possible compromise that will avoid ruining the event.
- If you disagree with the change, explain in the most professional way possible its negative impact on the meeting and attendees.
- Detail what’s needed to make the

changes and what can and cannot be accomplished during the time remaining before the meeting starts. In other words, reset stakeholder expectations.

### Handle Stress

The bigger and more complex the last-minute change, the heavier the stress and the greater the necessity to remain calm. Develop strategies to handle last-minute chaos. Here are tips from planning pros:

First, accept that late changes are a fact of planning life. Then, relax. According to Miles, “How you handle stress is what sets you apart as a planner. Pressing the pause button is always a good first best practice. Keeping a calm and cool front is the goal.”

Next, advises Woodin, “Breathe deeply and bring all your experiences to the situation to take control.”

Adams finds that follow-up on lessons learned after implementing nerve-racking, last-minute changes can help anticipate potential issues and thereby reduce stress in the future.

When it comes to last-minute changes, Murphy’s Law rules. However, planners can use their experience and that of peers to anticipate obstacles and create strategies to resolve them.

As Woodin advises, “Think quickly, have alternate plans in place and connections in the destination that can help, and budget extra funds.” **C&IT**

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## FAMILY FRIENDLY MEETINGS //



Photo Courtesy of Kalahari Resorts & Conventions

Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in Wisconsin Dells, WI offers bumper cars, water slides and more.

# family values

## Children and Spouses at Meetings are an Added Value Proposition

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

A business conference that includes family members, especially children, may seem counter-productive to work. Won't parents be distracted and more likely to skip out on core conference events? Will parents who do attend daytime functions likely leave them early and skip important evening networking

with colleagues? Don't children add the necessity for more security, oversight or even insurance requirements?

Maybe. But many corporations and meeting planners have found that adding family can actually drive attendance at conferences and promote productive networking. Attendees can also stretch their hard-earned dollars by tacking a

family vacation onto the beginning or end of a business conference for which their travel expenses are paid.

Setting is important for all meetings, of course, but even more so for those that include family. Fortunately for planners, there are slew of destinations and resorts that are both business- and family friendly.

### FAMILY FRIENDLY KALAHARI RESORTS

Prince Corporation, a Wisconsin-based wholesale distributor and manufacturer of agricultural, lawn and garden, pet and wild bird products, believes in the value of family at its fall booking show. And Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in Wisconsin Dells, WI, is the perfect place for meetings at which attendees bring family along. In fact, Sam Solatycki, Prince Corporation marketing supervisor, says they've met at Kalahari approximately 20 times and the attendees love it.

"The resort was chosen in part because of the proximity to our headquarters, proximity to an airport, quality of the event space and attractions in the area," Solatycki says.

Among its business attributes are the business center the group utilizes during the show and the fact that there are many different restaurants on property ideal for client meetings. "The location works great for us," Solatycki continues. "The convention center at the Kalahari is state-of-the-art and keeps improving. The hotel rooms are great and Wisconsin Dells definitely doesn't have a shortage of attractions."

Not surprisingly, Solatycki points to the resort's indoor/outdoor water park as the No. 1 attraction for his group. "A lot of our attendees come from out-of-state and nobody else has water parks like the Dells." But his attendees also use the theme park, bowling alley and movie theater, among other amenities.

Family is included in every aspect of this event. "Allowing family at our meeting is an excellent way for us to incentivize customers to attend. The Kalahari resort is a great family location and it allows our attendees to take a mini-

vacation with their families while also getting some work done."

It's a success for both company and attendees. "The majority of our attendees have their stays paid for by Prince Corporation, and the stay includes all that the Kalahari has to offer. We don't plan other activities for families with children because there's so much to do there already."

Solatycki notes that some of the attendees even bring their families with them to the show floor. "But this doesn't generally change the way the event runs," he says. "We have food on the show floor for the entire event and children are allowed to come in without a name badge and enjoy that part of our show as well."

From his point of view, there isn't a tremendous difference between a meeting at which family attends and one that doesn't include family in terms of the success of the event. "The main difference with a conference that families will attend is the choice in location. It might be slightly more expensive to host a conference at a premier resort like the Kalahari, but it makes the event that much more fun and our customers continue to look forward to the show every year."

To other planners considering a family friendly meeting, Solatycki says, "I think the best advice is to choose a

venue that already has activities for your customers. This will save you the headache of having to plan extra mini-events during your main event. Also, don't skimp on the food. The last thing you want is hungry, unhappy attendees."

Clark Sell, president and founder of THAT Conference, which is also very much about family and community, holds the annual conference at Kalahari Resort. Sell refers to the conference as "summer camp for geeks," and including family in the core event was integral to the vision of the conference from the beginning.

"Technology is the theme that brings us all together," Sell says. His goal with the conference, however, is not just to connect tech geeks, but to develop the common connections that link the community of professionals, families and businesses together.

Kalahari is an ideal setting for this conference and resort amenities are incorporated into the conference schedule. The conference is positioned as "the last chance to get away before summer slips away," so Sell tells potential attendees they will "geek out on everything from writing some epic code to making paper airplanes," and have time to cool off in one of the resort's many pools.

The schedule includes sessions such as Intro to Hacking Web Applications, Scary Stories About Artificial Intelli-

Prince Corporation, which has selected Kalahari Resorts & Conventions for their annual meeting 20 times, appreciates the resort's various family activity options.

Courtesy of Kalahari Resorts & Conventions







Courtesy of Hosts Southern California

**Hosts Southern California's client had a customer appreciation event with a red, white and blue theme, and bubbles were handed out to children.**

The customer appreciation event was the big offsite attraction. "Everyone brings their family members and attendance eclipses 5,000 guests. Menus are tailored to be child-friendly in both food and beverage," Davis says. "And interactive entertainment was spread throughout the event to encourage constant flow into new spaces. A carnival packed with games along with a park of full inflatables were two major features intended to keep children engaged for the night."

Davis points to San Diego's many attractions as one reason it works so well for family inclusive meetings. The San Diego Zoo, SeaWorld San Diego, the USS Midway Museum and LEGOLAND California Resort are just a few of the options. "San Diego is a very safe city with an endless offering of family friendly activities, from theme parks to water sports and more."

Menus, too, were created with kids in mind. "Our menus were tailored to be more child-friendly and included less 'adventurous' food," he adds.

The group utilized the San Diego Convention Center, which Davis says, "has all the features of any modern convention center," and is well set up to execute portions of this meeting. "The front driveway made it very easy for us to organize the motor coaches for the children's program."

In terms of planning the meeting, Davis says there are definitely differences from planning a more traditional meeting for adults only. "The biggest difference is in the proposal of food and beverage as well as finding ways to keep children engaged. Security for the children is a constant concern and must be addressed proactively and consistently. Parent attendees are much more apt to engage and enjoy the conference when they know their families are having a great time enjoying the destination."

gence Gone Wrong and a data structures and algorithms refresher, along with a family track that provides hands-on, activity-based learning for kids of all ages and an entire track for spouses and kids. Each night there are different events to attend, from a pig roast to a game night and, of course, a water park party because this is Kalahari.

While the conference is aimed at developers and other tech professionals and enthusiasts, Sell emphasizes that a core value of the gathering is "shining a light on the importance of family and caring for yourself."

## THE RIGHT DESTINATION MATTERS

When it comes to family friendly cities, San Diego is high on the list, according to Martin Davis, DMCP, general manager of Hosts Southern California, a Destination Marketing Company. Last year, Davis worked with a company whose conference drew some 6,000 attendees, and family was very much a part of it. The attendees were lodged in nine different downtown hotels, all within walking distance of the San Diego Convention Center. "This made it easy for families to come and go from the center," Davis notes. "Our clients engage their annual conference as an opportunity for many of their clients to come together and enjoy a sense of com-

munity. Many of the attendees are independent operators of businesses located in small towns throughout rural America. For a lot of them, the annual conference is a chance to bring their families to a top-tier destination where they can conduct business, learn, network and also enjoy a family vacation."

Davis' group assisted with many of the event's details, functions and activities. "We provided airport arrival shuttles for five days and airport departure shuttles for two days. The weeklong duration for airport shuttles is uncommon but was offered so that families flowing in and out throughout the week would have transportation accommodations, ensuring a positive first and last experience," he says.

Davis continues, "We also provided the transportation for our client's children's program, a four-day camp program during which 800 children per day were taken out to see popular attractions. Coach drivers were screened for security purposes, and the scheduling of drivers had to be consistent every day to ensure they were with the same group of children each day."

Davis says optional activities were offered on the final day of the conference in order to "provide families with unique experiences that could not be found online."

Davis says that when planning a meeting with family, "The more attendees the merrier. We find that many attendees are more likely to attend a conference when they can tie a family vacation into the travel plans. With families comes an increased sense of community and inclusion," he says. "Planners should plan for the positives of that."

There's no question having children at a meeting presents some challenges. However, Davis says, "The opportunities that come with a family friendly program far outweigh the limitations."

No matter where in the country a group wants to hold a family inclusive meeting, there are places to accommodate them, from the seaside to the mountain tops and from coast to coast. Here are several others to consider:

## SEA ISLAND A FIVE-STAR RESORT

Georgia's Sea Island has been welcoming families to its lush environment for many decades and has received the Forbes Five Star designation 11 years in a row. It offers 42,000 sf of indoor meeting space able to accommodate groups of five to 500.

