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THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

Luxury Gaming Resorts

The Perfect Mix of Business and Pleasure
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Celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay lights the cauldron at the Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis party to celebrate the Golden Anniversary of Caesars Palace Las Vegas.



Destination: Florida Page 26

Credit: Caesars Entertainment

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Credit: Caesars Palace

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Elegant prefunction space at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas.

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The terrace at the oceanfront Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa.

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Credit: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

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DESTINATION

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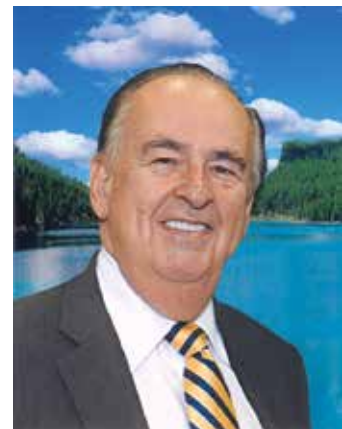
A Planner's Paradise
By Derek Reveron

Florida's beaches beckon fans of the SUP (standup paddleboard) craze.

Publisher's Message

Something for Everybody

Site selection is easy when meeting and incentive planners are tasked with setting up a program just about anywhere in Florida. A big state with countless options for all kinds of meetings and grand, luxurious incentives, "Florida — A Planner's Paradise," the destination report on page 26, covers everything from the best beach resorts to the many theme park resorts and everything in between.



For example, Paget Kirkland, president and owner of Kirkland Event & Destination Services in Lake Worth, Florida, who arranges many programs in the Palm Beach County area, says, "Palm Beach County has all of the fun things to do and all of the resources you need as a planner. This area has something for everybody, whether it's the water, art, nightlife, sports, nature with the Everglades and high-end properties."

Of course, golf is high on every planner's list, and whether it is an optional activity or part of the incentive, Florida is the place for

exceptional golf programs. According to Mark Steinberg, senior vice president of Merrill, Wisconsin-based Church Mutual Insurance Company, Streamsong Resort's golf courses were the prime reason his company brought 44 sales executives, risk management officers and business owners to Streamsong in Central Florida for a four-day meeting. "We were seeking a world-class golf facility, and we selected Streamsong because of the reputation of its golf facility. While we evaluate different locations throughout the year and try not to repeat the same location year after year, we will return to Streamsong in the future mostly because of the golf facility."

Luxurious gaming resorts (on page 10) also offer "something for everybody." These outstanding resorts from coast to coast make for memorable meeting and event experiences. Perhaps the pinnacle of luxury is the award-winning Wynn Las Vegas and Encore, which boast opulent ballrooms and meeting rooms with stunning views among their combined 260,000 sf of meeting space. Also, a variety of configuration options and unconventional luxe spaces make it easy to host a unique, memorable and highly attended event.

Why? Because Steve Wynn famously loves to tweak details in his unending quest for providing an unparalleled experience in luxury hospitality.

Harvey Grotsky

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Silversea Announces \$170 Million Fleet Refurbishment Plan

MONACO — Silversea, an ultra-luxury cruise line, announced a \$170 million fleet refurbishment plan — the largest fleet-wide refurbishment plan in its history. Silver Whisper, host to the iconic World Cruise, will undergo upgrades that will take place by the end of 2016, and that were largely influenced by feedback from World Cruisers.



The luxurious suites will be renovated and dark emperor marble flooring will be installed in the bathrooms. Public spaces will be upgraded with a freshly tiled pool and new chaise lounges. Dining areas at The Restaurant and La Terrazza will receive plush new carpet and elegant hardwood parquet respectively, and each will receive new furniture. Silver Whisper's communications hub is set for a major overhaul with the addition of two satellite antennas, vastly improving internet speeds on board and enabling guests to take full advantage of the new, interactive TVs and on-demand movies available in every suite. Other ships such as Silver Wind and Silver Discoverer will be refurbished in October. www.silversea.com

Pacific World and Access Launch the Global Client Experience Program

SAN DIEGO, CA — Pacific World and Access Destination Services recently announced the launch of the Global Client Experience Program, which will offer these exclusive client benefits: a global client account team spread across the world's major destinations, to closely focus on and coordinate client requirements independently; a unique experiences program, bringing the combined strength of global creative resources and local operational teams to deliver exceptional and innovative experiences worldwide; global financial assurance to actively deliver the financial security, leverage and benefits of working with a stable and solid partner, across all programs and destinations; global compliance and sustainability, including transparency and business ethics standards, customized health, and safety and worldwide corporate social responsibility programs.



LEE

Chris Lee, CEO of Access Destination Services, said, "After receiving so much positive feedback about our global alliance from our clients, we are proud to launch this Global Client Experience as our next innovation. We are excited to be able to further enhance value to our customers and promote the power of sharing experiences and perspectives anywhere in the world." www.accessdmc.com

SITE Nite North America 2016 Registration Open

CHICAGO, IL — Every year SITE Nite North America hosts a party to kick off IMEX America in Las Vegas. This year, more than 1,200 attendees will Shine Bright during the event on October 17. For the second year in a row, SITE Nite will be held at the Omnia Nightclub at Caesars Palace — one of Las Vegas' hottest nightlife attractions.

"The Omnia was a huge hit last year with two floors of inside nightclub space, as well as a large outside terrace facing Las Vegas Blvd. Due to popular demand, the party has been extended from two hours to three hours with drinks included for the first two hours and a cash bar for the third hour," said Ron Warner, SITE Nite Chair and regional director of sales, Melia Hotels International. "In line with the Shine Bright theme, we are asking attendees to wear bright-colored clothing. Prizes will be awarded for the brightest of the bright. We are also developing a mobile app and will request that guests post profile pictures to allow suppliers and customers to easily identify each other at the event. To encourage networking, we will be running a contest asking attendees to post selfies of customers and suppliers who are meeting for the first time. The person who submits the most selfies will win a prize."

During SITE Nite, attendees will be invited to bid on unique travel experiences — everything from urban explorations and relaxing beach vacations to exotic adventures and action-packed cruises across the globe. For more information, contact Ron Warner at ronw@sol-group.com. www.siteglobal.com

SnapShots



1



2



3



4



5



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7

1 Board members of the Financial & Insurance Conference Planners gather at the 2016 FICP Education Forum — held in late June at The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay in Half Moon Bay, California. 2-7 In total, 193 planner members and hospitality partners flocked to the Pacific coast for three days of education, networking and wellness events at an extraordinary seaside location. The event featured timely industry education along with dedicated networking events. At the forum, FICP Chair Caryn Taylor Lucia introduced the organization's new mission, vision and brand statements. The new direction reflects the needs of meetings and events professionals in the financial services and insurance industries and reaffirms FICP's commitment to elevating those professionals. "Moving forward, FICP will not only focus on the development of its members and partners, but will be looking to increase visibility into the positive impact, and value, these individuals provide within their organization," said Taylor Lucia. For more information, visit www.FICPnet.com.



4 Reasons Why Work-Life Balance Is Still Valid

“Don’t get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life.”

— Dolly Parton, American singer, actress and businesswoman.

Recently I’ve seen a lot of “RIP Work-Life Balance” claims, arguing that the concept is dying, if not already dead. Some people state outright that you can no longer expect much of a personal life if you ever want to reach the C-suite. Most, however, just claim there’s simply no longer a reasonable difference between work and personal life. Smartphones, Wi-Fi and related technology have made it possible for work to intrude upon your private life anywhere, anytime...so, they say, you may as well give up on the idea of having any sort of work-life balance.

Technology Blurs the Line

I’ll concede that technology has blurred the line between work and personal life, so that work can intrude on your private time — if you let it. The rest of the argument I can’t concede. To me, it’s all just word games designed to obscure a simple fact: If you don’t give yourself time to recharge, you’ll wreck both your personal and professional life. Work-life balance isn’t dead! People have just started calling it different things. Whether you refer to it as just plain “life” or

Just because you can be constantly connected doesn’t mean you have to be, or even should be. Over-connection damages your ability to think and focus.

“life exchange” or any of the other euphemisms so-called experts have invented, you still need a work-life balance that not only allows peak productivity, but fuels it.

After all, what are you working so hard for, if not so you can have a comfortable life outside work?

Why It Matters

I make sure I maintain a good work-life balance at all times. I’ve been doing this long enough to know when I’m getting stretched too thin. You probably have, too. But sometimes, we need to brush up on even the most basic of principles...so let’s look at a few reasons why the idea of work-life balance remains valid.

1. You CAN separate work life and personal life.

Just because you can be constantly connected doesn’t mean you have to be, or even should be. Over-connection damages your ability to think and focus. To maintain a good work-life balance, establish a sharp divide between work time and free time. Turn off your electronics and connect instead to your social life when you have loved ones in front of you. It’s not so hard.

2. The work-life divide exists for a reason.

Some of the people trying to usher work-life balance to an early grave insist it’s an artificial divide that didn’t exist until a century ago. Well, so what? Like the eight-hour day and 40-hour workweek, we established work-life balance in early modern times as a compromise between too much work and too little. Human beings aren’t robots; we can only be “on” so long before we need to rest and do other things. Which feeds into my next argument:

3. Recharging is crucial.

I can guarantee there have been things you’ve done in your life that you enjoyed for a while, right up until you ended up having to do them too much. If you push at



something too long, you’ll grow to hate it, no matter what it is or how well you do it. Add mental exhaustion to physical exhaustion and the need to refuel, and you can see the need for breaks. No matter how much you like your work, you need uninterrupted time off to recapture your energy and your desire to keep doing it.

