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# INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

A portrait of Katrina Kent, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark sleeveless top, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

## Gaming Resorts A Safe Bet

Offer More Than Gambling

## Family Friendly Fun

More Companies Allowing  
Spouses and Children

## Multigenerational Meetings

Planners Face a Challenge With  
Attendees of All Ages

## Hope After the Hurricanes

Visits Trending Upward on Stricken Islands

## Nevada Nice

Las Vegas is No. 1; Henderson  
and Reno Are Close

Katrina Kent, CMP, CMM  
Director, The Event Group  
TD Ameritrade

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## INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

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Gaming Resorts such as Bellagio Las Vegas offer more than gambling as these venues remain popular destinations. **PAGE 12**



Spouses and children are welcome to tag along as companies realize some employees prefer to include their families. **PAGE 20**



Most of the destinations affected by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 have seen visits ticking back up to pre-storm levels. **PAGE 30**



Nevada offers much more to planners than Las Vegas. Henderson and Reno have carved out their own niches in the state. **PAGE 36**

# Publisher's Message

## Gaming Resorts or Family Friendly Destinations?

We all know making a decision as to where to have your next meeting or incentive program can sometimes be a trying task depending upon the makeup of your attendees. While many attendees today enjoy having their family with them and often extend their stay to further enjoy the destination as a mini vacation, others take advantage of gaming resorts to enjoy the dining, entertainment and casino excitement.



Family friendly destinations provide an opportunity to mix business with quality family time. In Orlando, for example, Loews hotels at Universal Orlando offers several hotels to satisfy a family budget and also provide meeting space to accommodate groups of all sizes.

Numerous gaming resorts across the country have great appeal to planners seeking a winning proposition with activities to satisfy everyone. The idea that gaming resorts — and their exciting casinos — occupy too much of an attendee's time and leads to less participation in events is outdated at this point.

The above commentary leads me to the big question: How do planners handle multigenerational meetings? To say the least, it is a challenging task. Do you focus on age difference — baby boomers, Generation Xers or millennials — or do you offer something to satisfy everyone? Probably the best way to effectively cross the age barrier and get all attendees excited about the meeting destination is to look beyond the ordinary for activities.

Thinking about a unique destination for you next meeting or event? Look no further than New Orleans, always a favorite destination, especially for foodies, or Nevada, where casinos, dining and entertainment in Las Vegas, Henderson and Reno are plentiful and are sure to please.

Harvey Grotzky

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PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
**Harvey Grotzky**  
 harvey.grotzky@themeetingmagazines.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR  
**Mitch D. Miller**  
 mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

MANAGING EDITOR  
**Henry Fitzgerald**  
 henry.fitzgerald@themeetingmagazines.com

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR  
**Heather Ballis**  
 heather.ballis@themeetingmagazines.com

DIGITAL CONTENT COORDINATOR  
**Christine Smith**  
 christine.smith@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS  
**Sophia Bennett**  
**Ron Bernthal**  
**John Buchanan**  
**Sara Churchville**  
**Cynthia Dial**  
**Maura Keller**  
**Christine Loomis**  
**Derek Reveron**  
**Mark Rowh**  
**Patrick Simms**  
**David Swanson**

PRESIDENT & CEO  
**Harvey Grotzky**

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS  
**David Middlebrook**  
 david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

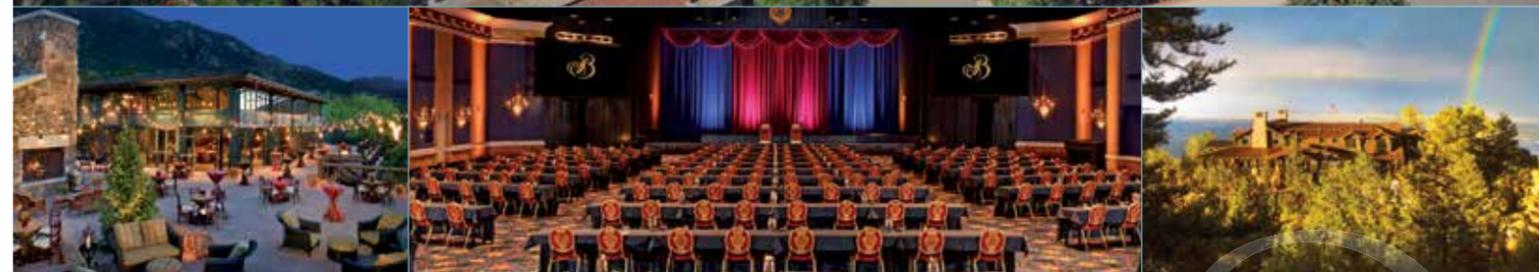
ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES  
 2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120  
 Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394  
 561-989-0600 Fax: 561-989-9509  
 advertising@themeetingmagazines.com

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## Louisville is the Hottest Growing Hotel Market

LOUISVILLE, KY — All eyes are on Louisville. According to CBRE Research, Louisville had the largest year-over-year hotel demand increase in the first quarter of 2019 at 11.4 percent, while demand nationally only grew 2.4 percent in the same quarter, slightly below last year.

CBRE Hotels Americas Research specializes in analyzing and reporting on both the historical and future performance of the lodging industry. They measured the growth performance of the top-60 major markets in the first quarter of this year and Louisville took the top growth spot, outranking Nashville, TN; Austin, TX; the Raleigh-Durham area in North Carolina as well as major markets including New York City; Seattle, WA; San Francisco and Denver, CO. [www.cbre.com](http://www.cbre.com)

## Sea Island Debuts New State-of-the-Art Golf Performance Center With Industry-Leading Technology



SEA ISLAND, GA — Sea Island, a Forbes Five-Star resort on the coast of Georgia, has unveiled an all-new, state-of-the-art Golf Performance Center at the Sea Island Golf Club, part of a nearly \$30 million enhancement program at The Lodge at Sea Island. The 17,000-sf facility features industry-leading technology, six instruction and club-fitting bays, a putting studio designed by world-renowned putting instructor Phil Kenyon — who serves as director of Putting Instruction at Sea Island. “The Golf Performance Center at Sea Island is dedicated to helping players play better and enjoy the game of golf with a holistic, comprehensive approach, regardless of their skill level, from beginning golfers to competitive juniors, touring professionals and everyone in between,” says Brannen Veal, director of Golf. “This new facility combines the latest cutting-edge technology with the finest teachers in the country, taking what we provide to an even higher level than before.” [www.seaisland.com](http://www.seaisland.com)

## Copley Square Hotel Launches Brand-New Art Square Space and 1891 Boardroom



BOSTON — The historic Copley Square Hotel, a boutique property located in the heart of Boston’s vibrant Back Bay neighborhood, is pleased to unveil Art Square, its brand-new meeting space that is specially designed to inspire and support the area’s innovative, on-the-go business community. Until 1883, Copley Square was called Art Square due to its location near many of the city’s cultural institutions. The area was considered to be Boston’s hub for the arts and a symbol of its progressive nature at the time. By reviving the Art Square name, Copley Square Hotel, which was Back Bay’s first hotel, will be paying homage to the area’s history while providing an inspiring place for its guests to channel their creativity and think differently. With a bright, open space that spans 1,254 sf, Art Square can accommodate up to 24 guests in a boardroom-style layout and up to 54 guests in a classroom-style arrangement. Beaming with natural light from the many windows in the space, Art Square is also home to a brand-new executive boardroom named 1891 after the year the hotel was founded. Both 1891 and Art Square are conveniently located at ground level adjacent to the hotel lobby. Groups can begin booking Art Square for meetings taking place on May 1 or after. [www.copleysquarehotel.com](http://www.copleysquarehotel.com)

## ALHI Hosts Fourth Annual Insurance & Financial Leaders Exchange

BOSTON — Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI), the global meetings and incentives sales force behind the world’s most sought-after independent hotels and small luxury brands, recently hosted its fourth annual Insurance & Financial Leaders Exchange (IFLE) in Charleston, SC. The three-day, by-invitation-only event brought together an intimate group of financial and insurance industry leaders as well as 25 select member hotels. Along with partners Delta Air Lines and Maui Jim, ALHI curated a comprehensive program of business, networking, philanthropic and social activities. Following a pre-event at the historic Belmont Charleston Place, this year’s IFLE took place at the all-new Hotel Bennett. The business agenda included two keynote speakers by ALHI partner Leading Authorities, Inc.: Jeff Kraiser, a



best-selling author and expert in behavior economics; and Immaculee Ilibagiza, a New York Times best-selling author and humanitarian. “IFLE was designed to engage an intimate group of insurance and financial leaders, providing them with fresh, new ideas and best practices on how to better navigate both their professional and personal lives, while showcasing the unique

experiences that only ALHI can offer,” said Ashly Balding, executive vice president at ALHI. “Our goal was to challenge traditional thinking and to create open dialogue in a relaxed, comfortable setting. We selected the charming city of Charleston for its warm, gracious hospitality, which so accurately aligns with our company values and mission that ‘Experience is Everything.’” [www.alhi.com](http://www.alhi.com)

## The Resort At Pelican Hill And The Spa At Pelican Hill Receive Five-Star Rating By Forbes Travel Guide Awards

NEWPORT BEACH, CA — The Resort at Pelican Hill and The Spa at Pelican Hill each earned a Five Star Award in the 61st annual Forbes Travel Guide Star Awards. Recognized as a Five-Star destination unto itself for the seventh consecutive year, Pelican Hill remains Newport Beach’s first and only resort to achieve the luxury hospitality industry’s gold standard, among 210 Five-Star hotels and resorts worldwide this year. The Spa at Pelican Hill earned its 10th consecutive Five Star Award and maintains its distinction as the only Five-Star spa in Newport Beach. As one of just 64 spas worldwide to earn the top Forbes Travel Guide rating this year, The Spa at Pelican Hill delivers an exceptional experience with no detail overlooked,



uncompromising service and extraordinary design and facilities. “I am proud of each of our team members whose unwavering passion and hospitality make Pelican Hill a favorite destination of the world’s most discerning travelers,” said

Tom Donovan, managing director at Pelican Hill. “They are the real stars who make the Resort shine.” Earlier this month, U.S. News & World Report ranked The Resort at Pelican Hill among the top-10 best hotels in California. [www.forbestravelguide.com](http://www.forbestravelguide.com)

## Rosen Shingle Creek Named to Preferred Hotels & Resorts' List of Top 10 U.S. Hotels in Inaugural I Prefer Members' Choice Awards



ORLANDO — The AAA Four Diamond Rosen Shingle Creek was named a top 10 U.S. hotel in Preferred Hotels & Resorts' first-ever I Prefer Members' Choice Awards, a global ranking of properties "that are the best-of-the-best in delivering high quality standards and exceptional, personalized experiences" to members of the brand's I Prefer Hotel Rewards. The Orlando luxury hotel is the only property in Central Florida to receive the prestigious honor, which was determined by votes collected from I Prefer Members in December 2018. "With more than 30 awards to its name, Rosen Shingle Creek's reputation for delivering a preeminent hotel experience precedes itself," the organization says of the crown jewel of Rosen Hotels & Resorts' portfolio. Worldwide, 40 hotels were selected as winners in four regional categories in the 2018 awards bestowed by Preferred Hotels & Resorts, the world's largest independent hotel brand, which represents more than 750 distinctive hotels, resorts and residences in 85 countries. [www.rosenshinglecreek.com](http://www.rosenshinglecreek.com)

## Mandalay Bay Events Center Enhances Guest Experience With Major Venue Renovations

LAS VEGAS — Mandalay Bay Events Center — home to world-class boxing, concerts and Las Vegas' first professional basketball team, the WNBA's Las Vegas Aces — recently completed a refresh to enhance the 12,000-seat sports and entertainment venue. "Guest experience was a driving focus during the entire renovation process," says Scott Preston, general manager of Mandalay Bay Events Center. "We have created a more comfortable and immersive experience where every fan feels a part of the action. As Mandalay Bay continues to be a center of the Las Vegas entertainment universe, we look forward to hosting the next generation of sports and entertainment programming in the Events Center." To give fans a full, 360-degree visual experience, Mandalay Bay Events Center is partnering with Daktronics and Musco Lighting to manufacture and install LED displays and energy-efficient sports lighting inside the venue and four main center-hung scoreboards each with LED video screens measuring approximately 11.5' x 18' feet to share instant replay opportunities, up-to-the-minute statistics, additional animations and graphics, while also offering sponsors the opportunity to share their messaging throughout events. [www.mandalaybay.com](http://www.mandalaybay.com)

## New IRF Study Reveals Reward and Recognition Strategies of Top Performing Technology Companies

Washington, DC — The Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) is pleased to announce the release of What Top Performing Technology Companies Do Differently for Incentives and Rewards, the first 2019 release in the IRF's signature series, Top Performer Studies. According to a new IRF study, technology executives believe in the power of non-cash incentives and rewards, and recognition programs as a competitive advantage. "What Top Performing Technology Companies Do Differently for Incentives and Rewards revealed a wealth of best practices for human capital investments specifically for the technology sector," stated Melissa Van Dyke, president of IRF. "To be considered a top performer for this study, companies met benchmarks in revenue, growth, customer ratings and employee ratings. Of the 118 technology companies reviewed, only 49 organizations made the cut." The report summarizes findings from data collected across multiple technology firms and compares the results of top performing technology firms to those of average performing technology firms, presenting key overall findings, then drills down to results for sales reward programs, channel partner reward programs, and employee reward programs. The release of What Top Performing Technology Companies Do Differently for Incentives and Rewards was supported by IRF Research Advocacy Partner Creative Group. [www.theirf.org](http://www.theirf.org)



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## Seven Forward-Thinking Ways to Future-Proof Any Organization

**W**hat status quo? According to researchers at IBM, there are no more static or predictable patterns in business. Continuous change is the new normal. Considering that their research was conducted half a decade ago, business leaders would do well to wake up and realize that nowadays, it's also more normal than new. To stay relevant in a fast-changing world, clearly, organizations must continually change and innovate as well. Happily, as research with scores of leading innovators for our new book *"Make Change Work for You: 10 Ways to Future-Proof Yourself, Fearlessly Innovate, and Succeed Despite Uncertainty"* reveals though, this process can be far less challenging than you'd think.

Case in point: Over the past several years, PwC's Strategy& consulting division has had occasion to study hundreds of the world's top innovators — including market leaders in every field — to determine their competitive edge. Strikingly, the world's most successful enterprises' top source of competitive advantage is that they simply provide workers with better platforms for sharing their insights and translating these ideas into action. These businesses' leading source of innovative new ideas may also surprise you: Time and again, studies show it's simply listening to customers — again, an area where frontline employees are best poised to spot rising opportunities or threats.