There's no lack of activities for children to engage in while the adults are in meetings. To start, Camp Cloister provides age-appropriate fun and educational experiences for ages 3-14, many of them outdoors taking advantage of the resort's setting on a barrier island. There's a Junior Naturalist program as

"San Diego is a very safe city with an endless offering of family friendly activities, from theme parks to water sports and more."

**MARTIN DAVIS, DMCP**  
General Manager  
Hosts Southern California  
San Diego, CA



well as an activity titled Fish Dissection, during which kids learn the "ins and outs" of fish commonly caught off the coastline. Families can participate in activities together, too. Nature tours, dolphin tours, fishing trips, tennis and archery are all good choices.

Additionally, Sea Island offers options for groups when attendees bring children along. Camp Cloister is available, but there's also Kid Fit, an Under-the-Sea workshop, Cloister Kids Crafts and Kids Night Out for those times when the adults are engaged in evening functions.

## A FAVORITE AT WALT DISNEY WORLD

Camp Dolphin, at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Lake Buena Vista, FL, is a supervised program for ages 4-12, and parents get two hours free with a dinner at one of the specified restaurants or a treatment at the resort's Mandara Spa. Additionally there are games and activities sched-

uled throughout the resort, not to mention five pools and a beach.

The Dolphin recently added a new 1,600-sf meeting space, The Caribbean Room, bringing the resort's total to 87 meeting rooms. The Swan is opening a new grab-and-go food venue in the lobby, much like the outlet in the Dolphin lobby so popular with meeting attendees. And planners take note: Shula's Steak House at the Dolphin has been completely updated and refreshed and still offers a variety of flexible private dining spaces as well as the option of a buyout.

## LOEWS RESORTS AT UNIVERSAL ORLANDO

Attendees at any of the Loews Universal Orlando hotels have easy access to the Universal Orlando theme parks, restaurants, shopping and services. The parks alone offer plenty for spouses and children to do during meetings. Which hotel you choose may depend on the size of your group and your meeting space needs. Loews Portofino Bay Hotel features 750 rooms, three themed pools, a spa, eight restaurants and ample meeting space, including the 15,000-sf Tuscan Ballroom. Loews Royal Pacific Resort has 1,000 guest rooms a lagoon-style pool and beach and 85,000 sf of function space. The Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando features a 12,000-sf pool with



**Loews Portofino Bay offers seven play areas for children, including Fievel's Playland.**





Photo by Ryan Jones / Courtesy of The Broadmoor

a giant waterslide — who doesn't love that? — along with 650 guest rooms. Meeting space includes the sleek Velvet Bar, accommodating 125 for a reception.

It goes without saying that this is the destination for those who love the Harry Potter series. Universal's Harry Potter attractions are super popular, so consider providing attendees and/or spouses/kids with the Universal Express Pass, which includes both Harry Potter-themed lands.

### THE BROADMOOR HAS IT ALL

Tucked into the base of Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs, CO, The Broadmoor has been welcoming attendees and families for a century. Golf, tennis, hiking, horseback riding, falconry, zip lining (that can include a 180-foot rappel), paintball, geocaching, laser tag and swimming — what's your pleasure? The resort offers all guests junior tennis camps and one-hour tennis "PeeWee Drills." And the historic bowling alley can be booked for events. Attendee spouses and teens should consider the resort's highly acclaimed spa as well.

Many of the adventures fall under the auspices of The Broadmoor Outfitters, who supply the appropriate gear in addition to leading activities, so no worries if you packed light. Groups that book the resort's intimate wilderness lodging options — Cloud Camp (say yes

to the mule ride), The Ranch at Emerald Valley and Fly Fishing Camp — have activities and services already built in, many of them perfect for families.

The Broadmoor partners with an exceptional local DMC, meaning planners don't have to think of everything. Staff at the Colorado Springs PRA office can provide pretty much anything groups want and need and can be onsite to work with planners before and during the meeting. A children's program and a few swimming pools are no longer enough to make a resort a top pick for families. Ideal locations, great programming and convenient accommodations are a must when you're traveling with little ones.

### AULANI, A DISNEY RESORT & SPA

Aulani's epic kid's club ensures that parents and kids will have a perfect stay. Located on Oahu's small, leeward Ko Olina waterfront community, the resort features 21 acres overlooking a quiet, calm beach ideal for kids. Disney touches are ample but subtle — character breakfasts and dinners, hidden Mickeys, sightings of Goofy by the waterslide — with numerous "regular" dining options available such as the Hawaiian-themed Ulu Café, 'Ama'Ama fine dining, appetizers and cocktails at The 'Olelo Room, a fish and chips shack

**The Broadmoor offers a host of outdoor and mountain-themed activities for families, including Soaring Adventure, with rope bridges, zip lines, hiking and more.**

and a shaved ice counter. A nearby off-property shopping and dining complex provides numerous dining opportunities at every price point.

The complimentary kids club, Aunty's Beach House, is a 5,200-sf kiddie paradise, complete with themed activities, superhero and princess dress-up, trivia, arts and crafts, fresh lei making, beach excursions, a movie room, video games and a backyard play structure. Attendees hoping for a bit of island culture can book the Ka'Wa'A lu'au, exploring the area's island culture through a canoe exploration story, which can be enjoyed with or without kids.

While the kids are at Aunty's, mom and dad can play a round of golf at the 18-hole, Ted Robinson-designed Ko Olina Golf Club or get a massage at Laniwai — and if the kids want to join, there are group massages and salon treatments for the whole family, too. And, of course, there's the property's water slides, lazy river, numerous pools, grotto, splash zones, and private snorkeling lagoon.

C&IT

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# DATA DRIVEN

BY MAURA KELLER

*Technology is  
Making a Huge  
Impact on the  
Meetings Industry*

Effectively using technology is as important to meeting and event planners as to any Fortune 500 company — maybe even more because when planning an event every dollar counts. Technology has become a mission-critical tool for meeting planners and for many, the internet offers inexpensive, viable solutions for their technology needs. With each new day, combining technology with meeting planning tools — through web sites, apps, social marketing and other IT initiatives — brings planners exciting opportunities to make each meeting and event a memorable one.

## IT STARTED WITH SMARTPHONES

As Michael Toyne, event solutions technology strategist at BCD Meetings and Events explains, around 2010 smart phones became popular and everyone suddenly had a mini computer at their fingertips. With these phones and tablets, attendees embraced a paperless existence; in particular, when traveling for meetings, laptops, notebooks and paperwork began taking a back seat to mobile devices.

"In the early stages, event apps allowed attendees to have an event agenda, program information and electronic note-taking abilities in the palm of their hand," Toyne says. "Social media further shaped how mobile apps affected events, allowing the apps to improve networking opportunities, further key messaging, enhance brand awareness and cultivate interest thanks to platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram."

Flash forward to today's technology use, and the key word is "data." As Toyne explains, by using technology to leverage integrations, meeting planners can now connect all aspects of event attendees' interactions — before, during and after an event.

For example, exhibitors can use lead retrieval by leveraging the event app; information collected during registration can help tailor the attendees' experience from personalization to targeted

"... there is a push to now make meetings more fun, interactive; less slow-paced — which technology can help solve."

**LAUREN CASELLI**  
Meeting Planner and Owner  
Lauren Caselli Events  
Bozeman, MT



information; stakeholders can collect data, integrate with their CRM and analyze and track and support their return on event.

"They can consolidate lead retrieval from exhibitors, session check-in, mobile app usage, pre-event registration information and post-event surveys to create a true picture of an attendees' experience, and tell a story based on their event goals," Toyne says. "If their event goal is to generate more sales, they can track which attendees have an increase in sales after attending the event, and use data target behaviors to further drive revenue and support business goals."

Lauren Caselli, meeting planner and owner of Lauren Caselli Events agrees. She says for a long time, the meetings and events industry lagged behind the general consumer industry with regard to event technology.

"It took what felt like forever to convince people to use such things as conference apps and on-stage Q&A software, because there was this feeling that meetings were supposed to be about people and not about technology" Caselli says. "However, now, with so much content being shared online, people don't have to go to meetings anymore to get relevant content and so there is a push to now make meetings more fun, interactive; less slow-paced — which technology can help solve."

This year, Cvent is celebrating 20 years in business and, as such, the Cvent team has been reflecting a lot recently on how the technology side of this industry has changed. What some people don't realize is that Cvent's CEO

and founder, Reggie Aggarwal, actually started Cvent because he was planning events for a nonprofit and he knew there had to be a better way to manage them with technology.

"He has this terrible picture of his desk from that time that is the epitome of what event professionals loathe — disorder and chaos," says Rachel Andrews, director of meetings and events, Cvent. "If anything, technology evolution within the meetings and event industry has been slow and steady. First it was the emailing of event invitations, then it was online registration, and then technology took over the onsite check-in and badging experience. More recently it was the addition of mobile event apps and virtual meetings. Only now, more than 20 years later, are we in a place where all of these things are expected. Event technology has helped to automate manual processes and streamline each piece of the event life cycle — but it's taken a lot of time."

## EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

According to Craig Dooley, senior vice president with SDI Meetings and Incentives, technology and new solutions in the meeting industry seem to follow a typical curve. "In early stages, there is a mad rush and confusion and predictions of seismic shifts in how we do business," Dooley says. "As we gradually move through that curve, solutions rationalize, new ways of engaging and supporting customers are established and efficiencies are gained. In simple terms, we've moved from paper and manual management to cloud-based data and web programs to enable every



At a recent Cvent Conference, attendees had access to many different kinds of meeting technology. Cvent, which was founded 20 years ago, is one of the leading meetings technology companies.



Courtesy of Cvent

aspect of the meeting industry — but ever-evolving and improving.”

For customer-facing tools, SDI is seeing web-based, self-managed registration is expected, and apps are quickly following for pre-event and onsite engagement. “Within SDI’s business, the back-end management tools in budgeting, space planning, resource management, reporting and analysis are all key tools that allow planners to be tremendously more efficient and provide greater customer service,” Dooley says.

Other key tools that have been embraced today with the corporate and incentives meeting segment and strongly in use are mobile apps. As Toyne explains, event apps have made strong enhancements to incorporate a full attendee experience such as polling, surveys, contact exchange, 1:1 meetings and more.

“Outside of also being a real-time communication platform, an attendee app can incorporate other technology needs, such as beacons, heat mapping, lead retrieval and more, to track and report back on an attendees onsite journey,” Toyne says.

Speaking as an event planner, there is a specific way Andrews like to do things and unless technology makes those things easier, she won’t use it.

“I think that’s how many of my

peers feel. They don’t have the time to learn how to use a complex piece of technology — they need something they can use out of the box and that will help them work more effectively and efficiently,” Andrews says. “Website design is a big one. As one of the first touch-points event professionals have with their attendees, the registration website needs to deliver an engaging experience.”

But most event professionals do not have the coding needed to design the experience they envision. So tools that allow them to build a unique website that helps them drive more registrations and increase attendance are quickly adopted. Tools that automate data collection and organization are also key to a meeting planner’s success. For example, Andrews points to tools that automatically code and organize attendee information and session attendance, or that can automate email marketing messages based on geographic region or registrant title.

“Finally, floor plan and diagramming software and VR are more essential solutions that help venues and suppliers showcase event spaces or experiences, and help meeting planners design and map out an event without ever having to set foot in the actual space,” Andrews says. “There are so many moving pieces

to planning and organizing events that any tool that can automate and reduce human error are widely embraced.”

In Caselli’s experience, online registration software has changed formerly clunky paper or phone registrations for events. Recently, there have been a slew of more affordable technology tools such as Eventbrite, Bizzabo and Ticket Tailor that have made it more affordable for non-enterprise businesses to host their events inexpensively and effectively.

“Additionally, I’ve noticed more conferences jumping on the conference app bandwagon, which is great since events are often marred by printed materials that become outdated by the time the event rolls around,” Caselli says. “Communication at events is always the biggest hurdle to creating a seamless attendee experience, so conference apps with push notifications have changed the game when conferences have onsite changes.”

Caselli adds that space planners have come a long way in the past few years. “Floor plans used to be a nightmare that we’d need to hand draw or hand create, but now, online software like AllSeated have made it easier to create a floor plan quickly and efficiently,” Caselli says.

In addition to the above, there are several ways in which these tools have

improved the meetings and events landscape. Planners can:

- Quickly communicate with their attendees important information, including last-minute changes.
- Plan future events based more closely on what attracts and/or motivates their attendees.
- Attract the attendees who meet their event and/or business goals.
- Create targeted tracks and communication plans.

“Meeting planners should embrace technology because not only is it not going anywhere, it is constantly evolving and will only be expected to be used more and more in their events,” Toyne says. “Technology can be used to help define a client’s ROE by giving measurable data points to tell the story of how their event engages with attendees and drives the client’s meeting goals — be it sales, brand awareness, attendee engagement or more.”

Caselli agrees that technology is important to remove some of the less pleasant aspects of events. For example, Q&A and facilitated discussions are extremely important to attendee engagement and experience, but no one appreciates it when one person hogs the microphone.

“Using live streaming Q&A so that participants can pose questions via an app is better, allowing more questions

“Meeting planners should embrace technology because not only is it not going anywhere, it is constantly evolving and will only be expected to be used more and more in their events.”

**MICHAEL TOYNE**

Event Solutions Technology Strategist  
BCD Meetings and Events  
Chicago, IL



to be asked and answered,” Caselli says. “All clients are looking for ‘the next big thing’ or ‘the best creative idea’ and what that really comes down to is making sure attendees have a truly seamless, engaging, fun event. A lot of times, those things can be achieved through removing friction points — a poor registration experience, poor communication, or poor onsite check-in — rather than bringing in fire-breathers and light shows, although those are helpful as well.”

A few years ago Andrews came across a tool called Passkey, which at the time, was offered by one of Cvent’s competitors. At its core, Passkey is a room block-management solution.

“Any event professional can tell you that room block logistics is one of the

most tedious and time-consuming aspects of our jobs,” Andrews says. “I went to Aggarwal and gave him my business case for why I wanted to use it for our events. He was 100 percent on board and I’ll tell you what — it was life-changing technology. Now, years later, Passkey is an integral part of the Cvent platform. It came full circle. In short, it’s a combination of things that have made our jobs easier with the addition of technology. It’s the automation of manual processes, the reduction of human error, the consolidation of information and the collection and dissemination of data. When technology offers all of these things, there is no going back to Excel spreadsheets and sticky notes.”

Some of Cvent’s clients are seeing



Courtesy of BCD Meetings and Events

Among other things, smartphones also changed the meetings industry, allowing attendees to do everything from event registration to onsite check-in paperlessly.



massive increases in attendee engagement with the implementation of a mobile app — while also reducing printing and labor costs. Mobile apps offer additional attendee touch points to gather session or event feedback, to drive engagement through gamification, or to highlight a unique offering by sending push notifications when an attendee passes by an RFID beacon.

“It all comes down to how the technology enhances the attendee experience. By delivering a more engaging and unique experience, attendees will become repeat customers and can become your biggest advocates,” Andrews says.

## NEWFOUND CHALLENGES

While each technology tool used within the meeting and events arena makes one aspect of event planning easier, they also present a problem: data integration and tool fragmentation.

As Steen Tromholt, CEO of Conferize explains, the solutions are often not complete, resulting in a fragmented experience for both users and organizers. “I see bigger events invest a lot of budget into custom design and attempts to extend and increase the attendee experience,” Tromholt says. “Usually things look good, but the digital design extending the event experience is usually lacking. The reason is: It’s hard.”

As Tromholt explains, usually data is stored in different clouds with little or no integration. “That’s the real problem. You see organizers manually trying to update the data sets across their various tools such as tickets, websites, CRM, email marketing and social apps, etc.,” Tromholt says. “Of course there are ways to integrate though APIs, etc., but it’s usually a technical effort most organizers don’t have in-house. Or you’ll have to invest in an expensive high-end enterprise solution, that’s usually overkill for the needs of events.”

And while there are over 200 event-specific mobile apps, usually they’re hard to integrate with the core planning setup. “We think there are a few good ones, though we haven’t seen a



Courtesy of Cvent

‘go-to’ social solution to improve the attendee experience,” Tromholt says. “You’ll need first to solve the core job-to-be-done of organizers before you can really improve the attendee experience, because it needs to be an integrated experience and rely on the same dynamic database across the various parts of the products suite.”

Although the meetings and events industry has come a long way from the days of Excel and long, paper to-do lists, there is still so much opportunity in the technology arena within the meeting and events industry. Attendee tracking and feedback, event reporting and delivering a better understanding of how to maximize event ROI are all areas where technology use is still in its nascent stages of adoption. “VR and AR offer different types of opportunities that are less focused on streamlining manual processes, but rather on increasing engagement and enhancing the overall experience — helping event organizers make a lasting impact with that elusive ‘wow’ moment that attendees will talk about long after the event is over,” Tromholt says. “It’s certainly an exciting time to be in the industry, and I see technology continuing to play a significant role.”

Caselli stresses that the point of events is to get people to engage with other, real humans. “I think people will continue bringing exciting technology to events,” Caselli says. “But I think that eventually, in order to be ‘different,’

**Rachel Andrews, Cvent director of meetings and events, says “Event technology has helped to automate manual processes and streamline each piece of the event life cycle — but it’s taken a lot of time.”**

which the meetings industry loves, planners and clients will start swinging back towards the center, limiting onsite technology usage for communication only, and encouraging fun ways for participants to connect face-to-face instead of through their devices.”

And Tromholt agrees when he says that the fundamental value of meetings is the absence of technology; meeting up in real life. As Tromholt explains, more than ever we need to discuss and solve important topics and advance quite a lot of discourses within climate, sustainability, business, financial, medical, etc.