4. Your family and friends need you.

When you start working for someone, your whole life doesn’t belong to them. Don’t let yourself take the road of shortchanging your friends and family in favor of a job or career — especially family. Do you really want to end up alone? No? Then don’t let work bleed over into the rest of your life. Set a sharp boundary between your work and your social life, and keep it strong. The only things that should breach it are emergencies. Most everything else will keep until you return.

Both Work and Life

Very few people live their work, and even those who try can’t always do so successfully. While it’s wonderful to do

what you love, there has to be more to you than work — not just for health and sanity reasons — but for professional reasons as well. The better-rounded you are and the more energy you have, the easier it’ll be to do a good job. **I&FMM**

Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, CPAE, is an award-winning keynote speaker, best-selling author, and noted authority on employee and team productivity. She is the president of The Productivity Pro Inc., a company dedicated to helping leaders increase workplace performance in high-stress environments. Stack has authored seven books, including Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time (January 18, 2016). She is a past president of the National Speakers Association, and in 2015 was inducted into its exclusive Speaker Hall of Fame (with fewer than 175 members worldwide). Stack’s clients include Cisco Systems, Wal-Mart, and Bank of America, and she has been featured on the CBS Early Show and CNN, and in The New York Times. To have Laura Stack speak at your next event, call 303-471-7401 or visit www.theproductivitypro.com.

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Luxurious Gaming Resorts

The Perfect Mix of Business and Pleasure

By Maura Keller



Caesars Palace Las Vegas celebrates its 50th anniversary.

Planning a luxurious onsite meeting or event? Luxurious gaming resorts present a variety of venues for insurance and financial groups who like the spectacular services and amenities combined with the hustle and bustle of casino resorts. Palatial rather than staid, many of these gems offer unique accommodations and amenities aplenty. The casino resort industry abounds with not-to-be-missed locales that make for memorable meeting and event experiences.

Caesars Palace Las Vegas

Caesars Palace Las Vegas has been the epitome of luxury and excitement on the Las Vegas Strip and in 2016 is celebrating five decades of illustrious history during the “Summer of Caesars.”

The iconic property provides new and contemporary accommodations, amenities and world-class dining options. To kick off its golden year, Caesars Palace debuted the newly renovated Julius Tower, formerly the Roman Tower, which now features 587 modern guest rooms. These guest rooms include 55-inch TVs, luxurious Beautyrest Bouvet Island Mattresses, a specially curated mini bar and English-themed Gilchrist & Soames in-room toiletries and amenities.

Caesars Palace is home to one of the world’s best nightclubs, Omnia.

The multilevel venue has an expansive main room dance floor with an astounding kinetic LED chandelier that ascends, descends, morphs and transforms to the sounds of the resort’s world-famous resident DJ, Calvin Harris. Omnia is able to host various types of private events from the main club to the outdoor terrace or the private ultra-lounge.

The most recent addition to Caesars Palace is the upscale Montecristo Cigar Bar. Newly designed by the award-winning architecture firm Rockwell Group, the contemporary 4,000-sf cigar bar offers notable cigars and rare fine whiskeys. Spacious courtyard space wraps around the back portion of the cigar bar, and the 10-seat Vault allows small groups to create an exclusive experience.

Caesars Palace has an outstanding range of flexible venues with 300,000 sf of meeting space and has the capacity to hold various groups sized from small to large. The hotel’s self-check-in kiosk program was designed to streamline an attendee’s arrival to a single step, with no lines and no wait time.

Overall, Caesars Palace features 3,980 hotel guest rooms and suites, including the all-new Julius Tower, the 181-room Nobu Hotel Caesars Palace and The Laurel Collection by Caesars Palace. The 85-acre resort offers 25 diverse dining options including the

award-winning Bacchanal Buffet, as well as celebrity chef-branded restaurants by Gordon Ramsay, Bobby Flay, Nobu Matsuhisa, Guy Savoy and Mr. Chow. The resort also features a five-acre Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis, the luxurious Qua Baths & Spa and the 4,300-seat Colosseum. Caesars Palace hosts world-famous headliners such as Elton John, Celine Dion and Mariah Carey.

Wynn Las Vegas

Wynn Las Vegas offers an incredible experience. Wynn Las Vegas and Encore have captured more *Forbes Travel Guide* Five Star Awards than any other independent hotel company in the world. Why? An exceptional attention to detail is one reason. And because Steve Wynn famously loves to tweak details in his unending quest for providing an unparalleled experience in luxury hospitality.

The design of their meeting and event spaces brings the outdoors in, with splendid terraces from each meeting room looking out to either an elegant pool or a stunning view of the resort grounds.

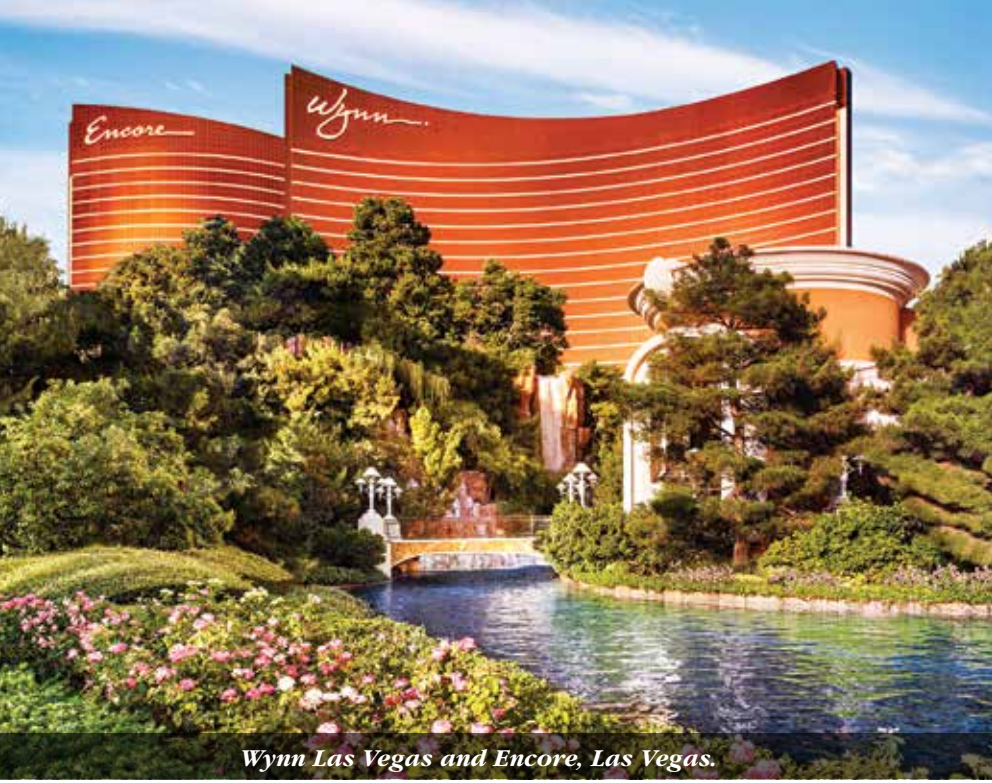
With more than 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space, two opulent ballrooms ranging in size from 25,000 sf to 50,000 sf and 34 meeting rooms, Wynn offers spaces for everyone. Combined, Wynn Las Vegas and Encore feature more than 260,000 sf



Credit: Caesars Entertainment



Caesars Palace Las Vegas celebrated its golden anniversary with special events including a fireworks display and a birthday pool party for hotel guests hosted by award-winning chef Gordon Ramsay at the picturesque Garden of The Gods Pool Oasis.



Wynn Las Vegas and Encore, Las Vegas.

Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

of meeting space including opulent ballrooms and meeting rooms with stunning views. The resort also offers high-tech support, wireless communities, audio-visual capabilities and a dedicated team of catering experts and convention concierge to personally assist meeting clients.

A variety of configuration options and unconventional meeting spaces make it easy to host a unique, memorable and highly attended event. To make the experience at Wynn even more memorable, they have recently refreshed the guest rooms at both Wynn and Encore hotels, a project helmed by *Architectural Digest* Top 100 Designer Roger Thomas.

Wynn Las Vegas has a core belief that only people make people happy, which leads to truly luxurious guest service.

M Resort Spa Casino

Impeccable service combined with thoughtfully designed facilities are the cornerstone of M Resort Spa Casino in Las Vegas. Featuring more than 92,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, M Resort offers a luxurious option for events of all sizes.

Customization is key at M Resort, whereby their spaces can be modified to enhance the layout,

connectivity and technology of any meeting or event.

Boasting an upscale, yet casual décor amid world-class service and amenities, M Resort is a luxurious experience that meeting attendees will love. Residential-esque, generously proportioned guest rooms make visitors to M Resort feel right at home. For executive and C-suite level attendees, M Resort offers some preeminent guest suites that offer separate living areas as well as suites with one- or two-bedroom options.