### Seven Habits Vital for Organizations to Embrace

Clearly, corporate culture plays a pivotal role in driving innovation. And the same system that market-leading enterprises utilize to drive game-changing breakthroughs and continually stay in tune with changing times and trends can also be readily adapted and utilized to future-proof any organization. (Hint: Staying attuned to rising opportunities and threats, and brainstorming better ways to address them is far simpler when you find more effective ways to tap into the collective insights and capabilities of your membership.) Following are seven new habits that leading organizations say it's vital to embrace in order to prepare your organization to stay at the forefront of fast-changing and highly unpredictable business environments:

1. Create a culture of trust and encourage employees or members to speak up. Leading organizations empower workers and reward them for bringing potential opportunities and challenges to their attention. That's because frontline employees are often an enterprise's most informed audience. Unsurprisingly, the system can work much the same for leading organizations — time and again, they can succeed by finding better ways to leverage the collective wisdom and resourcefulness of their constituents. So to create and sustain competitive advantage, do the same thing leading businesses do for their workers — provide your employees or members with the tools they need to share their ideas and insights, then translate those ideas into action. IT and big data leader EMC does a great job of this, for example, by putting pressing strategic problems to employees in the form of innovation contests that invite workers to share and vote for new solutions online via quickly assembled and quickly deployed websites.
2. Constantly rethink business practices. Is "The way it's always been done" still the best way to do it? Like competitors, market leaders are always asking themselves this question. Quick-service restaurant leader Freshii exemplifies this philosophy by regularly holding meetings where it asks executives to discuss "bad stuff first, good stuff last" — i.e. routinely think about and prioritize what it could be doing better, and where it's lacking in capabilities. What's stopping your organization from doing the same — then quickly reacting and addressing these issues?
3. Freely collaborate across the organization. Flatten lines of communication, and allow information, insights and support to flow throughout your organization. The more readily you can align tools, talent and resources toward common goals, the more readily you can foster innovation. Case in point: At personal finance software leader Intuit, employees can easily propose, team up to work on and secure support for new prototypes online. Dozens of revenue-generating ideas and products have resulted.
4. See the future now. Rather than simply keep pace with rivals, top innovators always consider where the future is heading and strive to put the solutions tomorrow's audiences will demand in place today. For instance: Google, HP and 3M are famous for encouraging employees to invest large portions of paid time exploring fresh ideas and experimenting with new innovations. As opposed to standard maintenance and upkeep tasks — i.e. research, fundraising, lobbying, education, member services, etc. — how much of your organization and its staff's time are you investing in long-term growth activities designed to expand its reach and capabilities?
5. Be open to change. Leaders expect employees to stay abreast of changing business environments — and intelligently and flexibly respond to them. To this extent, market-leading innovators provide workers with the freedom to take small, smart risks that have the potential to help the organization better serve its customers ... so long as these risks are intelligent, productive and cost-affordable. Online lodging service Airbnb actually encourages new hires to roll out new ideas on day one. What platforms and programs do you have in place for conducting similar learning experiments?
6. Spread your risk. Leading organizations don't try to be risk free, but rather actively pursue a more calculated range of business bets. As with financial portfolios, these enterprises constantly manage and adjust a portfolio of strategic ventures. Not all wagers will pan out. But all are designed to collectively help the organization grow its capabilities, spread risk and learn through real-time monitoring and course correction. From Merck to FedEx, Cisco to Intel, market leaders are constantly using innovation laboratories and incubators to play a portfolio of wagers. You can do the same.
7. Never stop learning. Rather than just relying solely on contingency plans, market leaders consistently experiment with new innovations and solutions — especially when things are going well, and they can most afford to gamble. By consistently pioneering new ideas and approaches, and extending their experience, capabilities and comfort zones, they create added flexibility and room to maneuver in the face of changes or unforeseen events. Market leaders like Sony and Microsoft specifically commit teams to pushing the

boundaries of technology in new directions, knowing that these new developments may be put to a variety of useful business purposes — not all of them commercial. Similarly, in good times, your organization can also plan for bad times by routinely rolling out new ventures and solutions that offer the potential for evolution, growth, and expansion as well.

### Business Strategy Should be Flexible

In short, leading organizations turn employees and/or members into emergency responders. They transform infrastructures from barriers into enablers. They see business strategy as being flexible, not fixed. And they continually provide constituents with the tools and runway they need

Rather than simply keep pace with rivals, top innovators always consider where the future is heading and strive to put the solutions tomorrow's audiences will demand in place today.

to reimagine, reinvent and innovate their way to success as scenarios change. You and your organization can also consistently innovate, succeed and stay ahead of the curve by doing the same.

**I&FMM**

**Scott Steinberg** is an award-winning professional speaker who is among today's best-known trends experts and futurists, a bestselling expert on leadership and innovation, and the author of *"Make Change Work for You: 10 Ways to Future-Proof Yourself, Fearlessly Innovate, and Succeed Despite Uncertainty"* and *"Millennial Marketing: Bridging the Generation Gap"*. Among today's leading providers of keynote speeches, workshops and seminars for Fortune 500 firms, and the founder of travel + lifestyle magazine *SELECT: Your City's Secrets Unlocked™*, his website is [www.AKeynoteSpeaker.com](http://www.AKeynoteSpeaker.com).



Caesars Palace Las Vegas Hotel & Casino's Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis features the Temple Pool, above, Neptune Pool, Apollo Pool, Jupiter Pool, Fortuna Pool, Bacchus Pool and Venus Pool.

Casinos by nature are fun, exciting and offer people the chance to try new things and go beyond the norm. But that's not the only reason people choose gaming resorts to hold meetings and conventions.

Tina-Marie Wassman, principal, TNC Events, has facilitated numerous meetings at gaming resorts and notes those in the insurance and banking industries always enjoy and appreciate the care that goes into serving attendees as they generally have great meeting space and welcome group business.

"We were just at the ARIA Resort & Casino in Las Vegas in early 2019 and they have a team of service-oriented professionals who work as extensions of your team to help accomplish your vision and goals," Wassman says. "The flexibility they have to help create a fun, engaging event for your guests is a key."

The best way to collaborate with these resorts to create an ideal setting for the attendees all comes down to communication.

"You begin by discussing and outlining your expectations, goals and objectives for your meeting," Wassman says. "Partnering with the right team makes all the difference in the world. The profession-

als at these facilities have expertise and experience working with groups of all types. Leverage that expertise and work together to create an exceptional experience for your attendees."

Naturally, there's the fun and excitement of the casino gambling to attract people, but attendees also appreciate the close proximity to the numerous shows, activities and fine dining. "I'm of the mindset to always try to expand your horizons — keep learning," Wassman says. "If you haven't had a meeting at a gaming facility, give it a try. You'll be pleasantly surprised."

#### Gamble on Las Vegas

Katrina Kent, CMP, CMM, director, the event group for TD Ameritrade in



ARIA Resort & Casino uses ample natural light in its 500,000 sf of flexible meeting space, which includes ballrooms, meeting rooms and boardrooms.

# A Safe Bet

## Holding a Meeting or Convention at a Gaming Resort is a Winning Proposition

By Keith Loria

Jersey City, NJ, has arranged the company's group meeting at MGM Grand in Las Vegas for the past four years and cites the consistent high-end service as a reason she keeps going back.

"MGM is not the newest or hippest choice in Las Vegas, but it is classic and they host large groups so well," she says. "Service at MGM is on point and the people we've built our program with over the years are engaged and consistent. There are also so many fantastic restaurants at MGM Grand and entertainment choices for people to enjoy. It's all right there."

The idea that gaming resorts steal your attendees to go gamble and party, and lessen participation, is outdated at this point.

"Our experience has been that not only does Las Vegas attract more people, the big resorts are more equipped to handle large conferences than anywhere else," Kent says.

"They do it better from a service standpoint. The experience overall is elevated. Access to leading technology and production is easy, as well."

Tony Yousfi, CMP, vice president of hotel sales for ARIA Resort & Casino and Vdara Hotel & Spa, notes that when ARIA was built, it offered 300,000 sf of meeting space, but this past year has added another 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space across four stories.

"When we look at those two segments financial and insurance, and we have done extensive studies, they are looking for an atmosphere that is professional, quiet, discreet, business-first and having alternative venues for one-on-one breakout meetings," he says. "They are constantly entertaining clients that are coming in, so it's definitely a big touch point having different areas of the hotel offering different things."



Bellagio Las Vegas is famous for its fountain show. Its Grand Ballroom, with 45,000 sf, can handle up to 4,500 attendees in a theater-style setting or 3,000 banquet-style.

Part of the \$170 million expansion was the addition of the Cypress Executive Lounge, a nearly 3,000-sf space featuring a fully stocked pantry, three private suites for personal workspaces and one-on-one meetings, a conference room with flexible furniture set ups for up to 28, and a beautiful study for toasting to a successful event.

Dennis Hamilton, president of Hamilton Meetings & Incentives, a corporate meeting planner based in East Lansing, MI, has been in the industry for more than 40 years and thinks gaming resorts offer that "something special." One of

his favorite destinations to bring meetings and conventions is Las Vegas and Bellagio Las Vegas.

"The corporate programs I represent prefer very high end properties and the Bellagio fits that bill. Over the past few years, we have hosted a multitude of our clients ranging in size and complexity," he says. "It takes a very unique hotel team to make a small

group in Vegas terms feel like a 'Big Fish.' The events team continues to strive to provide new experiences, program customization and unique problem-solving techniques to the planning process."

Don Ross, vice president of catering, conventions & events at Caesars Entertainment, says the company has nine luxurious properties in Las Vegas and is building its 10th property, Caesars Forum, a 550,000-sf conference center that can accommodate more than 10,000 attendees.

"We know how busy all meeting planners are and especially how busy the insurance and financial sector is," he says. "We make it easy to host a meeting with flexible meeting space. Several of our properties have guest room towers with direct access to the conference space, which is very convenient for attendees."

The properties also understand the needs of VIPs and offer a range of services to assure a top-tier experience from limos, to diamond cards, and priority access to restaurants, spas and shows.

"In Las Vegas, we will have over 2 million sf of conference space available when Caesars Forum opens next year," Ross says. "The facility will feature 300,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including two 110,000-sf pillar-less ballrooms, two 40,000-sf ballrooms and six state-of-the-art boardrooms."

What's great about hosting a meeting in Las Vegas is that when after the



The LINQ Hotel & Casino has 2,252 rooms, including 244 suites and 28 cabana suites, some of which provide a view of the High Roller, the world's tallest observation wheel.

show's activities are over for the day, there's plenty of post-show activities to keep people busy.

"Las Vegas is one of the top entertainment destinations in the world, Ross says. "If it is dining you are looking for, Caesars Entertainment has Gordon Ramsay's Hell's Kitchen, Nobu Restaurant and Giada De Laurentiis' Giada, which overlooks the heart of the Las Vegas Strip. We have world-class nightlife and entertainers in residency including Backstreet Boys, Gwen Stefani and many more."

There's also the LINQ Promenade, an outdoor retail, dining and entertainment plaza that is home to the High Roller, a 550-foot observation wheel — the tallest in the world — offering 360-degree views of the Las Vegas valley. For the adventurous and adrenaline-seeking event attendee, Caesars Entertainment recently debuted FLY LINQ, a zip-line experience 12 stories above The LINQ Promenade and the Strip's only zip line experience.

"We understand how important and challenging a meeting planner's role is, and we have worked hard on our processes to assure alignment and our customer's satisfaction," Ross says. "From a food and beverage standpoint, we pride ourselves on providing restaurant-quality catering. Our chefs enjoy sitting down with a customer to create custom menus that will elevate the events."

Amanda Voss, vice president of sales for Bellagio Las Vegas, says many insurance companies are looking for privacy and the resort takes extra care to offer white-glove treatment to ensure clients leave happy with their service. And once

*“The corporate programs I represent prefer very high-end properties and the Bellagio Las Vegas fits that bill. Over the past few years, we have hosted a multitude of our clients ranging in size and complexity.”*

Dennis Hamilton  
President  
Hamilton Meetings & Incentives  
East Lansing, MI

the meeting ends, there's plenty of high-end dining and entertainment options.

“A lot of our groups do dine around, and we help them coordinate everything so they don't have to leave the property,” she says. “All of this is by our beautiful fountain show, which really sets us apart from our competition. That makes it very special.”

Tori Brumfield, vice president/management supervisor for EvansHardy+Young, a full-service creative agency specializing in a four key areas, one of which is gaming resorts. She says some may question the attractiveness of both hosting and attending a meeting or conference at a casino resort and that's understandable given the immediate connotation of the Las Vegas Strip — the crowds; the sensory overload. However, casino resorts offer a wealth of opportunities for both those planning the conference and those attending the conference, she says.

“Many casino resorts are located off the beaten path, often in wine country

or other bucolic locations,” Brumfield says. “They are often self-contained ‘mini-cities’ where attendees can meet, learn and network during the day, then switch gears to enjoy a little thrill on the gaming floor at night, indulge in over-the-top culinary offerings, relax at the spa, or get a few holes in before the sun sets.”

M Resort Spa Casino in nearby Henderson, NV, has 390 rooms and offers more than 92,000 sf of gaming. The Villaggio Del Sole Pool and Entertainment Piazza spans 100,000 sf and is perfect for scenic outdoor functions. M Pavilion, at 25,000 sf, can host corporate events for up to 2,300 guests, and its 92,000-sf conference center brings in plenty of natural light with views of the Las Vegas skyline. There are also diversions beyond the casino after meeting sessions, such as a 23,000-sf spa and salon.

#### Fun in Atlantic City

Atlantic City has long been known as the gambling capital of the East, and although the city was devastated by Tropical Storm Sandy in 2012, it has rebounded strongly and offers major appeal to corporate meetings for those in the insurance and financial industries.

“Attendees can do it all under one roof; meet, eat and sleep,” Jim Wood, president of Meet AC says. “Attendees

are also able to utilize the added amenities the casino property offers, such as the fitness gym, indoor pool, spa and much more. In addition, attendees can explore the array of dining and entertainment options just steps from the meeting room.”

Both the insurance and financial industry markets are more incentive based than educational and tend to gravitate to Tier 1 resort destinations. Atlantic City is definitely a place for them to go.

“Located within a few hours’ drive of nearly one third of the nation’s popu-



M Resort Spa Casino offers more than 92,000 sf of gaming. The Villaggio Del Sole Pool and Entertainment Piazza spans 100,000 sf and is perfect for scenic outdoor functions.

Credit: M Resort Spa Casino



Credit: Caesars Entertainment

Caesars Entertainment has more than 20 destinations nationwide offering 40 first-class properties with 42,000 guest rooms and 1.9 million sf of meeting space.

lation and 20 percent of the country’s business addresses, the Atlantic City Convention Center is easily accessible for convention, trade show and meeting attendees,” Wood says. “Atlantic City is a beach resort destination that offers world class entertainment, dining, shopping as well as being the second-largest gaming destination in the country.”

#### Additional New Investment

The Atlantic City Convention Center offers 500,000 sf of meeting space, five spacious exhibit halls, 45 meeting rooms, 29 covered loading docks and plenty of CVB support. In the past year, TD Bank held its Merchant Service Sales Conference and three insurance events are scheduled in the center before the end of 2019.

“There are endless activities and experiences for attendees once the meetings are through,” Wood says. “They can visit the Orange Loop area;



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Credit: Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City has memorabilia attendees will love, including Elvis Presley's Rolls-Royce, Madonna's kimono, Michael Jackson's glove and more.

take in a show at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City; ride The Wheel at Steel Pier — the third-tallest wheel in the U.S.; climb the 228 steps at the Absecon Lighthouse; or eat with the locals at our famous eateries with unique dining experiences."

Shelley Williams, vice president of sales at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City, says the venue has no shortage of world-class entertainment, with performances 365 days a year. The property can arrange music for any event or for attendees to enjoy during their spare time.