“We can’t do that without better meetings. Today we get less than 50 percent of the value that we should’ve gotten as attendees,” Tromholt says. “We need carefully tailored tools that augment networking, knowledge sharing and active participation. To achieve that, you need a two-sided — for planners and attendees — holistic solution that doesn’t interfere with the core offline value of meetings, but significantly improves the value and effectiveness of meeting up in real life. So, good event tech is as little event tech as possible.” **C&IT**

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# the Islands Have It

## Sun and Sand Sit Atop the List for Attendees at These Destinations

BY MAURA KELLER

Courtesy Photo

**W**ith sun-warmed beaches, iridescent waters and breathtaking sunsets, the Caribbean and the Bahamas is naturally linked with the ultimate personal and professional get-aways. Within the last several years, these island destinations have become more than just a few moments in paradise. In fact, various locales within the Caribbean have turned into key destinations as meeting planners discover that they can double as the perfect meeting and event setting. Hosting meetings in the Caribbean and in the Bahamas offers a combination of adventure travel and memorable surroundings.

Resorts in such popular locales as the Bahamas, St. Lucia, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic are hastening to offer meeting and event packages for meeting planners looking for unique locales. Resorts throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands, including St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, as well as Aruba, offer packages that can meet the needs of meeting and incentive events of all sizes.

### The Bahamas Are Beckoning

Diane Murray, CMP, CIS, HMCC, president of SITE Chicago and president of Options4Meetings, recently organized a customer appreciation program for 65 attendees at the Sandals Royal Bahamian resort in Nassau, Bahamas.

"The closeness and ease to get to the islands from the U.S. is very appealing," Murray says. "There are lots of flights, as well as English-speaking residents. Beautiful blue calm waters and sandy beaches, casinos, and friendly locals are also key." In addition, Murray has found the Bahamas to be low-risk, safe, clean and well-maintained islands, offering both

One of Aruba's many delights is horseback riding on the beach, while Grand Hyatt Baha Mar in Nassau, Bahamas offers golf with fantastic views and more.



Courtesy of Grand Hyatt Baha Mar



metropolitan areas as well as beach paradise locations.

To make a meeting or event in the Bahamas as streamlined as possible, Murray works with the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism to stay abreast of island developments, services and new venues. “There are numerous resorts with great meeting space options,” Murray says. “Since the Bahamas has been a destination for many years it has well-developed services.”

Lauren Grech, CEO and co-founder of LLG Events, says that in the Bahamas, the new Grand Hyatt Baha Mar resort destination is definitely a differentiator. “It’s a luxury collection of three oceanfront properties, offering an option for every preference,” Grech says. “Between this collaboration, there’s over 40 dining and nightlife options that are perfect for planners to create a unique experience, or for attendees to unwind after a day in a conference. Everything you need is onsite.”

According to Grech, the Bahamas was selected as a destination for an event the firm recently planned because traveling to the ocean oasis is as easy as domestic travel.

There are direct flights from a number of cities, and the destination takes care of customs and immigration before you fly home to the United States,” Grech says. “That way, you don’t have to worry about any travel stress after having spent a few days relaxing in the Bahamas sun.”

## Bilingual Bliss

Puerto Rico has long been one of the world’s most popular destination locales. Offering high-quality facilities, stunning backdrops and hundreds of different activities, Puerto Rico is the perfect place for a meeting planner to find exactly what they want.

While many think of Puerto Rico as being strictly a “beach” destination, the country offers a wealth of options for those who seek more variety for their event. In addition to some of the world’s most celebrated locales — from golden beaches with turquoise waters, to old colonial cities teeming with charming



Atlantis, Paradise Island offers attendees a chance to kayak with dolphins.

Courtesy of Atlantis, Paradise Island

buildings, cobbled streets, and classic archways — Puerto Rico gives planners the utmost in choice and opportunity for their meeting or incentive event.

Considered to be one of the most beautiful, culturally diverse and accessible islands in the Caribbean, Puerto Rico is a sunburst of tropical indulgences. If this is paradise — and many say it is — being a U.S. territory it affords all the advantages of U.S. travel, with plenty of exotic flourishes to savor. Even veteran planners, accustomed to crossing off names of destinations with “been-there, done-that” abandon, find themselves returning year after year to this palm-swept Caribbean jewel.

Old San Juan, an eight-square-block city that dates back to the early 1500s, is teeming with narrow cobblestone streets studded with cobalt blue stones and pastel-colored buildings with filigreed wrought iron adornments, statue-filled plazas, mosaic-tiled churches and chapels, and the red cupolas framing Spanish colonial-style buildings.

Condado is San Juan’s sophisticated mecca of glittering hotels, Las Vegas-style casinos, and Latinesque discos, with all of the high-rise hotels, haute couture boutiques, art deco buildings and white sandy beaches, Condado is the closest thing to Miami Beach in the Caribbean.

Looking for a fun group excursion? Castillo San Felipe del Morro, a six-tiered fortress, rises nearly 150 feet above the waves that lap at its base.

For centuries, this monumental walled fort repelled raids of pirates and other oceanic marauders. Its labyrinth of secret tunnels, ramparts, vaults and dungeons beckons the adventuresome attendee to explore.

Just 100 miles long and 35 miles wide, Puerto Rico is compact, allowing visitors to venture into the island’s remote depths on day trips from San Juan. It is a magical destination, where the familiar mixes with the exotic and with its close proximity to the United States, Puerto Rico is the shortcut to paradise for meeting and event attendees.

## Caribbean Gems

The Dominican Republic is truly a natural paradise and a wonderful, low-cost alternative for many meeting and event planners. This tropical treat offers world-class resorts, pristine beaches, off-the-beaten-path ecotourism opportunities and awe-inspiring undersea water life. Attendees can explore seaside villages, bike through jungles teeming with gushing waterfalls, or shop to their heart’s content in many of its charming historic colonial towns.

Nearby Jamaica offers a unique beauty all its own. All-inclusive resort amenities abound throughout this iconic Caribbean destination. A meeting mecca that celebrates the country’s spirited culture, Montego Bay is an ideal location for event attendees looking to work some and play some. With more than 3,000 species of flowering plants, Jamaica is a wonderland

of “all things tropical” and truly offers an idyllic paradise for respite seekers and adventure lovers alike.

Michelle Esteban, CEO and lead planner at The Occasion, organized an incentive event in Jamaica for 120 top sales employees for a corporate client. “This was their annual sales incentive ‘President’s Club’ trip and the event was held at the Half Moon hotel in Montego Bay,” Esteban says. “This hotel is among the top three most luxurious hotels on the island and is a mixture of ocean view villas along with

single guest rooms.” All activities held during the five-day event could be held on property because the venue’s expansive size allows for plenty of space.

“Jamaica is an amazing destination with spectacular venues. The vibe in this country is like no other Caribbean island,” Esteban says. “The food, the people and the beaches are only a few reasons why this destination is so popular.”

Over the five days, there were private events which included restaurant buy outs, private musical bands, iron chef competitions with local chefs as well as a few flown in from Canada. There were also personalized gifts and personalized company decor throughout the venue with specific directional signs for guests.

Like Jamaica, Saint Lucia is the ideal destination for meetings, incentive, conferences and special interest groups. With nonstop flights from major cities, Saint Lucia welcomes delegates from across the U.S., Canada and globally. The island has a diverse range of accommodations to fit all budgets and niches — from smaller properties where a group can do a takeover, to larger resorts that can accommodate 100+ rooms. Many of the properties offer state-of-the-art equipment to host meetings and conferences.

Saint Lucia offers conference facilities right on the beach at a wealth of resorts, hotels, guest houses and



Courtesy of Diantha Boekhouwer

Diantha Boekhouwer, conferences and events liaison at the Aruba Convention Bureau, says attendees can do a Jeep Safari in Arikok National Park in the morning and hit the beach later.

private villas tucked in the beautiful surroundings. And when meeting planners combine business with sightseeing tours and other activities, they can offer meeting and event attendees a balanced approach to work and relaxation. From the beach, to the famous mud baths, zip lines, cultural and heritage tours and street parties, attendees can find a variety of activities to enjoy.

For meeting planners looking for help in orchestrating a tropical getaway on Saint Lucia, there are several destination management companies with which the St. Lucia Tourism Authority works. They can help prepare itineraries to suit the needs of attendees, who can be as adventurous as they would like.

Aruba also has become a favorite among meeting planners who are looking for the wealth of culture and adventurous options for attendees.

Aruba recently hosted an annual incentive trip where 230 top-qualified sales executives attended after winning a trip for excellent performance. This was a five-day trip held in one of Aruba’s top resorts on Palm Beach. The meeting planner worked with a local DMC where they organized custom activities for the group, including a nice welcome experience on the beach and a “dine-around tour” where the groups were divided in three and rotated to experience a different culinary treat for each course.

The meeting planner also included an activity day where participants could choose between ATV rides, a catamaran trip, horseback riding, deep-sea fishing or kite surfing.

“The objective was to organize a trip that they cannot do on their own,” says Diantha Boekhouwer, conferences and events liaison at the Aruba Convention Bureau. For example, they organized a night at the Ayo Rock Formations, a unique experience in Aruba’s nature — which is usually only open during the day and hosted an original event at night with a band, fireworks, etc.

“The island of Aruba is very diverse and people love the fact that they can be on a 4x4 utility vehicle tour in the middle of the arid Arikok National Park in the morning and on the beach a few hours later,” Boekhouwer says.