When the meetings are finished for the day, attendees can enjoy M Re-

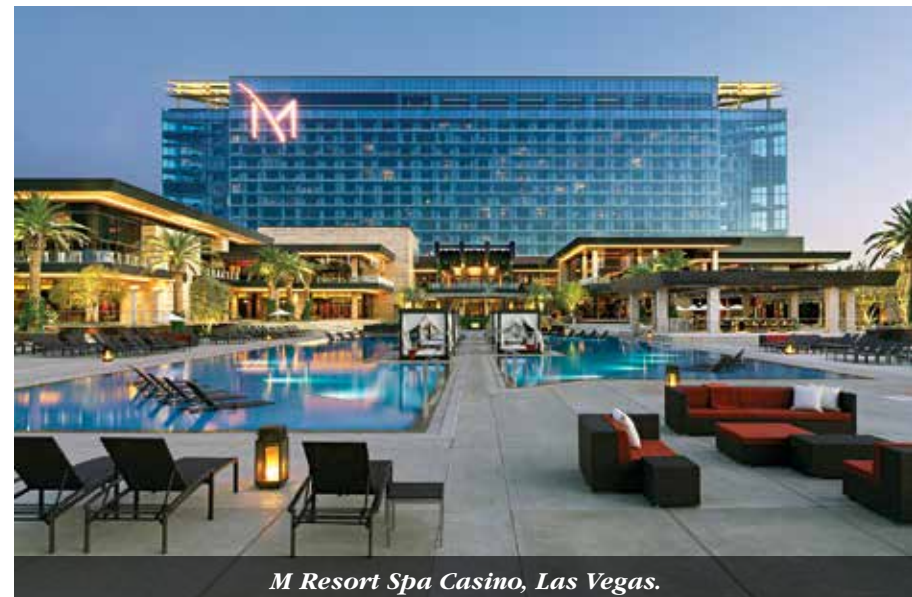
sort's 23,000-sf world-class spa, complete with six treatment rooms, sauna, steam and hot tub wet areas, full-service salon, luxury locker rooms and a state-of-the-art fitness center.

Aria Resort & Casino

Every luxury resort has beautiful hotel rooms and upscale restaurants, but Las Vegas' Aria Resort & Casino defines luxury in meetings by offering meeting rooms with natural light and an atmosphere that invigorates learning.

"Aria makes every group from 10 to 3,500 feel like a VIP with our customized service," says Tony Yousfi, vice president of sales for Aria. "The technology starts when you enter your guest room from the Crave tablet that controls your room to the state-of-the-art technology in the meeting space. Aria is known as the capital for tech groups."

Aria has recently collaborated with Crave Interactive, a cutting-edge guest service software company, to create the largest-ever installation of the provider's in-room hotel tablets. Enhancing the resort's AAA Five Diamond service, the tablets offer a hyper-tailored guest experience with new amenities such as digital in-room dining orders, one-touch spa service requests and an endless stream of news in multiple languages. The new tablets provide the intuitive function-



M Resort Spa Casino, Las Vegas.

Credit: M Resort Spa Casino



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ality that Aria guests are accustomed to, offering a user interface that is approachable and accessible to all. Installing this tablet, with its breadth and depth of capability, in all guest rooms and suites exemplifies the resort's commitment to green and technology innovations.

Encompassing a collection of 258 suites, Aria Tower Suites offers exceptional amenities including the new Tower Suites Lounge, curbside greeting, priority taxi line access, turndown service and more. The Aria Tower Suites experience begins the moment a stay is booked with individual contact from the Aria Concierge team who will confirm all travel details and help make any additional arrangements, such as show tickets or dinner reservations. Upon arrival, guests are invited to check in at the private Tower Suites Lounge, located via a separate entrance in the Aria lobby. This exclusive area provides personalized service and amenities such as light snacks and beverages.

Setting a new standard for poolside pampering, Sky Suites at Aria Resort & Casino unveils Sky Pool, an upscale exclusive pool specially designed for discerning guests. After entering via a dedicated walkway, guests are immersed in the secluded area surrounded by serene palm trees and lush landscaping. The lav-

ish hideaway, washed in splashes of periwinkle and soft yellow, offers sun worshippers 125 single and 15 double chaise lounge chairs as well as five daybeds for those looking for a more spacious area to relax. The oasis elevates the luxury pool experience with personalized services such as the private guest entrance, and luxurious amenities including unexpected indulgences every 90 minutes such as complimentary signature iced teas, chilled towels, smoothie shots and more.

"We have so much to offer all under one roof from 13 outstanding dining options, our new luxurious nightclub to inviting lounges and our award-winning spa. Aria offers options to all," Yousfi says.

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas

At first, one may not consider the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino as a luxury property. However, the Hard Rock Las Vegas All Suite Tower is a luxurious amenity and feature of the property. Not only are the individual units each 700 sf to 750 sf in size but the amenities per accommodation are what discerning meeting attendees search out when looking for luxurious and palatial treatments whether on business related travel or holiday.

Couple that with more than 17 other very high-end suites that range

in size from 1,500 sf to 5,000 sf, and the choices are limitless when looking for a tailored and themed suite experience in Las Vegas.

"What's more, we offer butler service available on a 24-hour-a-day basis for those guests that require just a bit more in making their visit to our hotel that much more memorable," says Drew Varga, vice president of group sales and operations at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. "Our European-trained and world-class team of butlers differentiate us from the rest of the offerings here in Las Vegas. Many group customers and individual guests make the conscious decision to return to the hotel for their multiple annual meetings and events just to enjoy that intimate service experience alone."

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino takes those elements and qualifiers of luxury to an elevated level. "Couple that, along with our ability to make your event different by choosing to use our theater for your meeting, our six-acre pool area for your evening events and our other unique venues found only at the Hard Rock, and this enables us to deliver something that remains to this day a very positive disruption to the traditional meeting box," Vargas says. "We score very high marks in meeting guest surveys at the conclusion of the event. I cannot stress enough that you never have to leave the hotel to make that one-off event dream come true."

Peppermill Reno

As a AAA Four Diamond winner for six consecutive years, Peppermill Reno strives to make all areas of the resort special for their meeting and event guests. Some areas of note include the all-suite Tuscan Tower, which boasts 600 suites featuring sophisticated amenities and views of Reno's cityscape or the Sierras.

The resort's Spa Toscana is a three-story luxury spa that houses northern Nevada's only Caldarium, which includes an indoor pool, sun deck and secret garden. Winner of multiple awards including a *Spa Finder* Reader's Choice Award, the spa, which

features 24 treatment rooms, offers massage, facials, Ayurvedic wellness treatments, and full salon services.

One of the most unique features of Peppermill is the fact that its heating source is completely provided from geothermal energy produced on the property — a special bonus for energy and environmentally conscious meeting attendees. Peppermill's two resort pools are geothermally heated, and are the perfect place to relax with private cabanas, three spas, a waterfall and poolside dining.

"Groups at Peppermill receive these luxuries at a value price," says Katie Silva, corporate communications manager at Peppermill. "Because we are a non-union property, they have no excessive labor charges. And our food and beverage pricing also is 30 percent lower than the national average. Groups can have a luxury stay while keeping within the budget."

Inn of the Mountain Gods

Well equipped to handle any group, Inn of the Mountain Gods, New Mexico's premier mountain resort, presents award-winning accommodations with 273 luxuriously appointed guest rooms and suites, a convention center with theater-style seating for up to 3,000 and technological capabilities to suit almost any need.

There's an abundance of recreation options including an award-winning, 18-hole championship golf course, an indoor pool and workout facility, horseback riding, hiking and paddle boating, kayaking and fishing on Lake Mescalero. For a truly exhilarating experience, the Apache Eagle ZipRider at Inn of the Mountain Gods and the Apache Wind Rider ZipTour at Ski Apache each offer unique and breathtaking rides year-round. Winter months bring snow to the surrounding Sierra Blanca, inviting guests up for an afternoon of skiing and snowboarding at Ski Apache.

"Other than its beautiful location, abundance of meeting space and luxury sleeping rooms, we offer gaming for those that chose this type of



Culinary Dropout, the gastropub inside the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas.

entertainment," says Charles Meeks, executive sales and catering manager at Inn of the Mountain Gods. "One of the great qualities that the Inn of the Mountain Gods has is that although we do offer gaming, you would not know this by walking in the front door of the resort. Our gaming floor is located inside the resort, but patrons do not have to walk through the gaming floor to reach the front desk or their sleeping rooms. They are greeted by an exquisite lobby with a beautiful view of the Sacramento Mountains, soothing music and impeccable customer service."

Inn of the Mountain Gods' sumptuous selection of dining establishments include the Gathering of Nations Buffet, Big Game Sports Bar and the property's new gastro pub-inspired restaurant, Broken Arrow Tap House. There's also Wendell's Steak & Seafood Restaurant, which overlooks Lake Mescalero and serves up four courses of absolute bliss. Before settling in, grab a nightcap at Wendell's Lounge, 1852 Treaty Room, Club 49 or the Sports Bar, all entertaining crowds well into the evening.

Talking Stick Resort

Located in Scottsdale, Arizona, Talking Stick Resort accommodations are elegant and eclectic. The resort delivers the type of experience that is expected from a four-diamond property.

The ultimate accommodations experience is the 1,500-sf three-bay hotel suite, which features a dramatic entryway, large living area with hideaway Murphy bed for extra accommodations, a dining area and a corner bar. The master suite includes a spectacular bed with a motorized TV in the footboard, a spacious master bath with a separate soaking tub, glass-walled shower and dressing area, floor-to-ceiling windows and breathtaking views of Camelback Mountain.

Other aspects of the Talking Stick Resort experience include the Tower Club Lounge located on the highest guest accommodations floor. This 2,000-sf space features sleek décor, contemporary furniture plus floor-to-ceiling windows allowing visitors to take in the views of the surrounding mountains. It also offers an onsite concierge who can help with spa, dining or golf reservations.