"When you first walk into our property, you will notice how vibrant our space is and you will instantly feel the excitement as you listen to curated music throughout the property," she says. "Our meetings rooms are conveniently located on the same floor and very accessible to our guest rooms as well as our on-property restaurants."

No space within the property is

**"Gaming Resorts are often self-contained 'mini-cities' where attendees can meet, learn and network during the day, then switch gears to enjoy a little thrill on the gaming floor at night ..."**



**Tori Brumfield**  
Vice President, Management Supervisor  
EvansHardy+Young  
Santa Barbara, CA

off limits for events, and that's something those in these industries appreciate. They can host an event in the nightclub, VIP lounge, world-class restaurants, spa, arena, or the performance space, Sound Waves.

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City offers 2,000 guest rooms with more than 150,000 sf of meeting space that can accommodate

events of all sizes.

"Whether you're looking for an intimate board meeting to a large-scale event — indoor or outdoor — we can fit any bill," Williams says. "Our Hard Rock Live at Etess Arena can hold up to 7,000 attendees. For a trade-show format, it can accommodate more than 300 booths. Our next-largest venue is our 29,000-sf Seminole Ballroom, which divides into six sections, perfect for any type of event. All A/V is handled in house by our very own experts."

Guests have access to multiple entertainment venues throughout the property, where they can be entertained by world-class live music, comedians and even Broadway shows. And rock aficionados are in for a real treat.

The property boasts the largest music memorabilia collections in the U.S., including Elvis Presley's Rolls-Royce, Madonna's kimono, Michael Jackson's famed glove, KISS' reunion costumes, Bruce Springsteen's Born in the USA tour outfit, hand-written lyrics to John Lennon's song "Imagine" and much more.

"Music is a part of our core, and we want you to channel your inner rock star with our Sound of Your Stay program — Picks, Wax and Tracks," Williams says. "Guests can have a Fender guitar

delivered to their room for a private jam session, get their groove on with a carefully curated collection of iconic records played on a Crosley turntable or download and enjoy an array of tunes during their stay. We want our guests to have a unique, memorable music experience that they will never forget."

Steve van der Molen, Caesars Entertainment vice president meeting operations, AC Region, says Harrah's Resort Atlantic City provides a secluded marina setting with exposure to natural light.



The Mirage Las Vegas, an MGM Resorts International property, allows attendees to interact with marine animals at Siegfried & Roy's Secret Garden and Dolphin Habitat.



**"Attendees are also able to utilize the added amenities the casino property offers, such as the fitness gym, indoor pool, spa and much more. In addition, attendees can explore the array of dining and entertainment options just steps from the meeting room."**

**Jim Wood**  
President  
Meet AC  
Atlantic City, NJ

Also, Bally's Atlantic City and Caesars Atlantic City offer access to the beach and the historic Atlantic City Boardwalk.

Overlooking the Absecon Inlet — the gateway to the Atlantic Ocean — and the iconic Marina District, Harrah's Atlantic City's Waterfront Conference

*The Atlantic City Convention Center offers 500,000 sf of meeting space, five spacious exhibit halls, 45 meeting rooms and 29 covered loading docks. Also, there are plenty of things to do onsite.*

Center offers a beautifully designed meetings experience on the East Coast with a fantastic view of the water.

"The 125,000 sf of meeting space offers planners the ability to eat, sleep and meet all in one location with more than 2,590 newly refreshed hotel rooms," Van der Molen says. "This versatile space has two 50,000-sf pillar-less ballrooms that can be configured 300 different ways. The Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center and hotel is the largest hotel-conference center complex from Baltimore to Boston."

When the meeting is over, event attendees can choose from any of the diverse dining destinations, world-class entertainment and activities available at Caesars, Harrah's, or Bally's Atlantic City.

"Our motto at Caesars Entertainment is 'One company, one contract and countless options.' With one contract, event planners can easily create a one-of-a-kind meeting," Van der Molen says. "Additionally, Caesars Entertainment offers one food and beverage minimum that allows meeting planners to host meals at different hotels within one destination or catered meals in unique spaces. Planners have the option to



Credit: Meet AC

have an opening reception at Harrah's, a general session at Caesars Atlantic City and a closing reception on the beach at Bally's. All planning will be done with one point of contact who will personally take the time to get to know meeting planners' specific needs."

### A Taste of Adventure

Not all gaming resorts are in the cities known for gambling.

Atlantis, Paradise Island is home to the largest convention center in the Caribbean, which is why Wendy Blaney, chief sales officer of Atlantis, Paradise Island, says it's the perfect meeting getaway spot for those in the insurance and financial industries.

"We have dedicated specialists who have worked with our insurance and financial sector clients for many years and continue to maintain a strong relationship with them," she says. "Their

knowledge goes way beyond the resort; they have strong knowledge of the clients' industry and really understand the granular details that come with working with premier groups like these."

Atlantis, Paradise Island draws a high attendee mix for meetings because there is so much to offer clients on-property. For example, the resort is built around Aquaventure, an innovative, 141-acre waterscape of thrilling slides and river rides. It is also home to the largest open-air marine habitat in the world with over 50,000 marine animals.

"The resort is a destination in itself. We have been operating in the meetings business for a long time, so we are highly experienced with all size groups within all corporate sectors," Blaney says. "We offer premier group dining at some of our renowned culinary outlets, outdoor venues with picturesque views and flexible meeting space. We also have incredible relationships with our DMCs if a customer wants to provide an off-the-charts banquet function for their meeting attendees. We also have dedicated entertainment and in-house A/V departments, who are here to service the needs of the group."

Sarah Kazhe-Kirgan, director of marketing at Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino in Mescalero, NM, says a meeting at this gaming resort allows participants to take advantage of the outdoors in their free time, as there's plenty of fishing, boating, zip lining and hiking available.

*Attendees at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City will be immersed in music. They can even have a Fender guitar delivered to their room for a private jam session.*



Credit: Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City

*“We were just at the ARIA Resort & Casino in Las Vegas in early 2019 and they have a team of service-oriented professionals who work as extensions of your team to help accomplish your vision and goal.”*

Tina-Marie Wassman  
Principal, TNC Events  
Detroit, MI

As for the meetings themselves, the resort offers a 29,000-sf event center and smaller meeting rooms available for breakouts. Over the years, it has hosted numerous meetings for those involved in the insurance and financial sectors.

“This is a one-stop shop for a convention, as we are almost a little town within itself; you don’t need to leave to get anything,” Kazhe-Kirgan says.

Karen O’Connell, executive director of resort sales for Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, CT, says it has plenty to offer insurance and financial management clients. Foxwoods has diverse guest room options, meeting space flexibility, outstanding food and beverage from its catering team or from one of its more than 35 dining options, as well as fabulous amenities such as golf, spas, shopping and world-class entertainment all reasonably priced and under one roof.



The Pool at Harrah’s Resort Atlantic City is a favorite meeting spot for attendees. Harrah’s Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center offers 125,000 sf of meeting space with great water views.

“Foxwoods has over 150,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, including our Fox Tower Boardroom with built in state-of-the-art technology for an intimate meeting for 20,” O’Connell says. “Foxwoods’ three pillar-free ballrooms ranging from 15,024 sf to 47,553 sf are perfect for meetings and events for up to 5,000 people.”

What’s more, a group can have a week-long conference and Foxwoods can offer them a different experience every day without having to load everyone onto bus to go to the destination.

“When the meetings are over you have your choice of activities — head to the gym for a workout, a treatment

in one of our two spas, team building in our 20-lane luxury bowling alley, live entertainment in one of the theaters or nightclubs, a great meal and dessert or try your luck on one of our casino floors,” O’Connell says. “In addition to having five pools, including a seasonal outdoor pool at The Fox Tower, Foxwoods has a 70-store Tanger Outlet Mall connected to the property and fun games for kids in our Tree House Arcade.”

Mohegan Sun, in Uncasville, CT is another gaming resort not in a traditional gambling city.

The resort has more than 40 restaurants, bars and lounges, but offers fine dining at Ballo Italian Restaurant and more Italian cuisine at celebrity chef Todd English’s Tuscany. For gaming excitement, visit Casino of the Earth and Sky, which at more than 300,000 sf, includes areas where there is no smoking allowed.

Its two luxury hotel towers have 1,563 rooms, there are two world-class spas, The Shops at Mohegan Sun — with 130,000 sf of retail shopping — and entertainment venues that include the 10,000-seat Mohegan Sun Arena and the 350-seat Wolf Den.

In addition, planners can have access to more than 275,000 sf of meeting and function space and a 17,500 sf outdoor sun terrace. **I&FMM**



Atlantis, Paradise Island in the Bahamas has amenities such as Aquaventure, a 141-acre water park with thrilling slides and river rides. The resort also has an open-air marine habitat.

# TURN ANY MEETING INTO A SHOW.

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



# Family Friendly Fun

More Companies Are Including Spouses and Children in Their Events

By Keith Loria



As more families attend events, planners must seek activities for adults and children.

Credit: Riskalyze



**Dan Bolton**  
Director of Conferences and Events  
Riskalyze  
Auburn, CA

*“It was one of the best decisions we’ve ever made ... we’ve had attendees gift tickets for their partner’s birthday, and get engaged at the event...”*

There was a time when those in the insurance and financial industries faced some sad goodbyes when they needed to leave their children or spouses for a big company meeting. Not only did it mean being away from their loved ones, but it often brought on resentment from the family stuck at home while one spouse got to visit a fun destination.

Today, more meetings and conventions are inviting the family, championing the idea that attendees bring their spouses and children with them when attending an event. The reason? Happier workers and a more peaceful family life for those involved.

### Happy Family, Happy Worker

Riskalyze, a financial technology company based in Auburn, CA, annually hosts its Fearless Investing Summit for more than 600 attendees from across the financial industry.

Dan Bolton, director of conferences and events for Riskalyze, says after its first year, they noticed how many attendees brought their spouses and decided to add an additional registration option for attendees.

“It was one of the best decisions we’ve ever made for the meeting and we’ve had attendees gift tickets for their partner’s birthday, get

engaged at the event, and even had spouses email us asking when registration opens for the event,” he says. “Just this year, we’ve already had multiple spouses confirmed and an attendee purchased a ticket for his son so that the son could learn more about the industry.”

In fact, once the company added a spouse ticket option to the main conference, they saw the overall customer attendance increase.

“While we’ve always wanted our customers to feel welcome to bring their family to an event, this added ticket option in a way gave them permission,” Bolton says. “It’s also much easier to tell your spouse that you’ve got to go to a work event when you’re able to include them.”

### Cooldest Company in the World

Riskalyze is intentional in making the event a fun experience for both attendees and their families.

“For our internal company events, we want our employees’ kids to talk about how their mom or dad works at the coolest company in the world,” Bolton says. “For our customer-facing events, we want the spouses and families to talk about how they attended the best event. We dream big but live in reality.

We look at the event elements that will add a memorable experience while meeting the internal company’s goals of creating a unifying experience.”

Mark Herbert, president and CEO of Incentive Solutions in Atlanta, GA, specializes in meeting planning for corporate clientele throughout the country, many in the financial industry. He notes the secret to organizing a

family friendly meeting comes down mostly to two things: the location and the dates.

“You should consider a central location close to where your participants are located. If budget is an issue, look at one that is close enough that your participants can drive to attend,” he says. “If flying is required, consider a destination that has plenty of family friendly activities, including ones that are specifically



**Mark Herbert**  
President and CEO  
Incentive Solutions  
Atlanta, GA

*“This is a golden opportunity to mix business with some family time. Not to mention, you are now creating a loyalty to your business amongst the whole family. It’s a great way to extend brand awareness.”*



Credit: Riskalyze

Activities such as a tower swing, facing page, carnival games, top, and life-size bowling, left, were a hit at an event for Riskalyze, a financial technology company.



**Jessie States, CMP, CMM**  
Director, MPI Academy  
Meeting Professionals  
International  
Dallas, TX

**“Families are searching for destinations, venues and facilities that not only provide activities and adventures for children, but those that can fulfill the needs of their retired immediate family as well.”**

kid-focused. Many properties also offer child care for the ‘adults’ night out.’

When considering the dates for travel, if you want to be open to children, he says you will need to plan the travel program around the school year so thinking holidays and summer breaks are good times to jet off.

“Family friendly meetings can boost attendance as attendees may be more inclined to participate if they can also spend time with their families during their downtime,” Herbert says. “This is especially important if you are marketing your meeting to outside audiences like customers who may not want to spend more time away from their families. This is a golden opportunity to mix business with some family time. Not to mention, you are now creating a loyalty to your business amongst the whole family. It’s a great way to extend brand awareness.”

Jessie States, CMP, CMM, director, MPI Academy at Meeting Professionals International, says in 2019, family friendly meetings aren’t just about the kids and spouses.

“More and more adults are caring for aging parents, and forward-thinking event professionals are ensuring that their meetings can accommodate for the needs of the young and the not-so young,” she says. “They are searching for destinations, venues and facilities that not only provide activities and adventures for children, but those that can fulfill the needs of their retired immediate family as well.”

#### **Include Coloring Books and Crayons**

Lorena Tomasini, owner of MALM Life and Health Insurance Agency in Cutler Bay, FL, says when planning activities for family friendly events, organizing a meeting time that works for everyone — including young children — should be considered.

When kids are involved, you need to prepare more than if it’s just a spouse or adult child.

“Coloring books and crayons will always work,” Tomasini says. “If the kids are involved in the meeting ... draw diagrams to make it easy for them to understand and follow along. Use fewer numbers; more visuals.”

For example, Tomasini was at a company meeting where the children looked tired and bored.

To avoid the kids distracting their parents from the important information, she made some copies of a coloring book and told them it would be a silent competition based on who could color and be the most quiet.

“Kids like a challenge and it helped with them doing something to not distract the adults,” she says. “They both got a candy at the end for having behaved well.”

#### **Appealing to All**

To be successful at creating family friendly meetings, Bolton agrees that the event environment has to be inviting to all ages and it’s important to develop a few activities that are strictly child-centered.

“We want to provide activities for all ages and abilities. There are multiple free resources available within the community,” he says. “Just recently, the local fire station agreed to come out to an upcoming event. They’ll be bringing a couple of their trucks for kids to explore and all it took was a phone call.”

Even those who come without their families can find fun in the family friendly atmosphere.

“For those who don’t have a family, there are still many options for them,” Bolton says. “We want to reduce as many attendance barriers as possible. We want both attendees and their family to be able to look at the agenda and feel a sense of inclusion due to thoughtful planning and activity offerings.”

**“Indianapolis offers attendees and their families not only the world’s largest children’s museum, but more than 10 major family friendly museums, attractions and professional sports in walking distance of the Indiana Convention Center and downtown meeting hotels.”**

#### **Lisa Wallace**

Associate Director  
Convention Marketing  
Visit Indy  
Indianapolis, IN

Through the years, the company has brought in world-class comedians, rented a yacht, and taken over a 1,000-acre Texas ranch.

“We know that when an attendee’s spouse is having a great time, that’s one of the best compliments we can receive,” Bolton says. “When planning, I’m thinking, ‘How can I plan an experience that both my groomsmen and



*Kalahari Resorts & Conventions offers a variety of activities, including a water park, spa and more.*

grandparents would want to attend?’ We also make sure to offer multiple food options for a variety of palates. We mix it up to provide savory options for adults and fun options for any children in attendance.”

Obviously, a family friendly meeting done correctly will have a specific agenda for the kids. This can include a kid’s club atmosphere during meeting times and plenty of kid-friendly activities during the evening events.