Aruba is not a destination for very large groups. Since it’s a small island, it can comfortably host groups of up to around 500 people. While they do host some larger groups, the hotels are smaller and more focused on these sizes of incentive groups.

However, it an easy destination to plan for with experienced hotel staff and destination management companies on the island. A significant number of groups come year after year due in part to the ease of planning.

To make the most of a meeting or incentive trip to Aruba, meeting





Courtesy of LLG Events

planners should reach out to the Aruba Convention Bureau. Their main objective is to make planning as easy as possible as they work with all partners on the island to ensure the best experience possible for every group.

Aruba offers a wealth of different types of meeting spaces, including executive boardrooms, expansive ballrooms, state-of-the-art multimedia theaters and many options offering wall-to-wall views of the Caribbean. More than a dozen properties can accommodate conferences as well, and each is equipped with banquet halls, meeting rooms and breakout venues for classroom sessions and smaller events.

And best of all, the island is situated outside of the “hurricane belt” which means visitors to Aruba can enjoy a wealth of outdoor events, activities and group excursions with very little rain or major seasonal storms impacting their experiences.

### The U.S. Virgin Islands at Their Best

The U.S. Virgin Islands offer an idyllic Caribbean setting for meetings and incentive travel. Its various accommodation options, activities, attractions and island flair appeal to groups of all sizes. Also, with “no passport required” for U.S. citizens, the Virgin Islands are accessible for meeting groups seeking a hassle-free, Caribbean destination.

Although the islands is still recovering from past hurricanes, about 80 percent of accommodations across the U.S. territory are open and accepting

guests; other properties continue to repair or rebuild.

Melissa Sparks, global account director with HPN Global, recently orchestrated a corporate incentive event for their top producers along with their spouses/guests. It was held for 35 couples at The Buccaneer in St. Croix for three nights and four days.

“All receptions and dinners were at the resort, which did an exceptional job of servicing the group,” Sparks says. “The couples had plenty of time to relax, gather and explore the island.”

The Virgin Islands destination was chosen by the company president, who had spent a personal vacation there years earlier. At the time of booking, the resorts were limited due to the 2017 hurricanes, which hit the islands very hard. However, The Buccaneer was open and ready to accommodate them.

St. Croix, the largest of the three U.S. Virgin Islands, offers meeting and event planners a variety of options for meetings in paradise. Attendees can enjoy a horseback ride along scenic trails, play blackjack at the casino or relax on miles of barely touched white sand beaches. St. Croix features venues ranging from museums to historic forts, sugar mills and great houses for groups seeking to incorporate cultural elements in their itinerary.

The smallest of the three islands is St. John, which also provides many options for group activities. Countless beaches and offshore activities including Lime Out VI, a new floating taco bar, are available for

Lauren Grech, CEO and co-founder of LLG Events, picked the Bahamas for an event because traveling there is as easy as domestic travel.

groups to explore. Given that 2/3 of St. John is part of the Virgin Islands National Park, groups can enjoy the various hiking trails and ruins dotted throughout the island.

A selection of private settings for off-site offerings can be found on the island of St. Thomas. Paradise Point, which is 700 feet above the capital city of Charlotte Amalie, features multilevel decks and can accommodate up to 200 guests. Coral World Ocean Park is available for buyouts and Yacht Haven Grande and St. Thomas Yacht Club are ideal for corporate gatherings seeking great views.

In addition, the United States Virgin Islands Department of Tourism has launched Purpose in Paradise, a program that enhances the territory’s network of “community-based philanthropic activities and strengthens the region’s ability to attract visitors in search of purpose-driven travel opportunities” according to a news release. The initiative pairs visitors who are interested in helping the territory’s recovery efforts with local nonprofit organizations in need of assistance with specific projects.

In addition to the opportunity to participate in a purpose-driven project, Purpose in Paradise allows visitors who may not be able to donate time in person to contribute financially to the territory’s recovery. Groups such as Friends of Virgin Islands National Park in St. John, the St. Croix Landmarks Society and the Family Resource Center in St. Thomas are just a few examples of the many organizations that are performing essential community-based work.

The U.S. Virgin Islands are easy to get to and you do not need a passport,” Sparks says. “Needless to say, it is absolutely beautiful and perfect for an incentive retreat. I have personally been to both St. Thomas and St. John many times and St. John is my absolute favorite place in the Caribbean.” *C&IT*



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## F&B AND OTHER ACTIVITIES MAKE THIS DESTINATION A PLANNER FAVORITE

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

Planners need no introduction to Music City. Nashville's reputation as a premier meeting destination extends across the globe. While country music put Nashville on the map, today the city's music scene covers many genres — and it's not the city's only draw.

Keystone Automotive Operations Inc./NTP-Stag brought its 2019 Expo to Nashville earlier this year, an invitation-only event of more than 2,500 set at Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center. Melissa Holland, CMP, event manager with Keystone, says the city and hotel are an excellent fit for her group.

"Nashville is a return city for our event and

attendees. It's a great destination providing ease of access to and from the airport, Gaylord Opryland, downtown area destinations as well as many historical entertainment options. When our attendees and exhibitors were made aware of our return, they were excited about heading back to Nashville with its many offerings, including the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Bridgestone Arena and the infamous Broadway Historic District: Honky Tonk Highway," Holland says.

"With the winter weather unpredictable, Gaylord Opryland offers an all-under-one-roof inclusive destination to our attendees. We enjoy working with the Gaylord staff. They go above and beyond to ensure we're well taken care of, and the accommodations are second to none."

Photo Courtesy of Jacqueline Marko



Holland's group has worked with Gaylord Hotels for the past 10 years in Texas. "We always find the property and services to be first class," she says.

It was in 2011 that Keystone decided to try the Opryland property. "We knew it was the right destination for our event. Our January program rotates to various locations each year. Knowing the level of service, hotel and venue offerings and year-over-year satisfaction we get with growing with the Gaylord team and properties, it's a win-win."

Holland offers high praise for members of the Opryland team. "During our program, we had a banquet captain who was outstanding. Our food and beverage lead was new to the events team with this activity, and while she is very detail-oriented and knowledgeable, she was nervous about the biggest miss — not having enough food for our major events."

The team, Holland says, pulled it all together, especially the banquet captain. "He made her feel at ease and updated her every step of the way. He went above and beyond in our opinion to put her and our worries at ease, and everyone raved about the food and beverage. Opryland truly has a well-oiled machine."

Keystone primarily used the Ryman C Exhibit Hall for the Expo and meal functions. "We also had several meeting rooms equipped with seating, and a projector and screen set up to accommodate up to 250 attendees for our education series, which precedes our opening event. The staff was very hospitable, regardless if they were new or a seasoned event



"Nashville is becoming known for its quirky neighborhoods featuring local artisans and chef-driven restaurants, including some of the top-rated restaurants in the country."

#### JACQUELINE MARKO, CMP, DMCP

Regional General Manager  
PRA Nashville and PRA Louisville  
Nashville, TN

professionals, in working with each of our key event individuals."

Holland says one thing planners and attendees should know is that there's a lot of walking involved at Gaylord, but she has a suggestion about that. "It's a huge property with several layers

and additions. Get familiar with the property by visiting it a couple of times prior to your meeting so you know how to direct your attendees. The best way is to get lost in the property and find your way out. It will take just a few times around the property and you'll find the shortcuts to get you and your guests through with ease."

#### EXCITING CLOSING EVENTS

The Expo's closing event was set at Wildhorse Saloon in downtown Nashville. "This multilevel venue is perfect for a group our size, offering food and entertainment along with several A/V multimedia options in a one-stop-shop environment," Holland says. "We used this property previously for our 2011 event. It works well and allows for our guests to get a taste of downtown if they choose to after our closing reception. And the Wildhorse staff was great to work with. Jessica Sprouse, Chelsea Noyes and the entire Wildhorse team ensured our event went off without a hitch. We toured several other venues and were excited to learn that the Wildhorse was available for our event dates. Wildhorse Saloon is on our return list."

Holland says one unexpected challenge did arise at the Gaylord: Wi-Fi interference on opening night. "Unknown to our internal IT events team, one of our exhibitors had equipment that was scrambling our show Wi-Fi, which is integral to our overall show success. Thanks to the fast-acting collaboration of the Gaylord Opryland IT team and our internal team, the intrusion was identified and we able to get back up and running as quickly as possible. The entire IT team was very responsive that evening." And, she adds, "The fact that we had several visits from the Gaylord executive team

Keystone Automotive Operations Inc. held its 2019 Expo at Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center.



Courtesy of Melissa Holland Keystone Automotive Operations Inc./NTP-Stage

Attendees can enjoy the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum while in Nashville.

to ensure that our needs were being met was refreshing."

Holland says there are a few things about meeting in Nashville that planners should know. "Nashville is well equipped with meeting options from small to mega large. There are venues that will blow your attendees away, from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum to small intimate restaurants on Broadway. Explore all your options," she advises, "even if you think something is out of your reach as you never know what you might be able to negotiate until you try. As many planners know, get at least three estimates for comparison to ensure you're making your company's dollars stretch."