The property features functional and elegant indoor and outdoor meeting space totaling 113,000 sf. The hotel conference center's 21 meeting rooms can be configured into several setups fulfilling every aspect of a meeting — creating highly productive settings.

Talking Stick Resort also is skilled at fulfilling after-hours experiences for meeting participants, including live entertainment in the 650-seat Showroom, Degree 270, Players Sports Bar, and Shadows, an elegant martini and



Aria Resort & Casino, Las Vegas.

Credit: MGM Resorts International



The Tuscany Suite at Peppermill Resort Spa Casino, Reno.

Credit: Peppermill Resort

cigar bar. And of course The Spa is the ultimate space to relax and unwind.

French Lick Resort

Nestled in the Indiana countryside, the French Lick Resort includes both French Lick Springs Hotel and West Baden Springs Hotel. When you mention luxury, the first thing that comes to mind is the exquisite West Baden Springs Hotel. The world-famous domed hotel was once the largest free-span dome in the world and serves as an incredible setting for meetings and events.

With 55,000 sf of event space, 11 meeting rooms and dedicated conference planners, the impressive surroundings and exquisite service combine to make West Baden Springs Hotel an unforgettable venue.

For a truly luxurious dining experience, planners can choose Table One, an intimate setting located right in the kitchen. Guests can watch as the chef prepares their meal for groups of up to 10 guests. Glass walls make observing every move possible, and with the flip of a switch the walls are frosted to provide the utmost in seclusion. Private parties dine from custom menus served on elegant one-of-a-kind Versace dinnerware.

World-class spas are located in both West Baden Springs Hotel and French Lick Springs Hotel. Planners can even host after-hours events in the spa. For

golf aficionados, the French Lick resort is a golf lover's paradise with courses designed by hall-of-fame designers Donald Ross and Pete Dye. The championship Pete Dye course, which has hosted the Senior PGA Championship, is the epitome of luxury.

"French Lick Resort is a great choice for meeting planners looking to offer their attendees a seamless opportunity to mix business with pleasure," says Dyan Duncan, PR manager at French Lick. "Our 105,000-sf Meeting and Event Center can accommodate any occasion with a variety of meeting and event spaces with full resort amenities."

With more than a dozen different dining venues, three golf courses, a pair of spas and endless activities, attendees rarely need to leave the property. Meeting at a resort allows all guests to stay in the same hotel, meet on property and partake in additional activities on or off the clock. It also serves as a cost savings to the planner since they do not need to contract third-party venues and transportation.

New & Noteworthy

Aria Resort & Casino announced a major expansion of its award-winning LEED Gold-certified convention center. The \$154 million project will deliver an additional 200,000 sf of technologically advanced, flexible meeting space across four stories, highlighted by

stunning indoor/open-air spaces and a glass-enclosed venue with dramatic views of The Park and spectacular new T-Mobile Arena. With the completion of the expansion, Aria will feature more than 500,000 sf of meeting space for its luxury clientele.

Tropicana Atlantic City recently completed \$40 million in enhancements and renovations including the redesigned Havana Tower hotel rooms, a new high-limit slot area, the addition of a property entrance on Pacific Avenue, Luxe Hair Salon, Corner Market, Ivan Kane's Kiss Kiss a Go-Go, Trop Advantage Rewards Center and five all-new Multimedia Light and Sound Shows on The Boardwalk.

Wynn Resorts recently announced expansion plans for their Las Vegas locale. Called Wynn Paradise Park, the expansion will be constructed on approximately 130 acres of real estate that currently houses the Wynn Golf Club. Wynn Paradise Park will add 260,000 sf of premium meetings space.

MGM Resorts International and New York-based Sydell Group announced a partnership to reimagine and rebrand Las Vegas' Monte Carlo Resort and Casino. The approximately \$450 million transformation, which will touch every element of the property, will include two distinct hotel experiences: a Las Vegas version of Sydell's widely acclaimed NoMad Hotel, and the launch of a new luxury hotel named Park MGM. In addition to fully redesigned and renovated hotel guest rooms, each hotel will feature innovative and exciting food and beverage experiences unique to the Las Vegas market, including the award-winning NoMad restaurant by chef Daniel Humm and restaurateur Will Guidara and Eatly's vibrant Italian marketplace with cafés, to-go counters and full-service restaurants interspersed with high-quality products from sustainable Italian and local producers.

Park MGM and The NoMad Las Vegas become the final pieces of MGM Resorts' complete neighborhood redesign of the central Las Vegas Strip neighborhood. **I&FMM**

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Small Meetings Trends

Planners Add More R&R to the Agenda for Higher ROI

By Patrick Simms

When any number of employees gather for a meeting, be it 10, 100 or 1,000, it's a chance for more than learning, training and discussing business matters. These are surely the key reasons to meet, but to maximize ROI, the host company also can take the opportunity to stage teambuilding activities and even reward their reps with diversion at the destination. So there is no reason to stereotype the small meeting, typically

Credit: LILA Photo

Participants in TD Ameritrade's June 2016 Elite LINC conference enjoy the ambience at the Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel.

defined as convening under 100 attendees, as being "strictly business."

Louisiana Farm Bureau Insurance certainly takes full advantage of the opportunities that small gatherings present. Jennifer N. Meyer, director of agency services, plans an annual

agency managers conference of 75–90 attendees, as well as district meetings every three months that bring in about 90 participants. Each type of meeting allows time for recreational activities outside the conference room.

"For our agency managers, it's a

half-day meeting and then the rest is free time so they can golf, shop, visit the spa, etc.," Meyer says. "So it's kind of a retreat for them. For the district meetings, I try to do more of an incentive location; many times we use casino hotels because you've got all your

"Sometimes, it's the larger property that has the flexibility to better accommodate a smaller, short-term booking."

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





The Windsor Court Hotel in New Orleans showcases European antiques and period reproductions from the 17th and 18th centuries.

restaurants and gaming, pool and spa on-property. It's kind of a little end of the summer celebration." That's a far cry from the small meeting that takes place over a day at an airport hotel, but Louisiana Farm Bureau Insurance has clearly found that the camaraderie that develops justifies the "extras."

Finding the Right Hotel

An indispensable partner in executing a small meeting with those recreational add-ons is the right hotel, one with both logistically ideal meeting space and memorable character and amenities. Meyer recently found such a property in New Orleans, the **Windsor Court Hotel**, which hosted the company's two-day managers meeting, bringing in about 75 attendees.

In proximity to the French Quarter and Bourbon Street, the 316-room Windsor Court Hotel showcases European antiques and period reproductions from the 17th and 18th centuries, a collection valued at more than \$8 million. The hotel combines that distinction with a 4,500-sf spa and 10,000-sf rooftop pool and deck. The hotel's 10,000 sf of function space includes two chinoiserie ballrooms with 23rd-floor views, and various rooms that can accommodate meetings for up to 250 people and banquets for up

to 240, including the library and the boardroom for small meetings.

Meyer relates that a recent Presidents Weekend was a similar success at the 405-room **Grand Hotel Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa** in Point Clear, Alabama. The hotel offers 37,000 sf of meeting space, including two meeting suites for smaller groups, the Bayside Executive Suite and the Hospitality Parlor. The historic property combines those resources with a 550-acre Mobile Bay location, the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail and a 20,000-sf spa.

One of Meyer's sources for placing her events is Marriott's national sales

representative. "Marriott is the only national hotel contact that I have, and there is a great benefit to using their national rep because it's a one-stop shop for (hotels) anywhere in the U.S.," she says. "Marriott is a preferred vendor for us; they're the first place that I look just because of the ease of use. And Marriott owns Ritz-Carlton, which is a really good location for my VIP groups."

Finding Negotiating Room

As a preferred supplier, Marriott properties receive a good deal of the company's meetings business, Meyer indicates. And while small meetings individually may mean a relatively modest amount of revenue for a hotel, collectively they can increase the client's leverage in negotiations.

Katrina Kent, director of The Event Group at TD Ameritrade, finds this strategy useful as well. "If we have a series of smaller programs that are located in, say, six or eight cities, we will try to bundle all of that business under one preferred hotel group and realize the benefits at a global relationship level," she explains.

Kent indicates that about 65 percent of TD Ameritrade's meetings bring in 10-100 attendees, including board of directors programs, sales team events and incentives, and client events. "We find that when a hotel partner or property considers the big picture of all of our business and has the ability to work with us accordingly, we both benefit," she says. "Some of the best property-level relationships we have are repeat properties where we have had success with a smaller meeting and that leads to more or repeat business. It all adds up."

Catering to Small Meetings

What's more, Kent appreciates the attention hoteliers have been paying to the small meetings market in general:

"We've always held the Bank Executive Retreats at luxury properties and want our attendees to feel special."

Allison Cooper, Assistant V.P., Conference Experiences
LPL Financial, Charlotte, NC

"Hyatt and several others have carved out programs to cater to the smaller meetings market, and it's been great," she says. Hyatt's small meetings services, including an online RFP tool for fast booking, can be found at hyatt.com/hyatt/meetings/events/small-meetings.jsp.

But even if a hotelier does not profess its small meetings proficiency at the brand level, many of its individual

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The Reach, a Waldorf Astoria Resort in Key West, Florida, offers attendees a slate of amenities including sandsculpting workshops, dolphin experiences and more.

properties can surely be ideal for these meetings — not only in terms of function space, but also the kinds of activities and amenities that optimize the ROI for these meetings.