“Another nice touch is welcome and goody bags for the kids as well as the adults,” Herbert says. “Additionally, many times the best events offer premium giveaways. A fun family giveaway that everyone can enjoy for years to come is a great idea — matching sunglasses, sandals, custom-designed Nikes, etc., are all good options.”

Herbert says a good mix of events, both kid-friendly and adults-only, is a necessity for family events.

“For your more formal, adults-only events, arrange to have supervised child care in a ballroom or outdoor space full of games, movies and other activities that the kids will love,” he says. “This will allow the parents to simply drop their kids off before the event and head out to a fun adults-only event.”

#### **Desirable Destinations**

Lisa Wallace, associate director, convention marketing for Visit Indy, says Indianapolis has a host of great things for families to do for companies that hold their meetings in the city.

“Indianapolis offers attendees and their families not only the world’s largest children’s museum, but more than 10 major family friendly museums, attractions and professional sports in walking distance of the Indiana Convention Center and downtown meeting hotels,” she says. “These attractions also serve as event venues, combining the needs of the event organizers, attendees and guests.”

For example, Primerica Life Insurance Group’s 2017 Biennial Convention was one such major meeting where attendees brought family along and guests took advantage of post-show activities such as visiting the Indianapolis Zoo, the Rhythm! Discovery Center and walking the Canal Walk.

#### **Venues Play a Part**

Tifani Jones, corporate director of sales for Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in Wisconsin Dells, WI, says the inclusion of families changes a meeting’s entire structure and adds many



**Lorena Tomasini**  
Owner  
MALM Life and Health  
Insurance Agency  
Cutler Bay, FL

**“If the kids are involved in the meeting ... draw diagrams to make it easy for them to understand and follow along.”**

additional layers to the planning process. It also means more than just lining up child care and adding chicken fingers to the menu.

"Ideally, your venue will offer plenty of onsite activities for kids and spouses. Offsite excursions can be a great option for older kids, but they generally don't work for small children," she says. "In addition to utilizing the onsite recreation, you'll want to plan group activities that bring the families together. This will take some thought as toddlers and teens do not share many interests, so offer activities aimed at different age tiers. The venue's planning staff should be well versed in generating creative entertainment ideas for your group."

That experience has made Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in Wisconsin Dells, WI one of the most in-demand convention centers in the state.

"The appeal of mixing work and play is only increasing for meeting attendees," says Kevin Shanley, corporate sales and revenue management for Kalahari Resorts & Conventions. "When groups select Kalahari Resorts & Conventions as their location, it's no longer a meeting someone has to attend, it becomes an experience the whole family gets to attend."

Bolton says when it comes to making the meeting family friendly, there are a number of things on which he focuses, but it always starts with location. He looks at multiple outside spaces specific to the attendee demographics.

"We intentionally choose cities that offer a variety of family friendly activities," he says. "Whether it is a nearby theme park, zoo, or outdoor activity, we always review the local options and make sure to promote them to our attendees."

For example, Orlando has many places to hold family friendly events outside of the hotel, making it a great destination. Its amusement parks create one-of-a-kind experiences for kids and adults.

Every year, Riskalyze holds picnics for both its East Coast and West Coast offices where it invites all employees and their families. This past year, it rented out a rooftop venue in downtown Atlanta and employees were greeted by some of the best views in the city. For the families, there were carnival games, prizes and miniature golf.

"Another event is our annual customer conference. While the event is geared toward our customers and industry partners, we included an optional spouse trip that was complimentary to attendees," Bolton says. "Our event was

in Texas so we booked a charter bus and drove the spouses up to the Chip and Joanna Gaines Magnolia market for the day."

Herbert shares that one of his favorite family events took place in Orlando, and included many of the suggestions mentioned above.

"From the start, we focused on including the children, really setting the mood for a family friendly event. We included goody bags for the entire family, and had Maui Jim come out and do onsite sunglasses for the entire family and did fittings right on location," he says. "We hosted a family fun evening one night at Disney's Hollywood Studios in The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror courtyard. Our final shebang was at the hotel. Kids were dropped off for a night under the stars, with child care, dinner, a dessert bar and plenty of fun movies, while the parents headed to their own version of a night under the stars, full of great food, a little dancing and live entertainment."

All-inclusive destinations and beach destinations are important to consider, as well.

"All-inclusive destinations are great, because you don't have to worry about consumption," Herbert says. "There are also plenty of destinations that have pool and beachside activities for the entire family to enjoy — pools that include water slides, fountains and beach activities like snorkeling, paddle boating, surfing lessons and more."

#### Making a Lasting Impression

One of the greatest challenges is planning for a variety of age groups. There is a big difference in the idea of fun for kids 5 and younger versus those older than 10. It's all about striking a balance for all age groups.

Events should never be planned alone and the more involved one can get coworkers in planning and generating ideas that their families would like, the better.

"Including coworkers on an event generates more excitement and interest," Bolton says. "Some of our best ideas at these events have come from comments from peers like, 'My kids would love if we had this.' It seems like for every activity, I'll say it out loud before booking so coworkers can weigh in."

It's also important to add a take-home element. Attendees and their families should be leaving the event with a visual reminder or a type of gift that serves a reminder about what a fun experience they had at the company party.

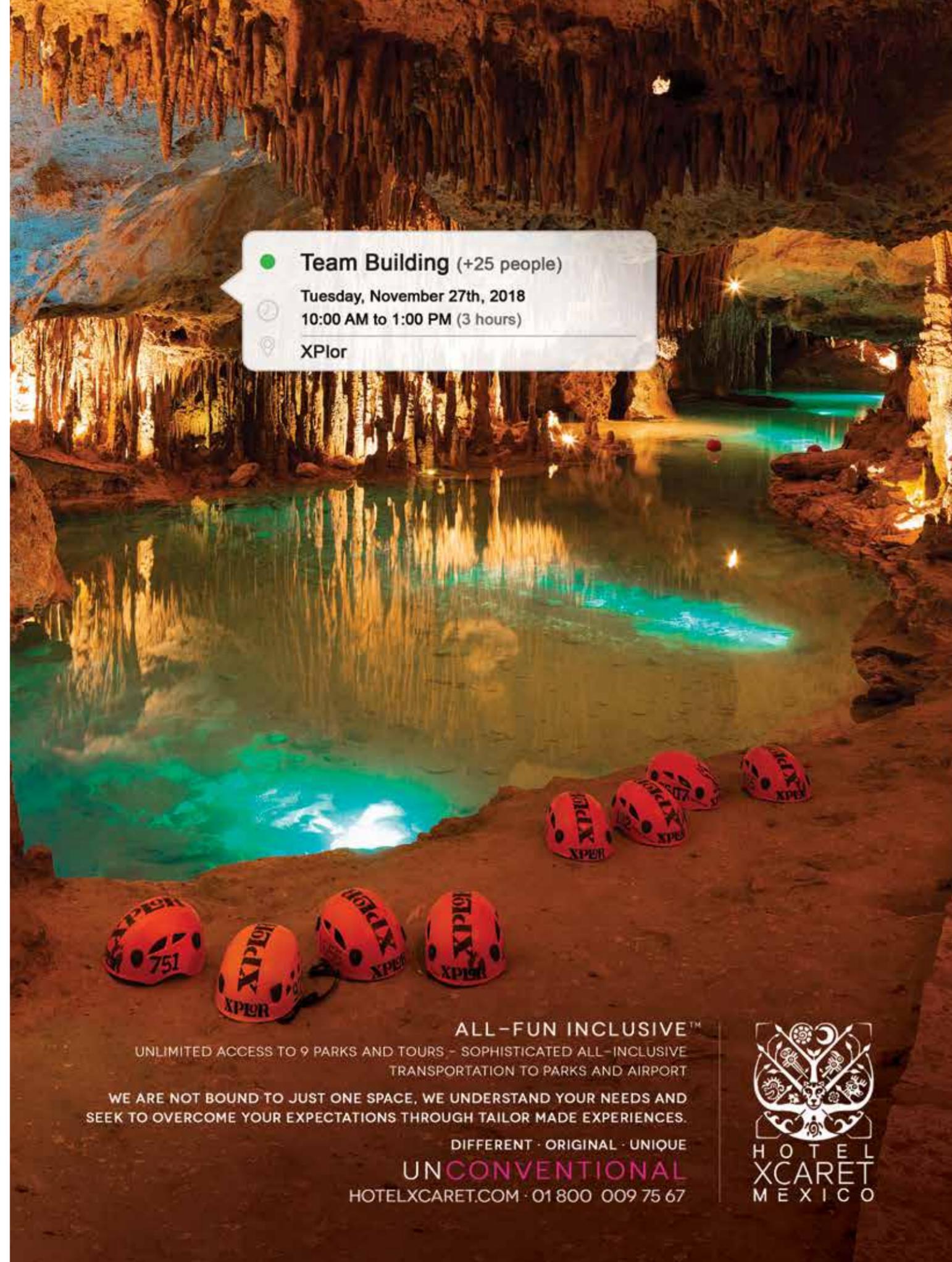
I&FMM



Tifani Jones

Corporate Director of Sales  
Kalahari Resorts &  
Conventions  
Wisconsin Dells, WI

**// In addition to utilizing the onsite recreation, you'll want to plan group activities that bring the families together. The venue's planning staff should be well versed in generating creative entertainment ideas for your group. //**



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# Multigenerational Meetings

## Planners Face a Challenge When Dealing With Attendees of All Ages

By Cynthia Dial

Imagine the synchronized tasks of selecting a destination for a meeting or incentive that not only meets the criteria of the executive board, but an assortment of groups ranging in age, interests and rules of engagement? This is the world of meeting planners, circa 2019.

### Meet the Attendees

Defined by Business Insider, the generational makeup of many of today's insurance and financial events include baby boomers (ages 55 to 73, born between 1946-1964), Generation Xers (ages 39 to 54, born between 1965-1980) and millennials (ages 23 to 38, born between 1981-1996). Coupled with the typical trio of goals — encounter, educate and stimulate — today's meeting specialist is not unlike an under-the-big-top performer whose role is to keep several objects in the air while simultaneously transferring them from one hand to the other.

Sound familiar? The challenges are plentiful but the best way to manage this labyrinth of tasks is to realistically recognize them, propose a plan for

them and directly deal with them. The first step in this process is to understand the differences in, and the desires of, these attendees.

Baby boomers are the post-World War II generation, typically raised in an environment where the dad worked a

*“The key is to design relevant experiences that bring different generations together in mutually beneficial scenarios, instead of catering to them separately.”*

**Katrina Kent, CMP, CMM, Director, The Event Group  
TD Ameritrade, Jersey City, NJ**

9-to-5 job and the mom was a stay-at-home one. As well as being competitive and team- and-goal oriented, additional characteristics of this group are a significant commitment to the workplace, a strong work ethic, an adherence to authority and a high regard for networking opportunities. Motivated by job title, privileges and prestige, boomers seek professional development well beyond their work years.

Generation Xers — sometimes called the middle child of the generations —

are shaped by the predominance of growing up in the era of two-income families, translating to the appreciation of a career/lifestyle balance and the development of a work-hard/play-hard mindset. More ethnically diverse and better educated than their pre-

decessors, they are independent and resourceful, though less committed to a single employer over a span of years. Working and communicating through such devices as smartphones, laptops and tablets are second nature to Gen Xers. They value freedom and responsibility in the workplace, as well as a hands-off management style.

Millennials, who are known for multitasking, embrace the latest and greatest in technology to do that and more. Motivated by intellectual stimu-

lation and what they deem as meaningful work, they are open to change, aren't afraid to share their opinions and place a high value on workplace flexibility. Appreciative of a less formal environment, they want their job to be social and fun, they want to feel connected and they desire ongoing feedback from their boss as opposed to an annual evaluation.

### Concentrate on Differences and Celebrate Differences

This is quite a diverse collection of personalities. The solution to dealing with them all? Take advantage of these differences, integrate the groups and capitalize on their communication, the

*“When I'm planning a trip, I don't focus on the age differences but more on the activities of interest to our qualifiers, as well as whether we offer something for everyone in the low-, medium- and high-impact activities.”*

**Donna Brinson, Senior Meeting Planner, Corporate Events  
Jack Henry & Associates, Charlotte, NC**

sharing of talents and the melding of ideas. They all seek respect, value and interaction — not lengthy, meaningless meetings and seemingly forever award ceremonies.

One way to best reach all of these groups is to plan the event through a team, one that includes a voice from every period. After all, who knows better what a colleague desires than a generational peer? For example, with a goal to foster knowledge transfer, consider reverse mentoring, defined as the pairing of employees of different generations who can share unique experiences and perspectives. Have a younger generation employee mentor an older one — who consequently adds incalculable merit to this May-December relationship through their over-the-years wealth of networking contacts. And keep in mind that though the move is toward providing millennials with digital content, boomers still prefer printed handouts, so utilize both routes of communication.

### Eat, Love, Learn

As partialities extend to cuisine choices, with millennials and many Gen Xers preferring healthier options, it's possible to adhere to these preferences by offering a selection of fresh, locally sourced food choices at events and super foods at breakouts such as apples, walnuts, broccoli, carrots, dark chocolate, green tea and fruit- and herb-infused water. In a display of fondness for the earth, today's audiences are increasingly interested in the production of more sustainable/green events and the minimization of environmental impact. Weigh in the current desire to give back and contemplate a destination with

group's desire to interact on a more personal level.

- For millennials — incorporate the online marketing technique of gamification into the presentation to keep the attention of these tech-savvy, electronics-loving attendees who demand digital.

Along those lines, always adhere to this common-sense but critical detail and ensure a strong internet signal, one available on every device. Bottom line: Aim to personalize, not pigeonhole.

### Majority Rules

Generational diversity within an attendee mix is inherently interesting because if able to tap into ways for those from different generations to benefit from the other's presence, the experience is “richer all around,” says Katrina Kent, CMP, CMM, director, The Event Group, TD Ameritrade, a company geared to assisting clients pursue their financial

goals. “The key is to design relevant experiences that bring different generations together in mutually beneficial scenarios, instead of catering to them separately.”

Kent cautions about the importance of knowing the audience breakdown and not making assumptions about that generational balance without properly analyzing the data. “We have one client conference for which we were certain most of the audience were seniors, as they were in the past. But when we looked at new numbers, the crowd had begun to skew a lot younger than we perceived. It's important to be inclusive but it's also important to keep perspective about the majority and use this assessment as a guardrail when creating the event.”

### Years Versus Yearning

“When I'm planning a trip, I don't focus on the age differences but more on the activities of interest to our qualifiers, as well as whether we offer something for everyone in the low-, medium- and high-impact activities. You will find



wine lovers joining a wine tour and adventure seekers on a whitewater rafting tour, regardless of age," explains Donna Brinson, senior meeting planner, corporate events for Jack Henry & Associates, one of the top three players

watching and jeep tours. And for those who love action, she specifies whitewater rafting, zip lining and kayaking.

"At Montage Deer Valley, we bused everyone to a ranch that covered

tions. In planning incentives, we look for a property/area that has universal appeal, and we consider all income levels and activity levels of our attendees."