Additionally, she says, use local resources. "Consider working with third-party partners to ensure you hit a home run with customer experience. Utilize the local convention and visitor's bureau (CVB) to get a good overview of the city and venues. Utilize as many CVB services as fit your event, including staff for registration to mitigate overall expense, a branded microsite that will give your attendees all they need to know about the city, marketing tools to assist with your theme, discounted attraction tickets for guests to explore what the city has to offer, etc. Don't let one stone go unturned."

#### MEETING VENUES EARN PRAISE

Patricia Farmer, trade show and events manager with Philips North America, Oral Healthcare, needed a more intimate space for a national sales meeting with 125 attendees last summer, and Nashville was a fit for that meeting, too. "It was a central location for our staff to fly into from all over North America and we knew the city would offer fun activity options for a corporate event," she says.

The Philips meeting was set at Loews Vanderbilt Hotel. "The property has a more executive, exclusive feel to it as you enter," Farmer says. "It isn't as large and overwhelming as other hotel chain properties can be."

Food and beverage at the hotel was definitely a highlight. "In a post-event survey sent to all of our guests, the No. 1 favorite was the food and beverage. It was absolutely the best we've ever had at any hotel in the country," Farmer says. "By far. Big kudos to the catering staff. They were fantastic and deserve a five-star rating."

Also deserving of praise was the A/V team. "They were so professional, knowledgeable and easy to work with, especially the team that helped us during our general session," she adds.



Courtesy of Visit Music City

Décor and restaurants in the hotel were another hit. "Attendees loved the décor in the music-themed rooms," Farmer says. "And many mentioned the great food in Mason's, a restaurant downstairs in the hotel, as well as the fantastic specialty cocktails at Mason's Bar."

Farmer has praise all around for all of the Loews Vanderbilt staff. "I wish I could remember everyone's name as everyone at the hotel was incredible," she says. "But specifically Taneka Benjamin, who was a wonderful planning partner, along with Shane Fortner, the sales lead. And there were so many others who helped us throughout the days onsite."

Loews Vanderbilt completed a full renovation of its Symphony Ballroom last year, including a new pre-function area, carpeting, walls and fixtures to create a sleek, modern space. One of its new lunch offerings available to groups for catering or to-go orders on arrival or departure day is a "create-your-own-healthy-lunch-bowl" from a customized menu at Mason's and Mason's Bar on weekdays.

While destination is a key component of any meeting, it's the hotel staff and relationships upon which planners so often rely. When Susan Moss brought a technology summit to Nashville related to intellectual and developmental disabilities, it was the staff at Hotel Preston that made all the difference. "The catering staff at Hotel Preston has done a great job on the latest projects I've worked on with them," she says.

And though the conference space was undergoing renovation during last year's meeting, it's the service level of the staff, particularly the sales manager, that Moss thinks back on. "Our sales manager was very attentive," she says, "continuously checking in to ensure everything was running smoothly — really going that extra mile."

Shortly after that meeting, a full renovation of Hotel Preston was completed, including updates to public spaces, meeting rooms, outdoor spaces and all guest rooms. Among the new amenities: Guests can call down and have an acoustic guitar delivered to their room — the perfect way to practice for one of Nashville's music-oriented team-building sessions.



## ADVANTAGE TO USING LOCAL DMCs

Local DMCs always have their finger on the pulse of the cities in which they work, and thus can help direct planners to exactly the right venues, activities and services to elevate their specific meetings. Nashville is no exception. Robyn Bass, DMCP, owner and president and CEO of Maple Ridge Events, a Hosts Global member, is one such resource. She worked on an April event drawing 1,700 attendees, which used multiple downtown hotels and notably one of Nashville's most famous streets.

"Nashville served as the perfect location for this group as it's situated in the middle of the country and provides easy access with multiple direct flights from both regional and national locations," Bass says. "Most guests were staying at hotels within walking distance of Broadway and the Music City Center, our amazing convention center. This saves on transportation costs and allows guests to experience the heart of Nashville at their leisure, beyond set activities."

A significant element of the annual summit was a private street party. "The main event was closure of Nashville's famed Broadway," Bass says. "We closed it between 3rd and 4th avenues and bought out multiple honky-tonks to give attendees the exclusiveness of a Broadway street party and the ability to bar-hop like locals do. The street closure included a custom Beer Garden, five local food trucks, fair games and a photo booth. The honky-tonks were filled with additional custom branding, entertainment and Nashville-themed food and beverage."

Closing any street in Nashville is not easy, according to Bass. "But the most popular one, Broadway, is almost impossible. So, knowing the city's pain points and avoiding them all together can help for a smooth process and program."

That's where a DMC can pave the way to fulfill a group's ideal in terms of a truly "wow" experience. "Nashville is a unique city, which presents some challenges," Bass says. "Working with a DMC that has relationships with the city and a pulse on the ever-changing landscape of what is — and

more importantly, is not — possible in Music City can save planners a lot of headaches."

For planners and their groups, the challenge is often patience, as was the case for this client in terms of closing part of Broadway. "The city, even if verbally committing, will not issue the actual permit for public-property events until two weeks before the event date," Bass says. "So, you have to remain patient as you cannot rush them — and then have a hell of a backup plan just in case." One thing Bass hopes is that planners have an open mind when it comes to hotels in Nashville, perhaps especially budget-friendly hotels.

## INCREDIBLE DESTINATION GROWTH CONTINUES

"There are so many new hotels popping up daily, many of which exceed what we may think of as their 'brand standard,'" Bass says. "We've all stayed in the old Holiday Inn atriums with rooms facing the pool in the middle, but our new Holiday Inn Hotel and Suites Nashville Downtown-Convention Center is unlike any I've ever seen. The soon-to-open Drury Plaza Hotel Nashville Downtown also exceeds all preconceived notions of a Drury hotel. From meeting rooms to décor to quality of service, all of our hotels in Nashville go above and beyond to provide an experience you can't get in any other city."

Jacqueline Marko, CMP, DMCP, regional general manager with PRA Nashville and PRA Louisville, calls Nashville's incredible growth and evolution an asset. "Nashville is known as Music City, so many visitors come for the amazing music scene. They're hoping to hear the next 'it' artist at the honky-tonks on Broadway, which feature live music open to close from up-and-coming artists."

In addition to music, she points out, "Nashville is becoming known for its quirky neighborhoods featuring local artisans and chef-driven restaurants, including some of the top-rated restaurants in the country."

Nashville has seen record-breaking year-over-year growth since 2010, Marko says. "In response, the city is expanding its international airport with more direct flights, such as British Airway's direct flight between London and Nashville launched last year. There's also substantial hotel development underway. There are more than 5,000 rooms currently in construction in the metro Nashville area."

Although music has been a staple of Nashville meetings for years, planners can find many ways to give attendees unique, even one-of-a-kind experiences. "That might be

hosting dinner on stage at the world-famous Ryman Auditorium with an intimate performance from Grammy award-winning songwriters telling the stories behind the music they wrote, or a private concert at a honky-tonk with an internationally renowned artist," Marko says. Bottom line: "Groups want, and attendees expect, experiences that are all about the music."

## TEAM-BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES GALORE

Music can be part of team-building, too. "While attendees certainly expect to hear music in Music City, they don't always expect to make it," Marko notes. "A popular team-building option we offer is a songwriting experience where we pair small teams with a local songwriter. They're given a topic and about an hour, then perform the song they wrote in front of the rest of the group. You would be surprised how even those who usually shy away from the microphone let out their inner star in this friendly competition."

Nashville's evolving food scene is also fodder for team activities, according to Marko, from a cooking demonstration and tasting with a local top chef to a throw-down team-building competition on which a team can make the best barbecue sauce.

Marko points out that another positive for the city is that many venues and activities for groups are within about 20 minutes of each other. "We often hear from clients that they don't want their attendees to sit on a bus for more than 30 minutes. From our airport to the convention hotels to the main attractions throughout town, everything is in close proximity, so attendees can spend more time in their cowboy boots on the dance floor than sitting on the bus waiting to get to their offsite event destination."

With all the positives, it shouldn't be surprising that Nashville is popular these days, and that means planners have to be proactive. "Start planning early" is Marko's advice. "Many are surprised by Nashville's popularity and the fact that last-minute bookings can be difficult. If you know you want to bring your group to Nashville and you're within a 12-month booking window, flexibility is key."

Like other DMCs, Marko works with all of the city's hotels



Courtesy of Jacqueline Marko PRA Nashville and PRA Louisville

Riverfront Park in Downtown Nashville, open from dawn to 11 p.m., is a favorite spot for attendees to enjoy live music.

but does have a preferred relationship with a few hotels in the city, which can mean savings for planners. "PRA has established preferred relationships with Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center, Omni Nashville Hotel, Hilton Nashville Downtown, The Westin Nashville, Kimpton Aertson Hotel, Bobby Hotel, The Hermitage Hotel and Union Station Hotel Nashville."

On the hotel front, there's lots going on in the city. Hilton Nashville

Downtown, adjacent to Bridgestone Arena, recently transformed its Trattoria Il Mulino patio into a fully enclosed space for year-round dining and events. In ideal weather it can be opened up via garage-type doors and windows, meaning planners don't have to worry if the weather turns bad on their outdoor event — plan A and plan B are in the same spot. The patio accommodates 80 for a reception, 32 for a seated event.