For example, while the **Hilton Chicago** is a massive property with 1,544 guest rooms and more than 234,000 sf of meeting space, many intimate meeting experiences are available with more than 50 meeting rooms and suites convertible into breakout rooms. In addition, the iconic Conrad Suite allows VIPs to gather in a library with a pool table and bar, a grand salon and dining room that seats 14. Small to mid-sized groups also can bond over a harvest experience by buying out the Hilton Chicago's rooftop garden and urban farm. Uniquely, Hilton Chicago boasts a team exclusively focused on the finance market, with membership in FICP, and who provide enhanced security and privacy for this segment.

Florida Favorites

Sunny Florida is replete with examples of upscale properties ranging from about 100–300 guest rooms that are ideal for small but high-level meetings. A true retreat can be found down in Key West at **The Reach, a Waldorf Astoria Resort**. The 150-room resort is set on Key West's only natural sand beach and offers a total of 22,600 sf of flexible indoor-outdoor event space. A

private dining room for up to 40 guests features plasma screens, PC connections and wireless internet. Attendees can participate in a variety of memorable activities such as sandsculpting workshops, historic bike/jet ski tours, dinner at the Hemingway House, dolphin snorkel tours, Mallory Square sunset celebrations, scavenger hunts, offshore fishing and day trips to Dry Tortugas National Park.

Farther up the state lies **The St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort**, Miami Beach, where Charlotte, North Carolina-based LPL Financial held its Bank Executive Retreat last fall. The 60-person group consisted of the company's top 30 bank executive program leaders, product partners and home office staff.

"We've always held the Bank Executive Retreats at luxury properties and want our attendees to feel special; this property definitely makes you feel that. It's perfect for a group of 150 or less," remarks Allison Cooper, assistant vice president, conference experiences. A recipient of the Forbes Five Star and AAA Five Diamond awards for 2015, The St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort houses 227 guest rooms and 11,200 sf of meeting space (10,200 sf indoor). As such, it was not oversized for the LPL group, which was served by a "courteous and attentive staff checking on me and my staff at least every 30 minutes or so," says Cooper.

The "retreat" qualities of the resort also were evident to Cooper. "It isn't in all of the loud, chaotic hustle and bustle of South Beach — but still only a short drive away for those that enjoy the South Beach nightlife," she describes. "Everyone loves South Beach, but it can get distracting at times for meetings. Having the beach, the pool, the cabanas and daybeds at St. Regis, our guests didn't miss out on anything that they'd find at any of the other South Beach luxury properties. If anything, they appreciated the fact that it was more low-key and relaxing, which is what a group like this needs."

A getaway for groups also can be found in Palm Beach, home to the five-diamond and five-star **Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa**, a 309-room property set on a secluded private beach. More than 30,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space is at a planner's disposal, and the flexibility is ideal for small groups: The 9,680-sf ballroom is divisible into three equal salons, and there are 10 breakout rooms, including two boardrooms. Outdoor event space includes a pool terrace, resort lawn and 3,000-sf oceanfront terrace with a fire pit.

Attendees can literally mix business with pleasure in Poolside Business Cabanas wired for connectivity and outfitted with oversized and stocked work desk, flat-screen television, printer and more.

Resort amenities include the award-winning, 42,000-sf Eau Spa, a state-of-the-art fitness center, three Har-Tru clay tennis courts, two oceanfront swimming pools, four restaurants including the fine-dining Angle, which features fresh local seafood and locally sourced seasonal ingredients, and Breeze Ocean Kitchen, which opened in March. With seating for up to 120 guests, Breeze Ocean Kitchen features striking design details such as a runway fire feature that lights up evening lounge areas. A "lookout" bar top floats above the resort's beach to offer extraordinary views of the sea and sunsets.

Small groups can combine a touch



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The resort lawn at Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa.

of Florida history with their event at **Ponte Vedra Inn & Club**, a bastion among North Florida resorts since 1928. This five-diamond property on Ponte Vedra Beach lies just 20 miles southeast of Jacksonville, making it accessible for groups to fly into. With 250 guest rooms and 25,000 sf of indoor function space, the resort is well suited to small to midsized groups, but again the flexibility and variety in small meeting spaces is important.

There are 17 meeting rooms including a cherry-paneled executive boardroom with flex-back conference chairs, all supported by a high-tech business center, hospitality suites and an in-house audio-visual team. During free time, attendees can enjoy a slew of recreational amenities, including two 18-hole golf courses, 15 Har-Tru HydroCourt tennis courts, three oceanfront pools, the region's largest spa, and a variety of shops and boutiques. Especially active guests can bike, sail, kayak or paddleboard, while the wellness-minded can take advantage of an 8,000-sf oceanfront gym.

Pop-Up Meetings

Properties like these find favor with planners looking to spruce up

the small meeting experience with “extracurricular” activities and memorable surroundings. But in practice there will always be small meetings that have to be planned expediently, and there may not be an opportunity to find a property that is attractive from both a business and recreational standpoint; the first property with the right dates, rates and space will typically fit the bill.

“Our August district meeting I usually book a couple months out, and the managers meeting I would book a year out. But there will be other little meetings that



Jennifer N. Meyer, Director of Agency Services
Louisiana Farm Bureau Insurance, Baton Rouge, LA

will pop up, like training sessions,” Meyer notes. Fortunately, she has “contacts pretty much everywhere in Louisiana, and when I’m shopping for those pop-up meetings, I usually don’t need much out of the property — I just need something functional.”

Alternatively, these “no frills” meetings might be held at corporate offices, but there are advantages to using off-

site venues. These “offer a more consistent participant experience and allow for an environment free from the distraction of everyday business that we encounter when hosting at our offices,” according to Kent.

Offsite booking can mean a short-term challenge at times, but “we try to work with properties as flexibly as we can to fit into a slot that is mutually beneficial,” she adds. The company’s flexibility on contract terms also is increased, given that a small group on a short-term booking schedule doesn’t have much leverage. “Our expectations are in line accordingly, and we understand when a hotelier is unable to offer a rebook clause or other generous cancellation terms.”

Large vs. Small Hotels

And while a small group is ideally housed in a small to midsized property, “sometimes, it’s the larger property that has the flexibility to better accommodate a smaller, short-term booking,” Kent points out. So in that situation, a planner must really be open to booking opportunities across the spectrum of hotel sizes.

However, all other things being roughly equal between the large and small hotel, the latter is preferable, according to Meyer. “When I was a younger planner I used a bigger property a couple of times and you end up

“For our agency managers, it’s a half-day meeting and then the rest is free time so they can golf, shop, visit the spa, etc. So it’s kind of a retreat for them.”

being a small fish in a very large pond.” So it’s really good to try as much as possible to utilize all the space the hotel has to offer, so that you’re the only group in the hotel. You don’t want to be competing for the (attention of the) sales and event staff with other groups; it never works out well in my experience.”

Attendees of small meetings and

VIP retreats not only want their due attention from hotel staff, they also want personal attention from the meeting host and their peers. After all, these forums are more suited to interactivity than large meetings, and planners do well to create a platform where each attendee can have his or her voice heard.

Regarding LPL Financial’s Bank Executive Retreat, Cooper relates that “the meeting objective from a business perspective is to listen and engage our top bank clients/executives in best business practices and find ways that LPL can help (or continue to) improve their businesses.” And to ensure that help is targeted to the individual client/executive, “we set up the room roundtable or crescent style instead of classroom or theater, so that the attendees could truly interact with each other and share ideas,” she says. “We tried to focus less on AV (although we did have it one day) and ‘presentation style,’ and (instead)



The historic Ponte Vedra Inn & Club is situated on Northeast Florida’s Atlantic coast.

have more of a true workshop-style general session. We find on our surveys that our attendees really appreciate that format much more and feel heard that way.

“We also send out a ‘save the date’ about three to four months out and have a call about two months out from the event to engage the attendees from the start, so we are

sure to touch on topics that are important to them.”

That kind of approach undoubtedly increases the ROI for a small meeting. And when the ideal session structure is combined with the recreational riches of a property like The St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort, the experience becomes more memorable, and the ROI is increased even more. **IFMM**

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The Naples Pier.

Florida

A Planner's Paradise

By Derek Reveron

Florida is a planner's paradise because it consists of several unique world-class destinations bound together by sunshine and beautiful beaches. Groups large and small can enjoy exclusive beach resorts, party all night in Miami, play at Orlando's theme parks and chill out along the stunning Gulf Coast.

Central Florida

This region is home to some of Florida's top meeting properties such as Streamsong Resort, a 229-room property located about 85 miles south of Orlando on 16,000 acres of lakes, lagoons and dunes.

Streamsong's golf courses are a big reason why Clearwater, Florida-based Bouchard Insurance held a two-day meeting at the property last August for 65 sales executives and managers. It was the group's first meeting at Streamsong after receiving recommendations from some company executives who had played golf at the property.

Streamsong was ideally suited for the meeting. "We wanted to offer our guests a reward for their hard work, and the rooms, facilities and amenities helped us convey their importance to us," says Connie Lance, assistant sales manager and meeting planner

at Bouchard Insurance. "This location was chosen because it is central to our five Florida offices and offers a variety of activities for our guests."