When adhering to a conservative budget, the planner looks for places that offer "free" activities. "Most of all, I look for attendee experiences for which I don't pay — here I call it the Coeur d'Alene 'vibe.' It's perfect with the beauty, outdoor activities and shopping within minutes — all different, all unique." And

when budgets are more generous, this insurance planner believes this resort meets that standard as well — from playing the resort's golf course and experiencing the 14th hole's famous floating green, a renowned hole on the "play list" of most golfers (very likely a boomer) to enjoying the Hiawatha bike tour, a downhill ride through old railway tunnels. A personal favorite of this meetings specialist is Silverwood Theme Park. With the park's designation of its approximately 40 rides and slides as "high, medium and low intensity," as well as a wide selection of shows and dining, it makes for a full day of fun for all. Further meeting the measure of across-the-ages activities are hiking, jet skiing and zip lining, in addition to fishing, there are gentle river float trips and clay shooting.

#### Safety in Numbers

"I believe there is a challenge when groups try to pick one activity to appeal to a multigenerational audience because interests, levels of exertion and sense of adventure vary so much between individuals," says Jamie Cornell, director of sales and marketing, The Coeur d'Alene Resort. "It seems to work best when three to five activity options are offered that are somewhat different, allowing each attendee to select which works best for them." She cites the success of an incentive for 600 guests of varying ages last summer. The choice of varied daytime activities included kayaking, wine tasting, whitewater rafting, a silver mine and railroad museum



**Jamie Cornell**, Director of Sales and Marketing  
The Coeur d'Alene Resort, Coeur d'Alene, ID

*"I believe there is a challenge when groups try to pick one activity to appeal to a multigenerational audience because interests, levels of exertion and sense of adventure vary so much between individuals."*

in providing technological solutions to the financial services sector in the U.S. and Canada.

Responsible for planning her company's annual sales incentive reward trip for the Golden Circle, a club of sales force personnel who have met their goals, Brinson gives details of this elite assembly. It started in 2006 within the ProfitStars brand when a group of qualifiers and their plus-ones visited The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. The four-night stay at this five-star venue was so successful that all Jack Henry brands — JHA Banking, Symitar and ProfitStars — now participate. With a knockout 2018 sales year, the result was a trip for 170 qualifiers and guests totaling 340 attendees to The Lodge at Edgewood Tahoe. Citing other resort choices which have met her five-star resort benchmark with 300 or fewer sleeping rooms and a wide spectrum of low-, medium- and high-impact activities, Brinson names One&Only Palmilla in Los Cabos, Mexico; The St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort, Puerto Rico; Four Seasons Resort and Residences Anguilla; and Montage Laguna Beach and Montage Deer Valley.

"We have a strong mix of millennials and baby boomers," Brinson says. In a nod to lower-impact activities, she continues, "Wine and olive grove tours never fail to fill up and we have offered culinary classes." Outdoor medium-impact possibilities have included catamaran sailing, water excursions, whale

all impact levels where they had the choice of participating in all or none. Wagon rides, fly fishing, ATVs, archery, horseback riding, cornhole and even lounge chairs from which to simply sit and enjoy the fresh air and stunning scenery were possibilities. With white cowboy hats and bandanas for all, the day's top off was a barbecue and the best of western entertainment."

Beyond activities, however, Brinson pays homage to the initial greeting. "I feel the welcome reception is the event that sets the mood and brings the common denominator to all. Who doesn't like to gather on a dock, pick up a beverage or cocktail, board a boat and meander through the marsh accompanied by a resident dolphin enroute to the outdoor venue that features an incomparable view, adult tree-house, oyster roast and southern buffet under the stars as we did at Montage Palmetto Bluff? Or maybe it's a champagne gondola ride to the top of Aspen mountain during a stay at The St. Regis Aspen Resort?"

#### Destination, Meet Desires

Locating a destination that meets the needs of multiple ages is a significant piece of this detailed puzzle — a challenge met by the meeting planner from one of the nation's largest publicly held property and casualty insurers with the selection of The Coeur d'Alene Resort in Idaho for the company's incentive. "This resort covers all genera-

## Think Outside the Box

The best ways to effectively cross the barrier of years and get everybody excited about the meeting or incentive are to go beyond the norm in terms of destinations and look beyond the ordinary for activities. Though off the radar of many planners, here are some locations that spark of creativity — for attendees and in attendees.

#### Southern California's Mountains

Only 90 minutes by car but a world away from the Los Angeles bustle is Lake Arrowhead Resort and Spa, Autograph Collection, a legendary 27-acre resort 5,106 feet up in the San Bernardino National Forest, known as the Alps of Southern California. Though its initial roots date back to the 1920s, in 1982 it was destroyed by fire, reconstructed and reopened. Its reopening was so exclusive, former President Gerald Ford and his wife, Betty, attended.

Nearby are such activities as mountain biking on professional trails, a private 780-acre alpine lake and the McKenzie Water Ski School. There is also archery, bungee jumping and roller skating. When coupled with treatments at the 8,000-sf AAA Four Diamond Spa of the Pines during the day and s'mores on the beach and under the stars at night, the result is irresistibly rewarding.

#### Beyond Denver

"Imagine watching 225 horses led by cowboys gallop in from pasture or having your own horse for a week," says David Craig, general manager, C Lazy U Ranch, Colorado's premier luxury guest ranch with 8,500 acres of adventure less than 100 miles from Denver. This is where everyone, regardless of age, can disconnect from the internet and connect with each other through activities such as horseback riding, line dancing, tepee building and hatchet throwing.

Typical of the dude ranch scene, many meals are served family style, but atypical of many is Chef Dennis Kaniger — formerly with Ma Maison, Spago, Venue and his own four-star restaurant in Kansas City — at the helm. Along the lines of corporate social responsibility (CSR) prospects is the opportunity to volunteer at the Colorado Horse Rescue, a nonprofit dedicated to saving disadvantaged horses, located on the front range of the Rocky Mountains, just outside Denver.

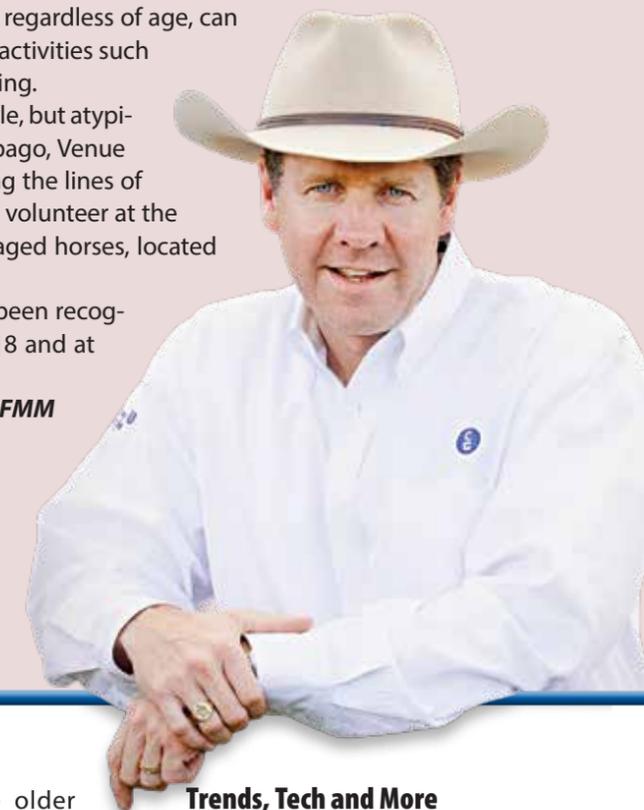
Celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, C Lazy U Ranch has been recognized by *Condé Nast Traveler* as the No. 1 resort in Colorado in 2018 and at *Travel + Leisure* as No. 3 in the America West in 2018.

Saddle up!

**I&FMM**

*"Imagine watching 225 horses led by cowboys gallop in from pasture or having your own horse for a week."*

**David Craig**, General Manager  
C Lazy U Ranch, Granby, CO



tour, spa time, golfing and a culinary activity. "In the evening, we cruised to our owner's private botanical garden for an on-the-lawn reception with a harpist, then a boat ride to the Hagadone Event Center, the resort's flagship indoor/outdoor meetings and events center situated on Lake Coeur d'Alene, for a themed dinner," Cornell says.

#### Check it Out

With respect to destination choice, Kent adds, "Sometimes the instinct

is to assume that the older generation most appreciates high-end destinations, and the younger generations appreciate those that are fun." Her advice: As most destinations have venues that check all the boxes, check it out first if in doubt. Getting specific, she says, "A hotel may look edgy or too hip for your group on paper, but when you get there, you may find that the atmosphere is inclusive and comfortable."

#### Trends, Tech and More

Kent sees trends in what planners are seeking for multigenerational meetings and incentives — personalization, surprise and delight, tech capabilities and ease of travel. She also issues a warning: "Avoid generational stereotypes. Boomers are not [all] tech averse. Millennials don't [all] have short attention spans. The more we work to help our participants across generations to connect authentically, the more successful our programs become." **I&FMM**

The Caribe Hilton is reopening in 2019 after a complete makeover, including all 652 guest rooms and suites and the modernization of 65,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space. It closed in 2017 after suffering damage from Hurricanes Irma and Maria.



Credit: Caribe Hilton

# Hope After the Hurricanes

Despite a difficult few years for the Caribbean Islands hit by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, the region still managed to attract almost 30 million visitors in 2018, its second-best year ever, and the Caribbean Tourism Organization is forecasting 6-7 percent growth in tourism arrivals in 2019, as most of the damaged infrastructure in hurricane-impacted destinations returns to normal.

Puerto Rico, one of the major Caribbean destinations for meetings and exhibitions, was hit especially hard by the hurricanes, with arrivals down 45 percent last year over 2017 figures. Several Caribbean destinations, however, posted double-digit visitor increases in 2018, including Guyana, Belize, the Cayman Islands, the Bahamas and Grenada, with some groups that were already booked into Anguilla, Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten and Puerto Rico managing to switch islands at the last minute.

This year, with improved Caribbean air connectivity, and with most of the

## Despite Some Islands Being Ravaged by Storms, Visits are Trending Upward

By Ron Bernthal

hurricane damaged hotels now up and running, leisure travel and meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) activities are definitely increasing on all the islands.

Some of the properties mentioned in the Caribbean/Bahamas are part of the Marriott Convention & Resort Network (CRN) which has announced the launch of Mastermind, a peer-to-peer community for meeting planners. The new Marriott CRN has several properties in the Caribbean, including Atlantis, Paradise Island in the Bahamas, which has 3,400 rooms; JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa, with 448 rooms; Marriott Cancun Resort, with 450

rooms; and Sheraton Puerto Rico Hotel & Casino, with 525 rooms.

"Our digital platform debuted in May with a goal to help planners feel connected, empowered and inspired while building new skills and meaningful long-term relationships," says Mike Wainwright, vice president of sales for the Marriott Convention & Resort Network. "With a diverse portfolio of venues in more destinations than any other company, we are committed to collaborate with planners on the journey to innovate. Meeting planners have the desire to push the envelope and inject creativity into meetings based on the changing demands of their customers. I am proud of our vision to have Mastermind provide a platform that brings these talented planners together to share knowledge, brainstorm and build lifelong relationships."

### Aruba

As one of the most revisited destinations in the Caribbean, Aruba is a good destination for insurance and financial

company incentives, conferences or retreats. Located in the southern Caribbean outside the hurricane belt — it was not affected by the 2017 hurricanes — the island is just a 2 1/2-hour flight from Miami, a 4-hour flight from New York City and offers year-round cooling trade winds with an average temperature of 82 degrees.

The Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino offers 10,000 sf of meeting space, and the property's Grand Ballroom can host up to 880 attendees with meetings space divisible into four sections. Nestled against the Caribbean sands of Aruba's Palm Beach, the property offers modern, recently upgraded guest rooms and suites, deluxe amenities and four-star service. Planners can upgrade specific attendees by booking premier suites in the exclusive Tradewinds Club. The venue offers an array of dining experiences, including Ruth's Chris Steak House, Atardi and La Vista. The 24-hour Stellaris Casino provides more than 10,000 sf of premium event space, so the hotel is also the ideal setting to hold a memorable event in Aruba.

Harris S. Fishman, CLU, ChFC, president and CEO of MassMutual Greater Philadelphia, visited the Marriott property with 30 attendees.

"It's a great island with great food and weat[her]," Fishman says. "In fact, its south of the traditional Caribbean hurricane belt, making it a safe bet for groups even later in the year when hurricanes may form in the region. Everyone is extremely friendly and willing to do anything to make guests happy."

Fishman likes the fact that his group can travel to Aruba on a direct flight, and that offsite venues are perfect for small group gatherings. "One night we dined offsite at Madame Janette near Eagle Beach, which is one of Aruba's top restaurants, and the weather on the island is very predictable, sunny, warm and breezy just about every day."

### Puerto Rico

After sustaining extensive damage from Hurricanes Irma and Maria back-to-back in 2017, San Juan is just about back to pre-hurricane levels in terms of

infrastructure, and almost all hotels are back in operation, often with renovated and improved rooms, meeting spaces and landscaping. Most of the Puerto Rico members of the Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association are back in business, offering visitors more than 4,000 restaurants, 141 hotels and 189 attractions island wide.

"Our cruise numbers also remain strong, and we're on a path to hit a record 1.7 million passengers during the 2018-2019 cruise season, surpassing by 17.7 percent the record number hit in 2015," says Brad Dean, the CEO of Discover



**"Our digital platform debuted in May with a goal to help planners feel connected, empowered and inspired while building new skills and meaningful long-term relationships."**

Mike Wainwright, Vice President of Sales  
Marriott Convention & Resort Network, Nashville, TN

Puerto Rico. "We're close to pre-Maria levels on air capacity and flight schedules, and we will have 15,000 rooms open by the end of 2019."

The Puerto Rico Convention Center is the largest in the Caribbean. It can host up to 10,000 attendees in indoor and outdoor areas, and is located less than a 15-minute drive from San Juan's Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport. Many of San Juan's excellent beachside hotels are also just a short drive from the airport.

The Caribe Hilton, a Puerto Rico landmark since 1949 and Hilton's first hotel outside the continental U.S., was hit hard by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Because of its location on a San Juan beachfront peninsula jutting into the sea, the property absorbed the full brunt of the two storms, which battered the property with heavy wind and rain.

After being closed since 2017 due to storm damage, the Caribe Hilton — the birthplace of the piña colada — is expected to open in mid-May, unveiling a more than \$100 million-dollar restoration; a major milestone as the property celebrates its 70th year of operation, and as Hilton Hotels marks its 100th anniversary.

The San Juan property has completed

a top-to-bottom makeover, including all 652 guest rooms and suites; reimaged food and beverage (F&B) concepts; fitness center, spa, tennis center and landscaping redesigns; and the modernization of 65,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space.

"The opening of Caribe Hilton in 1949 was a genesis of tourism that introduced travelers to the island of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean," Danny Hughes, executive vice president and president of the Americas, Hilton, says. "The revitalization of this emblematic property is a continuation of

that genesis, inspiring much anticipation and pride among the Hilton family, locals, guests and all who have an enduring affinity for this cherished San Juan hotel."

In every way the hotel's interior, exterior and landscaping will be better than ever, and with its 17 acres of stunning landscaping on the Caribbean Sea, within a five-minute drive of Old San Juan, the Caribe Hilton's reputation as one of San Juan's best meeting destinations will remain intact.