Sheraton Grand Nashville Downtown has already completed a \$35 million renovation that updated guest rooms, public spaces and meeting space.

Branson's Virgin Hotels Nashville is slated to open in the historic Music Row area this December, while Margaritaville Hotel Nashville should open in SoBro this fall. A new W Hotel Nashville is among those scheduled to open in 2020.

And then there's the Sinatra Bar & Lounge — a tribute to Frank Sinatra and the good music, good food and good spirits he loved. The venue, scheduled to open in early 2020, is set in a historic 19th century building in Printer's Alley. Sinatra's preferred drink, Jack Daniels, will be front and center on the "old school" cocktail list.

There's a reason 15.2 million visitors headed to Nashville last year, many of them to attend conferences and other business meetings. The mix of music, history, a cutting-edge culinary scene, vibrant industry, a central geographic location and a creative, service-oriented CVB all add up to make Nashville a destination that should top any planner's list. **C&IT**



Courtesy of Jacqueline Marko PRA Nashville and PRA Louisville

Nashville had 15.2 million attendees in conferences and meetings last year.





There are plenty of activities for attendees in Southern California. Hot-air ballooning is just one example.

Courtesy of Visit Temecula Valley

# A Hot Destination

## Southern California Remains a Favorite Locale for Corporate and Incentive Travel Meetings

BY KEITH LORIA

**L**eisure travel is a top trend this year. As more business trips combine business with leisure, meeting planners and companies are looking to destinations that are capable of providing both. No destination does it better than Southern California.

From Los Angeles to San Diego and from Anaheim to Palm Springs, there are a host of venues to meet every possible need. Whether it is an executive retreat or a meeting with several hundred or several thousand, Southern California has the facilities.

"Add to that coastline views, ocean breezes,

major meeting and convention hotels such as Hyatt, Marriott and Hilton and a multitude of independent and boutique hotels that cater to every possible demand, the choices are unlimited," says Carroll A. Reuben, CMP, CMM, director of major events at Meeting Excellence, headquartered in Rolling Hill Estates, CA. "While the major convention centers in Los Angeles, Anaheim, Long Beach and San Diego can accommodate some of the largest trade events in the country, many cities such as Pasadena and Carson have smaller meeting and convention facilities as well."

As a corporate planner, Reuben has planned

and managed many events in Southern California over the last 25 years and has seen some big changes in that time.

"Improved facilities, transportation and services have all made my job a lot easier," she says. "I nearly always start with the CVB in the selected city to secure the right venue for my needs and preferred dates. Destination Management Services such as ACCESS Destination Services have helped add interest to my programs by arranging offsite tours and activities such as the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, baseball games at Dodger Stadium and a tour of Marine Corps Air Station Miramar to name a few."

Southern California has something for every taste and budget. Los Angeles, Anaheim and San Diego conference centers and adjoining hotel properties can handle meetings and conventions from large consumer shows such as Home and Garden and Comic-Con, to trade and professional conventions such as the Association of Woodworking & Furnishings Suppliers.

Independent and boutique properties can provide luxury accommodations and facilities for high-level executive meetings that might include some leisure time activities such as Terranea Resort poised above the Pacific on the beautiful Palos Verdes Peninsula. A hidden gem on the Los Angeles coast, this luxury Southern California resort destination is surrounded by tranquil waves and offers a whole new world of relaxation and adventure that words just can't describe.

Stacey Crivello, director, national accounts for San Diego-based ACCESS Destination Services, says Southern Cal-

ifornia doesn't just have something for everyone, it has everything for everyone.

"There are few destinations, if any, that offer the variety of venues, hotels, activities, entertainment and even geography that can be found in Southern California," she says. "From the picturesque beaches of San Diego and Orange County to the desert and mountains of Palm Springs to the bustling metropolis that is Los Angeles, whether a planner is working on their first or 15th event in the area, it's simply impossible to run out of unique and one-of-a-kind experiences to incorporate into a program."

There's lots of culture to enhance any program, such as concerts at the iconic Frank Gehry-designed Disney Concert Hall, downtown Los Angeles and the Hollywood Bowl, the Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Orange County as well as several world-class museums. In addition, there are so many family activities to choose from — both Los Angeles and San Diego have well-established zoos, there is SeaWorld San Diego and close by, LEGOLAND California Resort.

"I can honestly say that I'm spoiled with the choices in Southern California," Reuben says. "When working with a new client, I have to prioritize their wish list before I ever get down to the logistical and budgetary needs of their

programs. Meeting space at most of the major hotels offer state-of-the-art audio visual support and broadband Wi-Fi. Gone are the days when I had to hard-wire properties to run a computer lab."

### THE BIG APPEAL

The climate in Southern California is the primary attraction as the temperature seldom drops below 50 degrees in winter, even at night, and one can choose just how warm they would like to be by staying close to the ocean with a balmy 80 degrees in summer or going inland to Palm Springs and basking in the 100-degree sunshine.

And while Southern California is big, attendees can usually land within just a few miles of their meeting venue thanks to major airports such as Los Angeles International Airport, Long Beach Airport, John Wayne Airport in Orange County and San Diego International Airport, which serve most major airlines. Car rentals and car services are readily available and the major hotels have airport transport buses.

"Everyone knows Disneyland Park and Universal Studios Hollywood offer hours of fun, but if your event doesn't include time for a day off to play, then there are lots of offsite locations that can add interest to even the most for-

One San Diego-based planner's clients recently enjoyed a local cruise, one of the destination's unique blend of outdoor activities.



Courtesy of Jen Singer Events



Planners say Southern California's weather makes the region perfect for outdoor receptions and other events.

mal agenda," Reuben says. "Scripps Institute, the J. Paul Getty Museum or Temecula wineries to name a few."

Southern California also has more than 600 golf courses, with such notable courses as Trump National Golf Club Los Angeles on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, to Torrey Pines and the Bel-Air Country Club, home of PGA major tournaments.

"Every city has an active visitors and convention bureau always ready to help you find just the right spot and give you all the information you need regarding services, products, city information and possibly provide a concierge desk at your event to make reservations and answer your attendee questions," Reuben says.

Crivello notes that conveniently, what's good for planners is also good for attendees — ease of travel, exclusive and unique venues, activities, that laid-back "So Cal" vibe, and of course, the weather.

"Southern California is the most populous region of the United States. Why is that? Some might say it's the weather, the attractions, the beaches, the food, the entertainment, the history, the culture ... and they would be right," she says. "It's all of that and more."

She also says Southern California chefs are on the cutting edge of every dietary need or trendy menu style. Sushi, Mexican, and just about any ethnicity you can think of, Southern California does it well.

## AWESOME ANAHEIM

Judy Payne, CMP, director, meetings and travel for GameStop in Grapevine, TX, says nobody sells sunshine and good times like Southern California, which is why selecting Anaheim for its annual conference is a "no-brainer."

"You can always depend on great weather, great food and lots of entertainment in Anaheim. We like that our attendees can elect to Stay-n-Play and



Courtesy of Jamie Pham

have so many cool things to choose from," she says. "Our attendees like the ease of getting around Southern California and all of the fantastic things to do while they're in town. You have amusement parks, great dining, beautiful beaches and tons of sports at your disposal. Anaheim is our favorite place to Stay-n-Play at our events."

GameStop regularly works with Visit Anaheim and the Anaheim Convention Center for its events, with Payne calling them great partners who creatively think of new ways to help the company build a successful event.

For example, this past year the Anaheim Convention Center was host to GameStop's annual conference with roughly 7,000 attendees.

"The campus around the convention center could house all of our attendees within a couple of blocks and had many restaurant options which we love," Payne says. "We also had Downtown Disney at our disposal, which led to some fantastic events. It's great to have a convention city that's so walkable."

## LOS ANGELES HAS IT ALL

With 50,657 sf of meeting and event space, 41 modern meeting rooms, and 36 breakout rooms, The Westin Los Angeles Airport hotel is well equipped to execute the perfect meeting — big or small. Sean Steenson, director of operations at the venue, notes guests can utilize its 13,100-sf ballroom space

with its 18-ft ceilings for an over-the-top business conference, capable of holding up to 1,500 attendees, or put on a lavish 300-person company soiree in the 5,340-sf outdoor terrace.

"Additionally, our Executive Chef James McIver is an École Supérieure de Cuisine Française-trained chef who offers thoughtfully designed menu options, aimed to fuel productivity and support meeting attendees' overall well-being," Steenson says.

Most recently, the venue hosted the Marriott Sales One meeting which had an estimated 350 attendees.

Steenson notes that Los Angeles is the ideal destination for "bleisure" — business+leisure — travelers. In addition to being a hub for large meetings and conventions, Los Angeles is filled with outdoor activities and wellness experiences that corporate attendees will appreciate and can unwind with.

"Specifically, at The Westin LAX, we're located minutes away from Los Angeles' best beaches where attendees can cycle, surf, or simply relax," Steenson says. "We are also minutes away from entertainment complexes like the Forum, which hosts events like music concerts, sports events and panel discussions."

Additionally, being in Southern California means having great weather year-round and more opportunities for outdoor meetings and events, something corporate meeting attendees will appreciate.