Streamsong's layout was a perfect fit. "Our group enjoys being together and interacting," says Lance. "Streamsong was a good match for our group because of its size, meeting space needs and activities that cover a wide range of interests. We held a day-long meeting the first day followed by dinner and then a game of cornhole (a game of tossing bean bags or bags of dried corn at a holed target) that turned into a tournament and extended well beyond our scheduled time. The Streamsong staff was very patient and accommodating in that situation. The next morning, we provided options for golf, fishing and the shooting range."

Lance also was impressed with the value the group received from Streamsong. "The resort's team worked closely with us to deliver the perks we wanted within our budget guidelines," says Lance. "Following the meeting, some of our team members booked smaller scale events themselves."

The Lure of Golf

Streamsong's golf courses were the prime reason that Merrill, Wisconsin-

based Church Mutual Insurance Company held a four-day meeting — the group's first at the property — for 44 sales executives, risk management officers and business owners at the resort last fall.

The group enjoyed the resort's Streamsong Red and Blue courses, which opened about three years ago and were recently named to *Golf* magazine's list of "Top 100 Courses in the U.S." while earning praise from *Golfweek* and *Golf Digest*. Streamsong is scheduled to open its third golf course, Streamsong Black, in autumn 2017.

Mark Steinberg, CPCU, AAI, senior vice president at Church Mutual, explains, "We were seeking a world-class golf facility, and we selected Streamsong because of the reputation of its golf facility. While we evaluate different locations throughout the year and try not to repeat the same location year after year, we will return to Streamsong in the future mostly because of the golf facility."

Steinberg cites several other reasons for choosing Streamsong: "The attention to detail and location were critical considerations in choosing this property, and the service was outstanding," says Steinberg. "All events, dinners, activities and receptions were held on the property, and the staff showed that they were well acquainted with what we wanted. All functions went beyond expectations to make our program one to remember for all attendees."

Orlando

Like many of the nation's most popular destinations, Orlando attracts high volumes of first-time and repeat visitors. That's one reason why Orlando continues to set visitation records. Visit Orlando announced that the destination welcomed a record 66.1 million visitors in 2015, up 5.5 percent from 2014. Visitation has more than doubled over the last 20 years.

According to Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel, "This new milestone and rapid growth over the past two decades is a result of having a tourism industry and community part-

ners that are focused on growth and investment, dedication to the needs of our visitors, and the global marketing and sales efforts of our Visit Orlando team and member companies."

New attractions at Orlando's theme parks provide groups with more entertainment and activity options than ever.

Walt Disney World is doubling the number of shops and other venues at Downtown Disney to more than 150. The project, scheduled for completion by the end of this year, will include a diverse mix of retailers, entertainment, upscale restaurants and casual dining options.

Top meeting accommodations are available at the seven Disney Springs Resort Area Hotels, which are located within an easy walk to more than 75 shopping, dining and entertainment venues at Disney Springs. The seven Disney Springs Resort Area Hotels offer Disney Meeting Advantages through their unique status as Official Walt Disney World Hotels.

Disney Springs Properties

The hotels include the 1,014-room Buena Vista Palace, offering 90,000 sf of convention and meeting space, a business center, and five restaurants and lounges; B Resort & Spa with 394 new rooms and suites, and 25,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space; the 814-room Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista, providing 78,000 sf of contemporary meeting space, with 22 breakout

rooms, an executive boardroom and outdoor patios; the newly renovated DoubleTree Suites by Hilton, Orlando Lake Buena Vista, featuring 229 two-room suites, and accommodating groups up to 125 guests in 3,500 sf of meeting space; the 323-room Holiday Inn located in the Walt Disney World Resort, offering 11,000 sf of meeting and event space, including a ballroom that can seat 500; the 626-room Wyndham Lake Buena Vista, featuring 19,000 sf of meeting and banquet space serving groups of 10 to 1,200 guests.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, has renovated the Swan hotel's 758 guest rooms and will do likewise for the Dolphin hotel's 1,509 rooms. The Swan and Dolphin also increased the bandwidth of the Wi-Fi technology in its convention space to offer more reliable and faster internet service that accommodates the online needs of groups exceeding 15,000 attendees.

With the installation, the Swan and Dolphin becomes the largest convention hotel in Florida to implement the technology, which offers faster and more reliable internet service that handles groups exceeding 15,000 attendees. The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin offers 2,267 guest rooms and more than 329,000 sf of meeting

"We were seeking a world-class golf facility, and we selected Streamsong because of the reputation of its golf facility. ... We will return to Streamsong in the future."



Mark Steinberg, CPCU, AAI
Senior Vice President
Church Mutual Insurance Company
Merrill, WI

space including 84 meeting rooms and 110,500 sf of contiguous convention/exhibit space.

Near Walt Disney World and all the attractions of this popular area, The Grove Resort & Spa will open this fall on Lake Austin. Billed as the largest development of its kind currently underway in Orlando, the first phase of construction will include up to 292 two- and three-bedroom residential-style guest suites. When completed, the Grove Resort & Spa, part of the Benchmark Resorts & Hotels portfolio, will boast 878 guest suites, several dining options and four swimming pools. The 6,000 sf of flexible indoor meeting space will accommodate up to 300 people and provide onsite catering and audio-visual support.

King Kong Cometh

Universal Orlando Resort opened a new King Kong-themed attraction at its Universal Islands of Adventure. Dubbed "Skull Island: Reign of Kong," the attraction honors the fictional giant gorilla. Guests aboard vehicles fend off threats while exploring ancient temple structures.

Loews Sapphire Falls Resort also opened at the resort, increasing the number of Universal Orlando Resort's onsite hotels to five. The 1,000-room Caribbean-themed resort was built around a towering waterfall and lagoon, and connects to Loews Royal



A guest room at Streamsong Resort.



Kirkland Event and Destination Services used four different lighting techniques to create a glowing event at Eau Palm Beach.

Credit: Kirkland Event & Destination Services Inc.

Pacific Resort, which has completed an island-themed renovation of its guest rooms, and expanded meeting and event space from 85,000 sf to 132,000 sf. The two properties form the new Loews Meeting Complex at Universal Orlando boasting a combined 247,000 sf of meeting space.

Universal Orlando Resort's CityWalk opened the first-ever NBC Sports Grill & Brew. Groups can meet in private dining rooms and enjoy 100 HDTV screens, a diverse menu and more than 100 beer brands.

At SeaWorld, the DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld is scheduled to complete a multimillion-dollar renovation by the end of this year. The project includes 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space, a new 20,000-sf ballroom and additional pool decks. SeaWorld also opened Mako, a new 200-foot-tall roller coaster.

The Palm Beaches

Discover The Palm Beaches, Palm Beach County's tourism marketing corporation, has launched promotional videos featuring golf legends and Olympic contenders. The videos feature several of the 60 current or former professional golfers who live in the Palm Beaches, including Jack Nicklaus, Ernie Els, Rory McIlroy and Tiger Woods, touting the area as Florida's Golf Capital.

Palm Beach County also is home

to top meeting properties, including Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa, one of just six new hotels in the U.S. named to *Forbes Travel Guide's* 2016 Five Star Hotels. The 309-room Eau Palm Beach, which offers 30,000 sf of meeting space, has helped set the tone for today's modern Palm Beach lifestyles.

Eau Palm Beach recently hosted a combination four-day meeting and incentive for 110 attendees (including spouses) of a financial group. Prior to this year's meeting, the group considered choosing another location in 2017. "They were thinking about going to Arizona or another location in Florida," says Paget Kirkland, president and owner of Lake Worth, Florida-based Kirkland Event and Destination Services Inc. "But the company did a survey after the meeting and it got all good and excellent reviews, so they decided to come back to the same property next year."

An enjoyable diversity of experiences in The Palm Beaches contributed to the group's decision to return. "Palm Beach County has all of the fun things to do and all of the resources you need as a planner," says Kirkland. "This area has something for everybody, whether it's the water, art, nightlife, sports, nature with the Everglades and high-end properties."

The meeting kicked off with a welcome reception at Eau Palm Beach that included a teambuilding event in

which attendees divided into teams of six to create art designs.

Atlantic Sailing

After the reception, unknown to attendees, Kirkland's staff transferred the designs to flags. The next day, when attendees arrived at docks to participate in a sailing regatta, they were pleasantly surprised to see the flags had been placed in the boats used by each six-member team. During the race, the teams wore t-shirts bearing their company's logo.

Attendees also enjoyed a creative evening function at Ragtops Motor Cars Palm Beach, a vintage-car museum. "This group wanted to go completely out of the box and do something they have never done before," says Kirkland. "So we did an old-fashioned sockhop with music from the 1950s. We got one of the executive VIPs to do a drive-in entrance sitting on the back of a classic convertible. After dinner we brought in a Good Humor ice cream truck to add a fun component to it."

One of The Palm Beaches' top golf courses also was on the agenda. "They played a tournament, in foursomes, at Trump International Golf Club and were entertained by a golfer who did trick shots like hitting two balls with a club in each hand," says Kirkland. "They thought they were returning to the hotel for lunch but we surprised them by taking them to The Mar-a-Lago Club for lunch. It was a big 'wow' for them."

Lastly, the group enjoyed some local culture. "Bruce Helander, a local artist gave a talk about making collages and showed them how to do it," says Kirkland. "Afterwards, the group went to his home for lunch. We later framed the collages and sent them to everybody."