The 400-room Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Puerto Rico Golf & Beach Resort is nestled on 500 acres along a mile-long section of beach adjacent to the El Yunque National Forest and the Mameyes River, just a 40-minute drive east of the airport. The lush resort features the newly renovated 48,000-sf Oceanfront Conference Center, 7,000 sf of casino floor, two 18-hole golf courses, an expansive spa and fitness center, multiple lounges and entertainment venues, an international tennis center, a water sports center and two beachfront pools.

The property can host up to 3,300 guests in 24 flexible meeting rooms, including the nearly 22,000-sf Rio Mar Ballroom, one of the Caribbean's largest.



Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Puerto Rico Golf & Beach Resort hosted 800 attendees of the Caribe Federal Credit Union's annual Assembly Weekend event held in June.

Credit: Caribe Federal Credit Union

The property's Destination Management Company helps planners organize any type of event for insurance and financial firms. The resort reopened on March 1, 2018 following its brief closure after Hurricane Maria, with an introduction of new culinary offerings in addition to the resort's already eclectic range of restaurants and lounges, including the traditional "cocina criolla," or Puerto Rican cuisine. The resort also opened the Caicu Rum Bar, a new venue featuring hand-crafted, rum-based cocktails and a selection of rare private reserve batches.

In addition, Marbella's \$1.2 million renovation debuts as the resort's modern restaurant with a sleek design. Additional resort venues include Palio, an intimate restaurant serving prepared Italian cuisine; Hole in One, offering drinks and bites served by the golf course; and Five O'Clock Somewhere Bar & Grill, featuring fresh salads, burgers, sandwiches and frozen concoctions served poolside. Private catering is available for group events.

The property, which offers community education around annual sea turtle nesting season in partnership with the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, actively works to protect sea turtle nests by limiting access to the beach at sunset each summer. There is still plenty of beach access for guests, and they love being part of the sea turtle protection program.

"Our Wyndham Grand Rio Mar annual Assembly Weekend event is held in June, usually the first or second weekend of the month," says Minerva Perez, meeting planner for Caribe Federal Credit Union. "The Annual Meeting of our members

takes place during this event, and altogether about 800 people, including credit union members and their families, board of directors and others will meet at the property. We have been celebrating this event for eight years at the same property, and our room block has grown to about 100 rooms for attendees using the two-night, room/meetings/social activities package."

**"One night we dined offsite at Madame Janette near Eagle Beach, which is one of Aruba's top restaurants, and the weather on the island is very predictable, sunny, warm and breezy just about every day."**

Harris S. Fishman, CLU, ChFC, President and CEO  
MassMutual Greater Philadelphia, Bala Cynwyd, PA



"On Saturday morning we have a Board of Managers meeting for about 40 persons, held in one of the hotel's conference rooms, with classroom-style setup," Perez says. "We held a catered board of directors lunch following the meeting, and we include credit union employees staying at the hotel, including their families. It is a nice, fun event."

Perez says the rest of the weekend is taken up by F&B functions and the Annual Meeting presentation. "On Saturday evening we have music, hors d'oeuvres and a refreshment party for all the credit union members, again with their families. Early on Sunday morning, we use a private registration area for members who are staying at the hotel, and for attendees who are not overnighing at the property but who are attending the Sunday Annual

Meeting and social activities," Perez says. "We offer an early, catered breakfast for about 300 members, and the Annual Meeting is held afterward, about 9 a.m. to noon, for about 400 attendees, theater-style, in one of the conference rooms."

"Following our Annual Meeting event, we move to the large Rio Mar Ballroom where we host about 800 attendees and families for lunch and music. Although most of our attendees are coming from other regions of Puerto Rico, we do have members who fly in from the U.S. Virgin Islands and from the U.S. mainland," Perez says. "The hotel is excellent for this type of event as it has different facilities according to the needs of the company, it is a convenient location to travel to from the San Juan metropolitan area by the main highway express lanes, and allows attendees to get to the property from downtown San Juan or the airport in less than an hour. Attendees also have direct access to the beach and the entrance to the El

Yunque National Forest, the only tropical rainforest in the U.S. National Park system, which is an easy 13-minute drive from the resort. But the best of all is the resort staff, who always exceeds our expectations."

### Bahamas

A group of some 700 islands, Grand Bahama and Paradise Island provide some of the best conference facilities in the region. Fishing, scuba diving among sunken Spanish galleons, snorkeling and sailing are just some of the many adventure activities available to planners. While the Bahamas were touched by the paths of both storms, the majority of the island chain managed to escape significant damage. All major corporate group centers, Nassau, Paradise Island, and Grand Bahama, are fully operational.

Atlantis, Paradise Island's Conference Center can accommodate up to 4,000 guests and features the Imperial Ballroom, with more than 40,000 sf of pre-function space, 30 breakout rooms, a large staging area and a huge banquet kitchen. The venue offers an onsite Conference Planning team that helps planners with every aspect of their meetings or conference programs, from contract signature to shipping and customs, A/V productions and island touring.

Atlantis features 500,000 sf of outdoor event space on Paradise Island, and meeting planners can select from 21 function spaces that may include Atlantis' waterscape, marine habitats and beaches. The open-air venues offer planners unique meeting opportunities, as most attendees will appreciate the Bahamian landscape and the sultry Caribbean climate.

For smaller insurance and financial groups when intimacy is required, the property offers meeting attendees seven executive boardrooms with floor plans to accommodate a range of conference sizes, including private reception areas and adjacent kitchens.

### Dominican Republic

According to the Dominican Republic Ministry of Tourism, all ports in the country are operating normally and none suffered damage due to Hurricane Maria, with very little damage from Hurricane Irma. While the island of Hispaniola managed to dodge direct landfall from both Irma and Maria, the storms passed close enough to its shores for their effects to be



Credit: Atlantis, Paradise Island

Atlantis, Paradise Island offers meeting rooms ranging from the 415-sf Hercules, the 5,448-sf Poseidon, above, to the 9,975-sf Crown A.

**"The opening of Caribe Hilton in 1949 was a genesis of tourism that introduced travelers to the island of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean."**

Danny Hughes, Executive Vice President and President of the Americas  
Hilton, Vienna, VA

felt. Reports showed images of flooding and moderate wind damage along the northern coastlines of both countries, primarily in rural communities. The Dominican government, however, confirmed there was minimal damage to tourism sites, and all hotels in the Dominican Republic are open and welcoming groups.

The 1,991-room Barceló Bávaro Grand Resort is a two-resort, all-inclusive leisure and meetings complex that includes the family friendly Barceló Bávaro Palace and the adults only Barceló Bávaro Beach Resort, which was recently renovated. The resort has a convention center that offers nearly 38,000 sf of meeting space, and one of only two conference centers in the Dominican Republic with the capability of hosting groups of more than 5,000 participants. The centers feature more than 50,000 sf of meeting space and 13 flexible spaces that can be broken down into 24 smaller rooms.

Located in Punta Cana, the complex includes a large spa and fitness center, a PGA-rated 18-hole golf course, a waterpark and entertainment options including a casino and a Vegas-style theater. Both leisure and insurance/financial groups are offered 11 specialty restaurants as well as additional private catering for groups. Meeting planners will appreciate

the property's MeetBarcelo.com, a service that works with planners on every aspect of the group's experience. A meeting concierge and the resort's events staff will organize functions such as Dominican cigar- and rum-pairing lessons or a visit to a local sugar cane farm. In addition, a high-tech Wi-Fi system was also added in 2015 to enhance seamless connectivity. This platform is available throughout the resort's convention facilities and can support up to 20,000 simultaneous devices.

The Equestrian Center at the Dominican Republic's 185-room Casa de Campo Resort & Villas offers horseback-riding lessons. Groups can arrange for private guided rides at the resort's cattle ranches.

### Mexico

Event planners seeking Cancun/Yucatan Peninsula meeting hotels can take advantage of the multiple meeting venues along the region's pristine coastline. Planners could consider the colonial architecture an oceanfront location at the The Ritz-Carlton, Cancun, a good choice for financial and insurance planners. Featuring a 27,000-sf conference center, with both indoor and outdoor meeting spaces, the venue is also on a summit overlooking the Caribbean and one of Cancun's best beaches.

Meeting planners at The Ritz-Carlton, Cancun have a dedicated Conference Concierge and professional meeting coordinators, all working to assist groups. The 11,200-sf Ritz-Carlton Ballroom can be divided into three salons, and meeting services include security, entertainment, floral and décor, transportation and audiovisual.

Marriott kicked off 2019 with a new addition in the Caribbean. The Renaissance Hotels brand debuted its new Renaissance Cancun Resort & Marina, anchoring the new marina in Puerto Cancun. The 180-room property, which Marriott is describing as a "lifestyle resort,"

*“The Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Puerto Rico Golf & Beach Resort is excellent ... as it has different facilities according to the needs of the company ...”*



Minerva Perez, Meeting Planner  
Caribe Federal Credit Union, San Juan, Puerto Rico

is the new centerpiece of the Puerto Cancun development, a project that includes a Tom Weiskopf-designed golf course, a shopping center, eateries, movie theaters and the largest marina in the area. The property's design includes everything from underground art by local artists to the Mayan underworld of "Xibalba." It's a new kind of property for Renaissance, whose Caribbean portfolio had been focused mainly in the urban centers such as those in Willemstad, Curacao and Oranjestad, Aruba. The new Cancun property is about 10 minutes from the city center.

Marriott's Caribbean focus is also evident in Cancun at their two major resorts, one next to another, totaling 897 rooms. The Marriott Cancun Resort offers 450 rooms, including 34 suites along with 12 meeting rooms spread over nearly 11,000 sf.

For larger groups, The JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa offers an additional 20,000 sf of meeting space and 447 guest rooms, including 74 suites, 18 breakout rooms and eight event rooms. The two properties are connected to each other via a short bridge. With nine restaurants and bars, expansive meeting space and views of the Caribbean, the JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa is a great choice for insurance and financial corporate retreats, conferences and incentive groups.

Recently, both the JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa and the Marriott Cancun Resort announced the completion of major property upgrades and renovations, which includes a transformation to all 447 ocean-facing guest rooms and suites at the JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa, and a \$25 million room redesign by its next-door neighbor, the Marriott Cancun Resort. Together, the properties are capable of hosting large-scale meetings

and events for up to 2,000 attendees, along with smaller and more intimate receptions and board meetings.

On the western side of Mexico is Los Cabos, only a two-hour plane ride from Los Angeles, and where most of the new hotels accept U.S. dollars for payment. This was a region once filled with lots of cactus and empty beaches, but now about half of its 20-mile coastline is dedicated to deluxe hotel resorts with all the amenities and dining venues of the best U.S. properties.

The JW Marriott Los Cabos Beach Resort & Spa opened in 2015 with 280 rooms and 19 suites. The property is attractive to insurance and financial planners not only because of its upscale leisure amenities, but its expansive meeting facilities include 20 event rooms, just more than 32,000 sf of total event space, eight breakout rooms and a highly esteemed catering department.

"We had our small, annual corporate and family meeting at the JW Marriott Los Cabos Beach Resort & Spa in February 2019 with about 15 employees, a moderator, and six family members," says one planner. "The property was a perfect fit for our group size, it is big enough to offer many amenities and the meeting spaces we needed, and small enough so we did not feel overshadowed by very large groups staying at the hotel. We also wanted to be on a Mexican beach, and the hotel is known for its high-quality service, rooms and culinary offerings. We also needed to be near an excellent golf course, all the partners love to play golf, and we have found that golf has been a great team-building activity for us."

The group enjoyed the reception they received upon check-in, as well as the dining venues at the property.

"Upon arrival, our group received a very warm welcome from the hotel team that looked after us, using a private library area for expedited check-in and providing us with refreshing drinks," the planner says. "The first night, we enjoyed a delightful welcome dinner at the Nak Grill & Bar restaurant. The next day, the breakfast was at the Ua Culinary Artisans restaurant where the buffet was spectacular, as was the lunch. We also went offsite, with a pre-arranged menu for the group at a dinner in Arbol, the newest evening dining venue at the Las Ventanas al Paraiso Hotel, a Rosewood Resort about a 25-minute drive from the JW Marriott Los Cabos Beach Resort & Spa. Set above the sea, Arbol opens to a shimmering pool and breathtaking views."

"On Friday, the JW Marriott team helped us arrange breakfast at one of the 'Matku' meeting rooms, allowing us to save time and to be able to finish the ambitious agenda we had," the planner says. "That afternoon, we played at the resort's Puerto Los Cabos Golf Club, an 18-hole course designed by Jack Nicklaus. We enjoyed having a chef and bartender provide snacks and drinks while we were out on the course. We had dinner afterward at the property's Café des Artistes, which was an incredible culinary experience. On the last day we had booked a luxurious catamaran and went for a sightseeing tour along the Baja Coast."

The Four Seasons Resort Los Cabos at Costa Palmas is to open in mid-2019, part of the new Costa Palmas community on the East Cape of the Gulf of California, a somewhat isolated region known for its scenery. The property will have 141 guest rooms, as well as 3,250 sf of event space, with the ballroom accommodating up to 260 attendees.

The 1,000-acre development, about a 35-minute drive north of San José del Cabo, includes multimillion-dollar homes and an Amanvari Resort expected to open in 2020. The Costa Palmas development will also contain a Robert Trent Jones II-designed golf course, 18 acres of organic farms, nearly 2 miles of swimmable white-sand beaches, and a marina capable of holding private yachts up to 200 feet.

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MGM Grand hosted TD Ameritrade's Investor Conference in October. The hotel features more than 850,000 sf of meeting space, including the 380,000-sf MGM Grand Conference Center.

# Nevada Nice

## Las Vegas is the Main Attraction, But Henderson and Reno Are in the Game

By John Buchanan

**Y**ear in and year out, no U.S. meeting destination hosts more meetings and conventions than Las Vegas, and the most fundamental reason for its dominance is a simple one: Once known solely for its gambling and entertainment, over the last decade the city has reimagined and re-engineered itself into a destination tailor-made for meetings.

"The bottom line is, I call Las Vegas 'The meeting city,' says Tracey Lane, founder and president of Fair Lawn, NJ-based The Lane Group, LLC. She has used Las Vegas as a meeting destination for 15 years, bringing at least two groups to town each year and sometimes as many as a half-dozen. "There are only a few destinations in the country that really know how to do meetings really, really well, and that also have the infrastructure to handle so many meetings, including large ones. And Las Vegas is one of them."

As a longtime and loyal user of the destination, Lane points out that Las Vegas has evolved from being perceived by corporate meeting planners as a gambling destination to being recognized as a multifaceted destination. "There are now non-gaming hotels like Vdara Hotel & Spa," she says. And there are a lot more things to do. There is more focus on culture. So it's a different city today, from a meeting perspective, than it was just a few years ago."

Katrina Kent, CMP, CMM, director, event group at TD Ameritrade in Jersey City, NJ, is another loyal repeat user of Las Vegas. She has been bringing the company's 1,000-attendee, two-day, three-night annual conference to Las Vegas for the last four years and will return this year. "One of the main reasons we keep coming

back is the overall ease of doing a large meeting in Las Vegas," Kent says. "Everything you need for a major meeting is right at your fingertips. And Las Vegas does major meetings so regularly that doing yours there is just a seamless experience, whether that means your room block or technology or production capabilities."