"The Westin LAX has a beautiful 5,340-sf terrace for meetings, breakouts and receptions," Steenson says. "Additionally, our close proximity, only four blocks from LAX airport, and our 24/7 shuttle service make for an easy and seamless meeting experience."

The property is just 15 minutes away from Los Angeles' most beautiful beaches such as Manhattan Beach and Hermosa Beach, which is also home to music, food and art festivals such as BeachLife Festival and Fiesta Hermosa along with popular sports events such as the Manhattan Beach Open AVP Beach Volleyball tournament.

"We think no visit to SoCal is complete without testing out the world-class surfing scene and our Surf Concierge, Jenny Palomo, is ready to help with everything surf-related, from organizing surf lessons, to sharing the best hidden surf spots, or assist in surf gear rental," Steenson says. "Our VIP Experience Manager

"During summer months, you can also hail water taxis, the Aquabus and the Aqualink, with services between the Queen Mary and Alamitos Bay Landing."

## STEVE GOODLING

President and CEO  
Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Long Beach, CA



Alexandra Kearns is available to recommend hidden, under-the-radar experiences that guests will appreciate."

## LOVING LONG BEACH

Meeting Excellence has worked many events in Long Beach and Reuben is impressed by its vibrant waterfront scene; from its eclectic

neighborhoods to sandy beaches, the Long Beach Marina and the Queen Mary Hotel.

The Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center includes 400,000 sf of exhibit and meeting room space, plus the Terrace Theater with 3,000 seats and the Beverly O'Neill Theater with 825 seats.

# DISCOVER

## L.A.'S COASTAL POINT OF VIEW

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Temecula Valley Wine Country barrel rooms, like this one at South Coast Winery, provide unique meeting spaces for attendees.

Courtesy of Visit Temecula Valley

Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau, says there are a host of restaurants all within walking distance of the convention center. The bright red Passport shuttle, which offers service to major Long Beach attractions, is free throughout the downtown area and whisks you quickly to downtown's cultural spots.

"During summer months, you can also hail water taxis, the Aquabus and the Aqualink, with services between the Queen Mary and Alamitos Bay Landing," Goodling says. "All shuttles and water taxis are bicycle friendly. If your attendees want to extend their stay they can take the Catalina Express to Catalina Island just 20 miles off the coast."

Reuben worked nearly 10 years for Southern California Edison, the second-largest subsidiary of Edison International, both as an independent planner and as an in-house corporate planner responsible for its commercial and industrial events.

"I planned events both on the Queen Mary and in the Long Beach Convention Center with numbers ranging from 100 to 3,000, which included a major convention and trade show with the emphasis on energy conservation," she says. "Long Beach offers nearly 5,000 hotel rooms, many within walking distance of the convention center. Educational programs, trade exhibits, hospitality functions and even dramatic program demonstrations were all possible in Long Beach right there downtown."

## GET TO KNOW SAN DIEGO

Jen Singer, CEO of San Diego-based Jen Singer Events, which specializes in managing and arranging destination-based corporate events, says with a unique blend of outdoor activities and a dynamic city, San Diego is the perfect host to those looking for team-building opportunities on a spectrum of engaging scenarios.

"San Diego is well known for its sunny disposition and laid-back attitude with less congestion than its neighboring city of Los Angeles," she says. "While also providing an environment where business casual can mean pairing your blazer with a pair of nice shorts."

Access to local attractions such as the San Diego Zoo; the USS Midway Museum, a retired aircraft carrier; or Balboa Park all makes for fantastic onsite meeting opportunities as well as a chance to see some local landmarks. Plus, there are sun-soaked beaches with local eateries and shops right on the water.

"Having worked with multiple tech companies as they launch a new office space or host incentivized business meetings, we are here to curate a unique experience based on the goal the company aims to achieve," Singer says. "We maintain a professional relationship with boutique hotels and local venues allowing us to easily host and book events with dynamic needs with a strong focus on the overall experience."

San Diego also has an expansive culinary scene, and Singer has an

extensive background in the food and hospitality industry, making her a fantastic resource on what venues offer the best culinary experience to serve your guests and colleagues.

"Right now, we are really loving Brick as they are making a big splash in the event venue space hosting approximately 200 guests at their flagship location here in San Diego and getting set to open a larger event space later this year right off the main drag near the San Diego International Airport," Singer says.

## A DESTINATION SURE TO PLEASE

David A. Anderson, CMP, meeting planner with Los Angeles-based Eventive Group, a third-party meeting and event planning firm servicing corporate and association meetings, loves the variety that Southern California venues offer in terms of size, scale and amenities.

"You can have resort-style meetings or suburban-style meetings, and there's a variety of traditional and non-traditional places to hold meetings," he says. "Because the weather is usually great, we can produce meetings all year round and we rarely need a contingency plan."

Recent events have been held at both the Pasadena Convention Center, which offers 125,000 sf of flexible meeting space, and the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, which offers 60,000 sf of event space.

Annette Brown, director of public relations for Visit Temecula Valley, represents

Marina del Rey offers corporate yacht receptions and other activities with gorgeous views of the marina.



Photo by Kendra Strey / Courtesy of Marina del Rey

the Temecula Valley Southern California Wine Country, an emerging wine region with nearly 50 wineries, and says Temecula Valley is the venue meeting planners and businesses are looking for when they want something fresh and unexpected.

"Recently named by Wine Enthusiast as a 2019 10 Best Wine Travel Destination, Temecula Valley is attracting visitors from both leisure and business markets," she says. "Corporate business is using this attractive, award-winning destination for incentive travel. Not only is it an inspiring and rejuvenating setting, there are so many outdoor activities and great dining options available."

Since leaving Southern California

Edison, Reuben continues to draw upon Southern California as the "go to" place for her national and international clients, holding events at the Rancho Bernardo Inn in San Diego, a destination resort known for its golf, spa and cuisine.

A true destination for meeting and incentive groups, the 265-acre property features luxurious guest rooms, three swimming pools, an award-winning spa and wellness center, signature restaurants, and extensive meeting and event facilities.

"I have held major educational programs and trade exhibits at the Disneyland Hotel and Convention Center — it's always fun working with cast

members," Reuben says. "And, for true variety, the company holiday party for 100 employees and guests at the classic Culver Hotel in Culver City. As a National Historic Landmark and almost a century old, the Culver Hotel gracefully retains its prestige and nostalgia of days long past. It remains a true icon."

Reuben adds, "Gender mix, age range and interests are important to the design of the program to round out the core content. I know I can incorporate those interests in any program I produce in Southern California. Companion programs, offsite excursions, golf tournaments and tours all help to enhance what would otherwise be just another conference." **C&IT**



Courtesy of ACCESS Destination Services

Attendees at events in San Diego can get surf lessons, an activity sure to leave a lasting impression.



## ON THE MOVE //



GREEN

The Wigwam appointed **J. Green** to vice president of sales & marketing. With two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Green will lead a tenured team of 25 in the planning and implementation of initiatives to boost revenues while promoting the AAA Four-Diamond services available at the storied resort.

Live! by Loews – Arlington announced **Marcela Ceccacci** as director of sales & marketing. Ceccacci comes to Loews Hotels with an extensive 20-year background in hospitality sales and marketing leadership, working for notable brands like Hyatt, Omni, Sheraton, Fairmont and most recently, The Westin Galleria Dallas.



RODRIGUEZ

The Watergate Hotel named **Ruben G. Rodriguez**, vice president of sales. In this position, Rodriguez will oversee the implementation of annual sales plans and lead the sales team in targeting new business and revenue streams for the historic property. Rodriguez's career in the luxury hospitality industry spans over 20 years, where most recently he served as area director of sales & marketing for Meliá Hotels International in Miami.



RICE

InterContinental Hotels Group welcomed **Eric Manning**, director of sales & marketing for InterContinental San Diego, where he will lead group sales efforts for the hotel's 400 rooms and 95,000 sf of meeting and event space. With over 15 years of professional experience, he brings strong sales leadership and extensive local market expertise to the InterContinental San Diego team, with a primary focus on driving top-line revenues and building client loyalty.

The Broadmoor announced the promotions of three rising stars to its Sales Team: **Caleb Rice**, director of national accounts, Incentive/Insurance; **Christina Osberg**, director of national sales, West Region and **Ashley Kloster**, sales manager – Executive Meetings & Golf.



KLOSTER

Cadillac Hotel & Beach Club in Miami Beach appointed **Christelle Fourcade**, director of sales and marketing, responsible for spearheading the sales, marketing and revenue strategies for the newly renovated and reopened Miami Beach hotel, which earned the AAA Four Diamond in 2019. Most recently, Fourcade held the role of market director of sales for Marriott International.



GARRETT

BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, named **Mitch Garrett**, vice president of business development. Mitch Garrett brings a decade and a half of experience in capital markets, hospitality, commercial and residential real estate to the leading independent hospitality company.

Teneo Hospitality Group, the premier Global Group Sales Organization, has appointed **April Egloff** as director of sales Midwest. Egloff will concentrate on the US Midwest region and comes to Teneo with an outstanding track record and exceptional network of professional and personal relationships in the Midwest and beyond.



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