Paradise Coast

Florida's Paradise Coast – Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades – hosted a record 3.1 percent increase in visitors in 2015, up from 1.8 million visitors in 2014, according to the

Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The growing popularity of the Paradise Coast has been recognized through several awards. These include the 2015 *Condé Nast Traveler* Readers' Choice Top American Cities for Food, and Marco Island's inclusion in the TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Awards Ten Best Islands – United States.

One of the Southwest Coast's most popular resorts, Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa, has completed phase one of a \$250 million renovation. Phase one includes a redesigned lobby and grand front entrance, and removal of the Islands Ballroom to make way for the new adult-only 94-room Lanai Tower.

Upon completion of all three phases in 2017, the 810-room Marriott beachfront will be rebranded to the JW Marriott Beach Resort Marco Island and offer 100,000 sf of meeting space and a 12,000-sf indoor entertainment zone.

Naples

Upscale Naples offers its share of top-shelf properties, including the recently opened Hyatt House Naples/Fifth Avenue, located on the Gordon River. The 183-room property features 3,315 sf of meeting space and a spacious waterfront restaurant/bar.

Nearby, the AAA Four-Diamond Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club, on the Gulf of Mexico, is renovating its championship golf course with completion scheduled by December. Famed golfer Jack Nicklaus is heading the redesign in collaboration with course architect John Sanford. The \$9 million redesign follows \$50 million in renovations over the last few years. Upon completion, the new, par-71 routing plan will include five tees ranging from 4,800 yards to more than 6,900 yards, and a 300-yard practice and teaching range.

"Palm Beach County has all of the fun things to do and all of the resources

you need as a planner...whether it's the water, art, nightlife, sports, nature with the Everglades and high-end properties."



Paget Kirkland
President and Owner
Kirkland Event & Destination Services
Lake Worth, FL

Northeast Florida

Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, Northeast Florida's largest convention hotel, has completed its multimillion-dollar renovation of all 951 guest rooms while adding six hard-



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Clam Pass Beach at Naples Grande Beach Resort.

Credit: Naples Marco Island Everglades CVB

walled meeting rooms on the fourth level of the property's Terrace Building. The renovation also included corridors, the rooftop fitness center and Regency Club Lounge, which now provides additional space for small meetings, networking areas and workstations overlooking the city skyline.

Located about 30 miles north of the Jacksonville airport, The Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort offers 80,000 sf of meeting space, including a new 16,825-sf ballroom. The conference center provides more than 13,000 sf of prefunction space and an 11,000-sf event lawn.

A short drive southeast of Jacksonville, the AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club will complete a multimillion-dollar renovation of its Ocean House accommodations in fall 2017. Recently, the property renovated its Peyton House accommodations and oceanfront Surf Club, opened the new Tavern Lounge and upgraded its Wi-Fi system.

Daytona Beach

Daytona Beach, one of the most popular destinations in Northeast Florida, is currently investing about \$2 billion for renovations and construction.

Projects include a recently completed \$400 million renovation at Daytona International Speedway that converted it into a motorsports stadium that includes three new concourse

levels spanning the front stretch; five expanded and redesigned fan entrances dubbed "injectors"; 11 social areas called neighborhoods; more than 60 new luxury trackside suites with patios; and 17 elevators and 40 escalators in the new grandstand.

Groups can choose from a range of properties in Daytona Beach, including several new hotels. These include the Residence Inn by Marriott Daytona Beach Oceanfront, the Hilton Garden Inn and the Chateau Mar Beach Resort. Projects in the planning stages include a new Hard Rock Hotel & Cafe, scheduled for completion in 2018, and an upscale Westin property. The former Desert Inn will reopen in 2017 as The Westin Daytona Beach Resort & Spa after a \$20 million renovation. It will be Westin Hotels & Resorts' first-ever property in the destination. The 200-room beachfront resort will offer 20,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space.

Another favorite, the 212-room Shores Resort and Spa in Daytona Beach Shores offers great views from its 8,000-sf rooftop meeting space with floor-to-ceiling glass windows. The property provides a total of 20,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space including a 6,800-sf grand ballroom that can be divided into five meeting rooms.

Miami

Planners are attracted to Miami

partly because of its plentiful supply of meeting space, spearheaded by the Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC), which is undergoing a \$500 million renovation and expansion.

The \$615 million project, scheduled for completion in 2018, includes plans for an adjacent headquarters hotel. Upon completion, the MBCC will offer 505,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space, a newly added 60,000 sf Grand Ballroom and 81 new breakout rooms spanning 190,000 sf.

Miami's most popular properties include Turnberry Isle Miami, a 408-room Mediterranean-style resort with 40,000 sf of meeting space, and 241 recently renovated guest rooms and suites in the resort's Magnolia and Jasmine buildings.

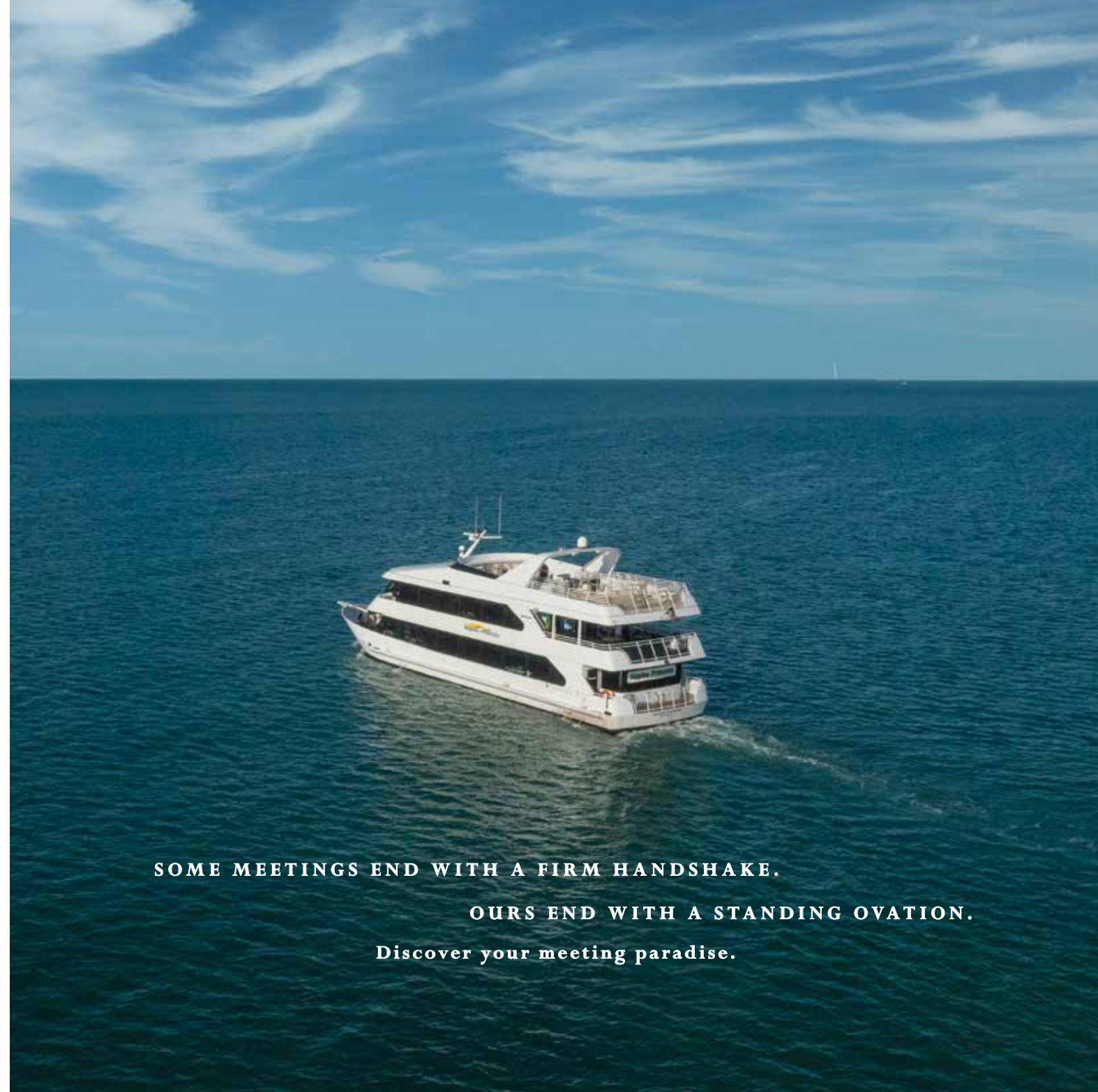
Just north of Miami, the Diplomat Resort & Spa in Hollywood, one of South Florida's premier meetings resorts, has received kudos from AAA, TripAdvisor and Orbitz. In addition, Cvent named the resort a Top 100 Meeting Hotel. The honors stem partly from the resort's luxurious indoor and outdoor meeting space and scenic location between the Atlantic Ocean and Intracoastal Waterway.

The Keys

The iconic Florida Keys is a 125-mile-long island chain that offers a range of intimate and spacious venues for large and small meetings, incentives and retreats.

One of the Keys' most popular properties, the Ocean Reef Club, offers teambuilding events such as bingo night, bungee run, the cardboard boat regatta and sand castle competitions. Groups also can enjoy field trips and eco-kayak tours through the Ocean Reef's Nature Center and group activities at the property's all-new cooking school, which accommodates cooking demonstrations, private parties and tasting events for up to 150 people.

The Ocean Reef Club also features 30,000 sf of indoor meeting and function space as well as outdoor venues including two oceanfront pools and Lagoon Beach, which can accom-



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Sundial Terrace at Sundial Beach Resort & Spa on Sanibel Island.