### Always New and Exciting

Kent's longtime loyalty to Las Vegas is based on a number of factors, but chief among them is its constant evolution. "There is always something new and exciting happening in Las Vegas," she says. "There is always a new dining option or offsite venue or attraction or activity. The city is always 'new,' because it is constantly updating and reinventing its meeting infrastructure. If you go there 10 years in a row, you're not stuck doing the same old things each year. There's always something fresh."

The city's formidable airlift is another important factor for Lane. "It's great both domestically and internationally," she says. "In addition to the ease of getting in and out of town, the major hotel properties along The Strip are very close to the airport, which makes it very convenient for attendees. For me as a meeting planner, and my clients, it is also attractive from a budget point of view, because your airport transfers are less expensive."

The city's vast and diverse hotel inventory is yet another reason why Lane and her clients find it so perfectly matched to their meetings. "One of

**There are only a few destinations in the country that really know how to do meetings really, really well, and that also have the infrastructure to handle so many meetings, including large ones. And Las Vegas is one of them.**

Tracey Lane  
Founder and President  
The Lane Group, LLC  
Fair Lawn, NJ



Attendees at the TD Ameritrade Investor Conference in October enjoyed the amenities at the MGM Grand, including its nightclubs, restaurants and bars.



Katrina Kent, CMP, CMM  
Director, The Event Group  
TD Ameritrade  
Jersey City, NJ

the things I like very much is the nontraditional food-and-beverage spaces you can find at some of the hotels. The local dining scene is another thing that draws corporate groups. There are amazing restaurants and chefs, and there are options at a range of price points, which just adds to the appeal. And finally, the amount and flexibility of the meeting space in Las Vegas is another reason why it's so attractive to planners."

### In a League of Its Own

For Kent, the unparalleled meeting infrastructure and range of capabilities in Las Vegas is the key to her loyalty. And her hotel of choice, the 6,852-room MGM Grand, which features more than 850,000 sf of meeting space, including the 380,000-sf MGM Grand Conference Center, not only embodies those traits, but also offers remarkable consistency in its service and support, Kent says.

"The major hotels like MGM Grand are used to working with large groups," she says. "They know exactly how to handle them. Major meetings are their bread-and-butter."

TD Ameritrade took its annual conference to the hotel for the first time in 2015 because it got a particularly appealing deal. "Attendees at our annual conference pay for their own hotel rooms, so value is very important to us," Kent says. "Since then, although we still get good value, we keep going back because of the level of the service I get as planner and the level of experiences our attendees get."

Kent praises the MGM Grand for the consistency of its staff and service. "The people we

work with have really gotten to know us and our attendees," she says. "And it has been very impressive to us, as a company, that the hotel can be so consistent from year to year, both for us as the planning team and also for our attendees."

Kent hosts all meals at the hotel — both buffets and plated dinners. "The quality of the food is consistently very good. They are very creative with their banquet menus. And the overall quality of the F&B is very high." She sometimes stages dine-around evenings within the hotel, whose roster of globally acclaimed restaurants includes Tom Colicchio's Craftsteak; Morimoto Las Vegas, from "Iron Chef" Masaharu Morimoto; and a pair of acclaimed dining options, L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon and Joël Robuchon, from the late, great "chef of the century."

Another aspect of the MGM Grand that keeps Kent and TD Ameritrade coming back is the quality and configuration of its meeting space. "It is very well-suited to our conference," she says. "We love the fact that for a group of our size, we can take over one whole floor of the hotel and be self-contained. That also means attendees do not ever have to go up or down from floor to floor. So the space is not only just top-notch, but it's also very convenient for us."

### Dining Options That Draw

Although there are now many factors that make Las Vegas such a popular meeting destination, especially for those companies that return year after year, perhaps none is more powerful than its dining scene.

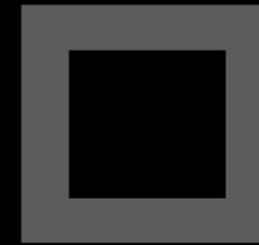
Given the vast array of options, Debi Kinney,



Credit: Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health — Las Vegas

Las Vegas offers attendees an opportunity to do corporate social responsibility at the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health — Las Vegas, a research and medical facility.

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general manager and director of sales at management company CSI DMC's Las Vegas office, offers planners a short list of some of her go-to choices.

"The Palms Casino Resort has debuted a trio of hot new restaurants," Kinney says. "One is Shark, from celebrity chef Bobby Flay. It offers a very creative menu that is sort of a fusion of Southwestern and Asian cuisines. The food is phenomenal. Another is Mabel's BBQ from celebrity chef Michael Symon. It specializes in classic southern barbecue with a Michael Symon twist. And the third is Greene St. Kitchen, which has a secret entrance through an 80s-style arcade into a beautiful dining room. It serves Asian fusion cuisine."

All three restaurants are incredible, Kinney says. "And the great thing about having those three new restaurants in the same hotel is that

one of the staples of Las Vegas when it comes to high-end groups," Kinney says. "It's one of my favorites because in addition to the food, it's such a fun venue. The entrance is up an elevator through a replica of the Eiffel Tower. Then, when you get off the elevator, you walk through the kitchen, which smells amazing. And as you walk out into the dining room, you get genuinely breathtaking views of The Strip. It's just a unique venue for groups that are looking for a high-end experience."

Another dining option Kinney enthusiastically recommends to clients because it offers something different and fun is Lip Smacking Foodie Tours. "It's a great experience, because instead of dining at just one restaurant for the evening, attendees get to dine at 4 p.m. or 5 p.m., each of which offers four or five small-plate portions of its most famous and popular dishes," Kinney says. "You can also customize the experience by degree of exclusivity or price point. And then during the tour, as you go from restaurant to restaurant, you get historical data and fun facts about Las Vegas. It's also a great networking opportunity, because typically you end up sitting next to different people from your group at each restaurant." Lip Smacking Foodie Tours can accommodate groups of up to 250.

When it comes to offsite venues, Kinney also recommends a unique option that also includes an element of corporate social responsibility (CSR). "One of my all-time favorites is the Keep Memory Alive, which is located on the outskirts of downtown Las Vegas," she says. "It is an event center that was built adjacent to, and connected to, the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health – Las Vegas, a research and medical facility. What makes it unique for meeting planners and attendees is that you're using a gorgeous, state-of-the-art event center, with a beautiful courtyard, but all of the proceeds go toward brain research. That means your group can make a difference while also using a very high-end facility." Maximum group size is 350 attendees. The preferred caterer list includes celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck.

A classic alternative for many planners remains the legendary Tropicana Las Vegas, a Doubletree by Hilton. The venue is undergoing a revamp of its 100,000-sf convention center and a face-lift for all 1,470 guest rooms, starting with the Paradise Tower.

Opening in 2020, the \$375 million CAESARS FORUM began construction last summer. The project, just east of The LINQ Hotel & Casino,

will include a LEED Silver-certified conference center featuring 300,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including two 108,000-sf ballrooms, and a 100,000-sf outdoor plaza that will connect directly to the LINQ Promenade and to the Las Vegas Monorail.

### The Henderson Alternative

Meeting planners who want the amenities of Las Vegas without the hustle and bustle of The Strip can opt for the nearby hub of Henderson, NV, just 15-20 minutes from the action and offering self-contained, top-notch meeting infrastructure of its own.

Henderson is home to the Forbes Four-Star, AAA Five Diamond, 390-room M Resort Spa Casino, which offers more than 92,000 sf of meeting and event space, including the 25,000-sf M Pavilion and LUX special event venues.

"I have used M Resort for several meetings," Lane says. "The most recent was in January. And we have another, a three-night, two-day coming up in February of next year for 350 attendees. What I, as a planner, really like about M Resort is its consistency. We've had long-lasting relationships with our sales manager and conference services manager. So they are very familiar with

us and our groups, and they really do everything they can to make sure our meetings are successful."

The M Resort Spa Casino is also perfectly sized for the groups Lane brings to town. "When I bring in a group of 350, we pretty much own the hotel," she says. "And that is always nice for any group."

Another thing Lane likes about M Resort is the fact that it offers some nontraditional spaces for food-and-beverage functions. "I also like the meeting space a lot," she says. "The flexibility of it is amazing. And one aspect of the layout that is nice is that attendees do not have to walk into or through the gaming space if they don't want to."

The latest new amenities at M Resort Spa



Caesars Palace is home to the Vanderpump Cocktail Garden, where attendees can enjoy a casual gathering or a big night out. It offers light bites and cocktails.



Credit: Caesars Entertainment



Credit: Tropicana Las Vegas, a Doubletree by Hilton

Tropicana Las Vegas, a Doubletree by Hilton offers a 50,000-sf casino and more than 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space.

you can do a dine around for a small or medium-sized group under one roof."

For tiny, super-exclusive VIP groups of nine or fewer, Kinney highly recommends é by José Andrés, which serves modern Spanish-inspired cuisine at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. "It is a hidden gem that offers an incredible dining experience," Kinney says. "It has only nine seats and it does two seatings a night. The wait list for a reservation can be months long. But for meeting groups, it is the ultimate in intimate dining experiences with phenomenal food." She has used it for C-suite executives from a meeting group and also for the top VIP qualifiers from an incentive group.

For medium-sized to large groups, one of Kinney's go-to options is the Eiffel Tower Restaurant at Paris Las Vegas, operated by Caesars Entertainment. "The Eiffel Tower Restaurant is



Credit: Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa

Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa has nearly 120,000 sf of meeting space, 35 event rooms, 12 breakout rooms and two championship golf courses.

Peppermill Resort Spa Casino features a trio of fine dining restaurants, including Bimini Steakhouse, and four more casual restaurants.



Credit: Peppermill Resort Spa Casino

Casino include TopGolf slots and the 16-A Handcrafted Experience — a bar on 16th floor of the property that serves handcrafted cocktails and an eclectic selection of small-plate menu items, which include wagyu beef grilled tableside on a hot lava stone, Australian lamb chops and pan-seared Hokkaido diver scallops. “It has a private space that has beautiful views of The Strip,” Lane says.

Another popular meeting property in Henderson is Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa, which recently completed a \$40 million renovation. The 493-room hotel offers nearly 120,000 sf of meeting space, 35 event rooms, 12 breakout rooms and features two championship golf courses.



**Debi Kinney**  
General Manager, Director of Sales  
CSI DMC  
Las Vegas, NV

#### Reno on the Rise

Although Las Vegas reigns at the heavyweight champion of U.S. meeting destinations, Nevada offers a second option that is less frenetic but still offers much of the glitz and glamour of its better-known big brother. Reno-Sparks is small, intimate and laid back.

The Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority has become more aggressive in the corporate market, stressing that the destination offers excellent meeting infrastructure, including a variety of hotel product that ranges from gaming to nongaming hotels and resorts large and small.

Meeting planners and attendees like Reno for its relaxed atmosphere and ease of navigation.

Hotel options include the 1,900-room Grand Sierra Resort and Casino, a Reno landmark located in the heart of the city. The resort features elegant and comfortable rooms and suites in a resort setting. Grand Sierra offers 11

food-and-beverage options, from a fine dining steakhouse to casual eateries, including a Round Table Pizza Italian restaurant that features gourmet pizzas. LEX nightclub is the premier nightlife venue in northern Nevada.

Grand Sierra Resort and Casino offers more than 200,000 sf of meeting and event space, including 45 meeting rooms and three ballrooms. The Grand Theatre, an ideal venue for general sessions, can accommodate up to 4,000 attendees. A self-contained Nevada Conference & Exhibition Center features 44,115 sf of meeting and exhibit space, including 12 breakout rooms. The resort complex also features a state-of-the-art spa, as well as a bowling complex, a cinema, indoor golf and a driving range.

Another top-quality meeting property is Peppermill Resort Spa Casino, which features 106,000 sf of meeting space, including the 62,000-sf Tuscan Ballroom, as well as four other ballrooms. Among Peppermill’s most unique amenities are an intimate White Orchid Private Dining Room and a 17th-floor, two-story executive boardroom. Peppermill features 11 dining/snack options, including a trio of fine dining restaurants, including Bimini Steakhouse, and four more casual restaurants.

Reno’s largest property is the 4,100-room complex that includes a trio of hotels — Eldorado Resort Casino, Silver Legacy Resort Casino, and Circus Circus Reno, formerly owned by MGM Resorts.

Reno’s public convention facility is the 500,000-sf Reno-Sparks Convention Center, which features 380,000 sf of exhibit space and 120,000 sf of meeting space. Plans are now underway, subject to approval by the Nevada Legislature, to add another 300,000 sf of space. **I&FMM**

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New Orleans, which celebrated its 300th birthday in 2018, is being transformed as a destination as new venues are being built and long-established venues are being refreshed. The city is famous for its culture of steamboats, jazz, food, trolleys, Mardi Gras and other unique celebrations.

# New A New Orleans The Big Easy Gets a Face-lift

By David Swanson

A new \$1 billion airport, a face-lift for a long-established convention center, and a fleet of new hotels offering an array of meeting spaces — the coming year promises to be transformative for one of America’s favorite destinations — New Orleans.

Following a yearlong celebration of the city’s 300th anniversary, New Orleans is looking ahead to new developments that will continue to certify the “Big Easy” as a bucket-list destination for those who’ve never been, and polish its offerings to its legion of fans.

## The Backdrop Sets the Scene

“We received hugely positive feedback about the city of New Orleans,” explains Chelsea Hubbell, director, head of global event management at New York Life Investments. Hubbell says the firm has previously hosted its annual sales conference in more



Credit: New Orleans & Company

traditional resort locations. “Using New Orleans as a backdrop brought a ton of energy to the meeting.”

The conference — which welcomed a sales team 140-strong from across the U.S. for training, sales outlooks and networking — was held at The Ritz-Carlton, a 527-room hotel on the edge of the French Quarter that offers 35,000 sf of renovated event



**Chelsea Hubbell**  
Director  
Head of Global Event Management  
New York Life Investments  
New York, NY

space, including two ballrooms, two boardrooms, 23 meeting rooms and a charming courtyard.

“The quality of the sleeping rooms was wonderful, and the guests loved the ‘Southern glamour-inspired’ interiors,” says Hubbell, who added that the meeting space was also excellent. “Our group has hosted at Ritz-Carlton properties in other locations, so we were eager to host at The Ritz-Carlton in New Orleans as we’re incredibly pleased by their quality of staff, service, menus and accommodations. Plus, the cost of the program was slightly more economical than our previous markets, and we felt like we received a lot more bang for our buck.”

The attendees had their hearts set on hosting a welcome reception in the hotel’s beautiful courtyard, but the weather turned out to be too cold for an outdoor evening event. “We made an decision on the day to host in the foyer of the ballroom space,” Hubbell

Attendees at a recent annual sales conference for New York Life Investments enjoyed their stay at The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans.

says. “The hotel and A/V team were able to rejigger our plans and offer a great reception experience in the internal space. Our guests were none the wiser. With up-lighting, a seafood bar and live jazz band — the reception was still a wild success.”

Fortunately, competing events that threatened to upend plans for us turned out to be non-starters.

“The week that we held our event, the New Orleans Saints football team had two playoff games over back-to-back weekends,” Hubbell says. “Then we found out President Donald Trump was arriving in New Orleans during our arrival time. I was very concerned this would impact the quality and timing of our guests arriving from the airport on Sunday and Monday morning, but frankly there were minimal delays.”

Hubbell made sure her event took advantage of the special character and traditions for which New Orleans is known, allowing the meeting to speak to the location. She adds that they were spoiled for choice in entertainment.

“We used BBC Destination Management to source our welcome and closing bands, Mardi Gras-themed décor for our onsite Awards Banquet and to help source our offsite closing dinner location,” Hubbell explains. “They were



Credit: Chelsea Hubbell, New York Life Investments



The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans offers 35,000 sf of renovated event space, two ballrooms, two boardrooms and 23 meeting rooms.

knowledgeable and professional and helped us find options that fit our budget and vision. These touches added huge value to the program and the uniqueness and specialness of being in New Orleans.”

Hubbell continues, “We used local cuisine in all of our menus and hosted the offsite dinner at the House of Blues in their Voodoo Garden, with a live band. We were looking for something causal, fun, and New Orleans themed, so we had a ‘second-line’ band walk the group from the hotel to the venue through Bourbon street with a private police escort. Our guests raved that it was really a once-in-a-lifetime experience.



Credit: The National WWII Museum

The National WWII Museum, a favorite activity for attendees who visit New Orleans, is ranked as the No. 8 museum in the world and the No. 3 museum in the U.S. by the 2018 TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice awards. This year it will debut its new, 230-room Higgins Hotel & Conference Center.

At the House of Blues we had barbecue stations indoors and outdoors, which included a tent. Another great aspect of the space was that there is a stage in the outdoor space so the band added to the fun atmosphere. The food was standard barbecue fare, which did the trick for our sales team — they were more focused on drinks and fun.”

As a hotel chain, The Ritz-Carlton offers Impact Experiences, providing enriching, on-property opportunities for guests to contribute to the local community. In New Orleans this includes working with the hotel’s culinary team to prepare meal donations to be served at St. Jude Community Center or organizing school supplies for the students at KIPP Central City Academy. Another option is working with Save Our Cemeteries, a uniquely New Orleans nonprofit designed to help restore the above-ground cemeteries, one more facet to the city’s lure and mystery.

“The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans is particularly special because it has such a sense of Southern glamour and hospitality,” Hubbell says. “The lobby creates a fabulous impression upon check-in and our guests were very well taken care of. The catering staff, front desk, sales team and Presentation Services Audio Visual team were all incredibly gracious, helpful and creative on solutions.”

### A City-Wide Refresh

The Ritz-Carlton will have a growing list of competitors as the year progresses, as New Orleans’ hotel options grow and diversify.

Hard Rock International is expanding its hotel portfolio into the New Orleans Theater District with Hard Rock Hotel New Orleans opening at the end of the year. The 18-story building is located on a landmark corner on the perimeter of the French Quarter, one mile from the convention center and adjacent to two street-car lines, allowing guests easy access to all parts of the city. Melding together New Orleans’ history of music and culture, the hotel will offer 350 rooms, in addition to 62 one-and two-bedroom units available for purchase. The property will also feature four meeting spaces including two ballrooms, totaling approximately 12,000 sf of event space, plus 9,000 sf of pre-function space.

After years of litigation delays, the \$400 million Four Seasons Hotel and Private Residences celebrated its groundbreaking last year. It’s actually the transformation of one of the city’s most prominent buildings — the 33-story former World Trade Center designed by Modernist architect Edward Durell Stone. The building previously sat vacant for years at the foot of Canal Street, just steps from both the French Quarter and the Mississippi

River banks. Four Seasons calls the project “the first five-star hotel in the city,” with more than 400 rooms and more than 30,000 sf of meeting space — making it one of the Four Seasons’ largest properties in the world when it opens in late 2020.

Other news comes from hotels finishing up renovations and other improvements.

The Roosevelt New Orleans — A Waldorf Astoria Hotel, completed the first phase of its \$20-plus million renovation last summer — an overhaul of the hotel’s 60,000 sf of meeting space. A full makeover for all 504 of the hotel’s guest rooms is scheduled with completion projected for November. Opened in 1893, The Roosevelt is New Orleans’ grand dame, famous for the walnut-paneled The Sazerac Bar, The Blue Room, where Louis Armstrong, Ray Charles, Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra performed regularly, and how author Arthur Hailey checked in for two months and wrote the best-seller “Hotel”.

The National WWII Museum located in the Warehouse District is already no stranger to the meeting business. Ranked as the No. 8 museum in the world and No. 3 in the U.S. by the 2018 TripAdvisor Travelers’ Choice awards, later this year the acclaimed museum will debut its new, 230-room Higgins Hotel & Conference



Center. The Museum Board of Trustees retained Hostmark Hospitality Group to manage the hotel and conference center; the Higgins will operate as part of the exclusive Curio Collection by Hilton.

Named for Andrew Higgins, who designed and built over 20,000 boats in New Orleans that were used in every major amphibious assault of World War II, the hotel and conference center is located at the corner of Andrew Higgins Drive and Magazine Street opposite the museum. The \$66 million project will include an 18,000 sf conference center, and it sits less than a 1/2 mile from the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.

“The Higgins Hotel & Conference Center brings a new dimension to the New Orleans’ hotel inventory,” says Tim Hemphill, CVP, vice president of sales and marketing for the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.

Hemphill will soon have his own project to celebrate, a \$60 million linear park development along Convention Center Boulevard. Scheduled to be completed in August 2020, this first step of the Convention Center District

Development Project will include dining, entertainment, retail and transportation, and landscaped and lit with outdoor seating along the entire length of the Convention

*“The Higgins Hotel & Conference Center has historically been a great place to convene, and we are going through the process to make it even better.”*



**Tim Hemphill, CVP**  
Vice President of Sales and Marketing  
New Orleans Ernest N. Morial  
Convention Center  
New Orleans, LA

Center, the nation’s sixth-largest convention facility.

“New Orleans is, in and of itself, a premiere meeting and event destination,” says Hemphill, who notes that all 140 meeting rooms at the convention center will be updated and modernized. “The Convention Center has historically been a great place to convene, and we are going through the process to make it even better.”

In all, the project will revitalize 47 acres of land upriver from the Convention Center. The next steps include the addition of a 1,200-room “headquarters” Omni Hotel at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, an outdoor performance venue space with retail, residential and dining options.

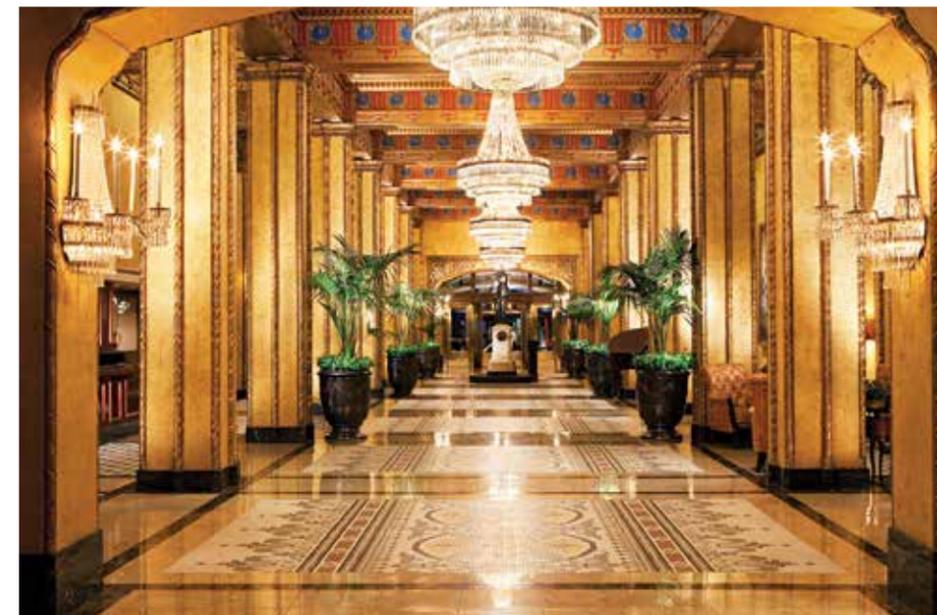
“In the grand scheme of things, this five-year, \$557 million plan will transform the convention center into an entirely new experience,” Hemphill says. “We’re bringing it up to the level of expectation that a great convention destination city like New Orleans deserves.”

### City Character and Culture

Many meeting planners like New Orleans just the way it is.

Last year, National Life Group brought its Independent Distribution and Field Leaders Conference to New Orleans for the second time in five years.

“We look for a domestic city location that is easy to fly into from around the U.S.” says Anne-Marie Bobay, CMP, senior conference planner at National Life Group. “Although this conference is very meeting-focused, the location must have great options for evening events, and New Orleans has a wealth of choices for great food and memorable venues.”



The Roosevelt New Orleans — A Waldorf Astoria Hotel last year wrapped up the first phase of its \$20-plus million renovation. The work included refreshing the hotel’s 60,000 sf of meeting space. This year all 504 of the guest rooms will be revitalized, with completion projected for November.





Credit: New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center

A five-year, \$557 million plan for New Orleans includes a 1,200-room “headquarters” Omni Hotel at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. The plan calls for an outdoor performance venue space with retail, residential and dining options.

Equally important to Bobay was a hotel of a certain character.

“I cannot imagine bringing a meeting of this size to a city like New Orleans, with such a rich history and culture, and not use a hotel that reflects the city’s charm,” Bobay says. “Hotel Monteleone is iconic. If you want the old New Orleans atmosphere and to be in the very heart of the French Quarter, it is the best location. The Monteleone team is first class, friendly and they’re seasoned professionals, and the fact that many of New Orleans’ sites are within walking distance from the hotel is ideal.”

Built in 1886 on Royal Street, the 570-room Hotel Monteleone offers more than 24,000 sf of meeting space, ranging from breakout rooms to the 6,236-sf La Nouvelle Orleans Ballroom. The hotel’s famed, 25-seat Carousel Bar has been revolving since 1949 while standards spin — live.

“Although it is a very historic hotel, the meeting space was conducive

to our program,” adds Bobay, whose group numbered 130. “You won’t find a huge ballroom with 24-foot-high ceilings suited to large conferences. But their space is elegantly appointed with recessed soffit ceilings, some rooms with windows out to the street, and a rooftop venue with a terrace overlooking the city.

**“Hotel Monteleone is iconic. If you want the old New Orleans atmosphere and to be in the very heart of the French Quarter, it is the best location.”**

**Anne-Marie Bobay, CMP**  
Senior Conference Planner  
National Life Group  
Montpelier, VT

This group is the perfect size to utilize the meeting space at a hotel like the Monteleone.”

The Hotel Monteleone did something unique for National Life Group’s 2018 meeting: a Super Bowl party on the arrival night. The hotel converted meeting space into a party with large screen TVs around the perimeter. Otherwise, evening events were held away from the hotel, and Bobay relied on the services of PRA and BBC Destination Management companies for interesting ideas and unique venues in and around the French Quarter.

“For our biggest dinner, we did a Mardi Gras-style parade for the guests

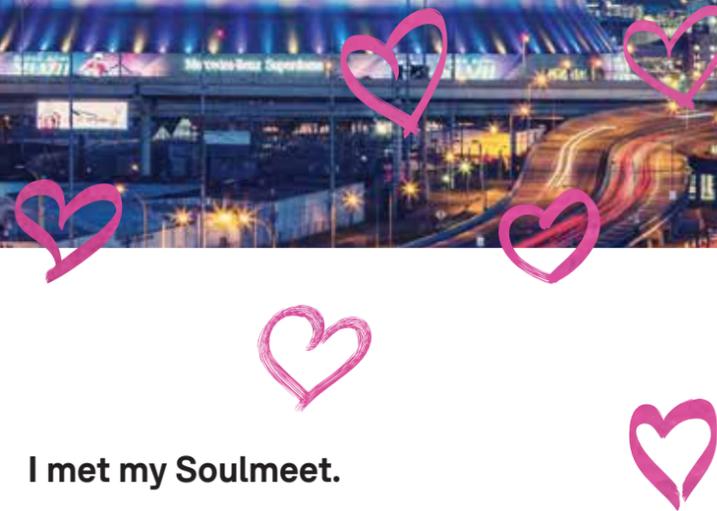
from the Monteleone, through the French Quarter to Pat O’Brien’s on the River,” Bobay says. “It’s a banquet venue on the second floor with a terrace overlooking the river, an excellent room for a group of 100 to 130, with a beautiful antique bar.” Bobay cautions that planners should be aware of menu descriptions. “The Pat O’Brien caterers are set up for a reception with food stations, not a sit-down meal — their menu is geared for small plate appetizers, as opposed to a buffet dinner.”

“The second offsite event was a bit of a risk that turned out to be a very fun and unique evening for a group of 40 guests. We did a buyout at Toups South, one of the restaurants of celebrity chef Isaac Toups. The restaurant is outside of the French Quarter, about a 15-minute transfer from the Monteleone. Chef Toups and his team did a mixology demonstration at the antique bar for the entire group by actually standing up on the bar and giving the New Orleans history of The Sazerac Bar. Then, he did a very animated cooking demonstration of his Dirty Rice Jambalaya in a large demonstration kitchen at the restaurant.”

“Chef Toups is quite the showman and the group loved him and the meal,” Bobay says. **I&FMM**



# One Time, in New Orleans



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Resorts | Mountains | Cities (RMC) recently announced the promotion of **Karen (Crawford) Cantrell** to president of sales, operations and business development. Cantrell joined RMC in 2011 as an event planner and sales consultant.

LaKota Hotels & Resorts recently named **Christine Imbrogno** director of sales and marketing at LaKota Oaks in Norwalk, CT. Christine brings 23 years of hospitality sales and marketing experience to the operation.

Incentive Solutions announced that **Mandy Freeman** was promoted to vice president of account management earlier this quarter, after 11 years with the company.

Hard Rock International has announced the appointment of **Rachel Mecca** as director of global travel industry sales in the global sales and marketing

department. In her new role, Mecca will be responsible for the development and execution of strategic sales and marketing initiatives for Hard Rock Hotels & Casinos.

Naples Grande Beach Resort in Naples, FL announced the appointment of **Melinda Hutchins** to director of sales and marketing. Prior to joining Naples Grande Beach Resort, Hutchins spent 13 years at the Trump National Doral Miami.

**Tom Davies** has been appointed sales manager at The Westin Riverfront Resort & Spa in Avon, CO. Davies will be overseeing the International Group Sales and Sports Group markets.

**Ashley Ridolfi** is the new director of sales & marketing at Doubletree Suites by Hilton Philadelphia West. Ridolfi's background includes leadership roles for Hyatt, Marriott and IHG.

The Los Angeles Airport Marriott (LAX Marriott) announces the addition of **Ryan Wollman** to the hotel's executive team as the director of group sales. Wollman's duties include maximizing group revenue and profitability through the sale of guest rooms, catering and tours.

The Charter Hotel Seattle, Curio Collection by Hilton, has appointed **Nicole Cheramie** as director of sales and marketing. Cheramie is now tasked with spearheading initiatives to grow both group and leisure sales.

Omni Orlando Resort has appointed **Anne Madden**, CMP, HMCC, to senior sales manager. Madden is tasked with upholding Omni Hotels & Resorts' tradition of service and dedication. Madden joins from Maritz, where as operations manager she led the sourcing team. **I&FMM**



**DAVIES**



**RIDOLFI**



**WOLLMAN**



**CHERAMIE**



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