Credit: Sundial Beach Resort & Spa

modate up to 400 people, 36 holes of golf, a salon and spa, more than a dozen restaurants, a 175-slip marina and a private airport. In addition, the property's Carysfort Hall, a modern meeting and function space features a 5,688-sf ballroom and five additional meeting rooms that can accommodate up to 300 guests.

New and Noteworthy

The Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort in Bonita Springs is building a \$7.1 million triple waterslide and lazy river pool complex. The waterslide will be located next to an existing two-acre pool scape and add to the resort's two existing waterslides, three pools, secluded island and beach. The triple waterslide is scheduled to open in late 2016. The resort also has renovated more than 37,600 sf of meeting space including two ballrooms, two prefunction spaces, eight meeting rooms, one executive boardroom, a meeting planner's office and two technology nooks.

The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village is building a \$15 million, 35,000-sf conference center that accommodates groups of up to 1,250 guests and will increase the property's existing 15,000 sf of function space to 28,000 sf. The new conference center will include a 13,000-sf Grand Ballroom that can be divided into several

spaces and accommodate up to six smaller banquet rooms.

In addition, the property offers a 4,754-sf prefunction area, a 1,728-sf terrace overlooking the Caloosahatchee River and a multifunction room for board meetings. The conference center is scheduled for completion in late 2017.

In Boca Raton, the upscale 189-room **Renaissance Boca Raton Hotel** completed a multimillion-dollar renovation. About 15,000 sf of meeting and conference spaces feature upgraded décor, ergonomical furniture and natural lighting. A range of new meeting rooms comes with on-site event planners to help plan meetings, conferences and events for up to 600 people.

Palm Beach County's new 21-story, 400-room **Hilton West Palm Beach**, which opened in January with 24,000 sf of meeting space, is the only hotel in South Florida connected to a convention center — The Palm Beach County Convention Center.

In Central Florida, **The Hilton Orlando** has added 11,000 sf of new meeting space divisible into eight separate meeting rooms and adjacent to the existing 15,000-sf Florida Ballroom. The new meeting space includes the Key Largo and Key West rooms, which offer 4,764 sf and 4,145 sf of meeting space, respectively. The hotel is

connected to the Orange County Convention Center.

Westgate Lakes Resort & Spa, a stylish Orlando condominium resort, recently increased its total meeting space to 36,000 sf with the addition of 20,000 sf of meeting and banquet space that accommodates up to 1,000 people and is divisible into eight rooms.

In Immokalee, just northeast of Naples, the **Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee** has added a new 99-room hotel that features 80 guest rooms and 19 suites. The entire casino and entertainment complex now has a total of 175,000 sf, up from 75,600 sf previously.

Planners and meeting-goers looking for a beachfront site find that **Sundial Beach Resort and Spa** on Sanibel Island is popular for laidback corporate events. Nine meeting rooms, each with comprehensive audio-visual capabilities, comprise the 12,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space, and the resort boasts that it is the only destination on the Florida Gulf Coast's Sanibel Island capable of accommodating up to 300 guests.

New dining options include a daily breakfast buffet and a new restaurant, Shima Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar, that can be used for private group events.

Currently, the Sundial Beach Resort and Spa offers special value for groups that book by December 31, 2016, including the following:

- Complimentary one-hour cocktail reception.
- 10 percent off F&B.
- Waived resort fee.
- Complimentary meeting space.
- Complimentary internet in meeting rooms.

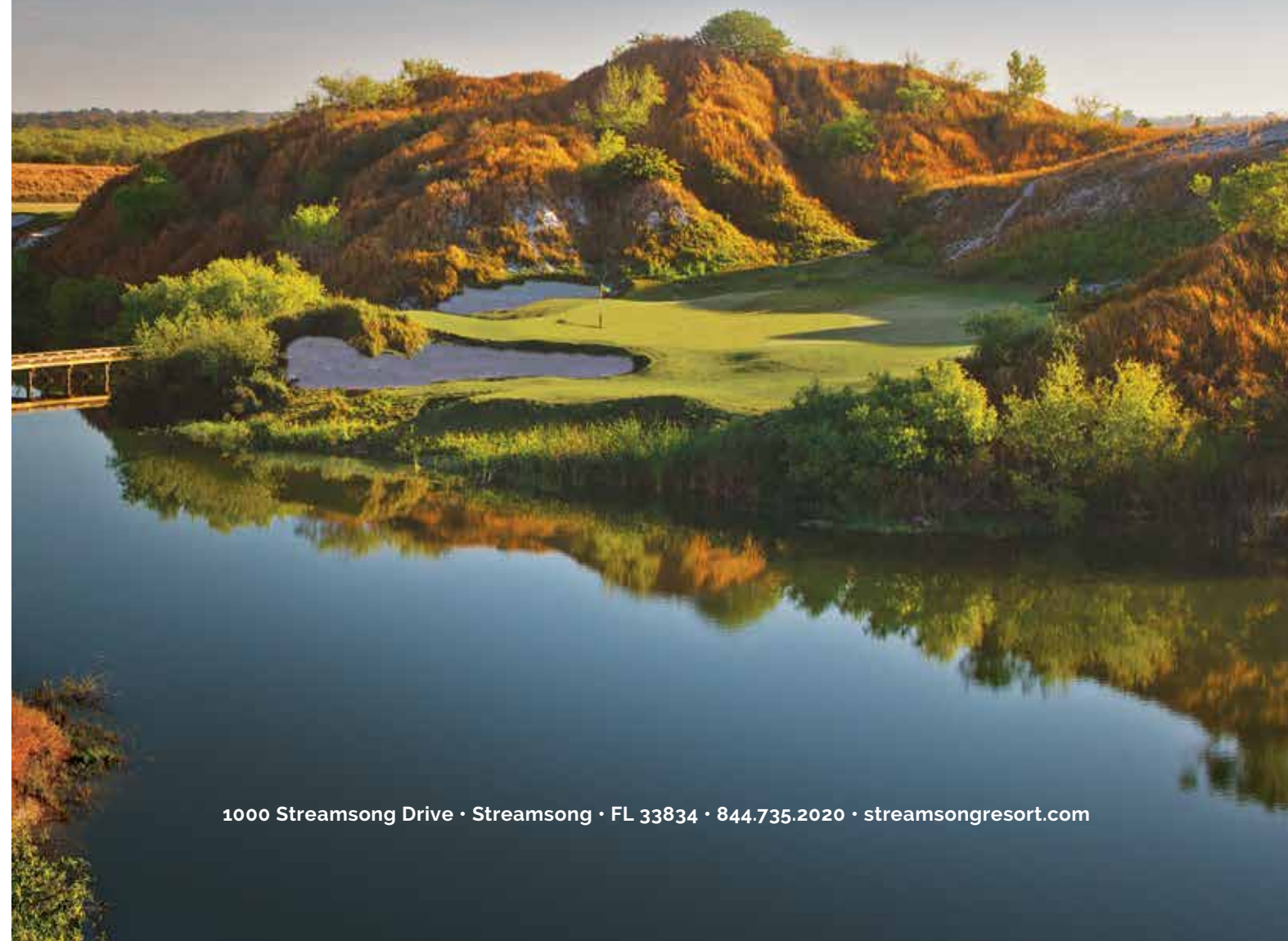
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HERNING

Gregg Herning was named vice president of sales at Bellagio in Las Vegas. Bringing 30 years of experience to the role, he was most recently vice president of sales for MGM Grand.

The Westin Nashville has named **Adam Smith** executive meetings manager of sales. He was catering sales and short-term sales manager at Music City Center. **Dawn Kruis** was named sales manager. She was sales manager and catering manager at Millennium Maxwell House Hotel in Nashville.

Andaz Scottsdale Resort & Spa in Scottsdale, Arizona, has named **Terri Benich** as area director of sales and marketing. She was director of sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency



SMITH

Scottsdale Resort & Spa at Gainey Ranch. **Rachel Jessop** was named director of group sales. She was senior sales manager for Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort & Spa.

Tony Aslanian was named director of sales and marketing for The Grove Resort & Spa in Orlando, Florida. He formerly served as director of sales, marketing and revenue strategy at Nickelodeon Suites Resort in Orlando.

Loews Regency New York Hotel in Manhattan has named **Daniel Ben-Efraim** as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing at The London New York.

Kiawah Island Golf Resort, Kiawah



ASLANIAN



ROMERO-PERI

Island, South Carolina, has appointed **Trish Luckenbill** as group sales representative for the Northeast region of the U.S. She formerly worked in group sales at The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa, South Carolina.

Cristina Romero-Peri was named director of sales and marketing at Montage Los Cabos, scheduled to open in 2018. She was most recently executive director of sales and marketing at One&Only Palmilla in Los Cabos.

Topnotch Resort & Spa in Stowe, Vermont, has named **Devin Gleason** as director of sales and marketing. He formerly was director of sales at the Stoweflake Mountain Resort and Spa in Stowe, Vermont. **I&FMM**



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² Not all event revenue generates points. Contract must explicitly state that Program will apply to applicable event. Planner must be a Wyndham Rewards Member and identified in contract as the "Planner" of the event or substituted for such Planner in accordance with full Program terms and conditions. Program is subject to full terms and conditions: wyndhamrewards.com/gomeet. Wyndham Hotel Group reserves the right to change/terminate the Program at any time without notice. Void where prohibited by law.

³ Most properties: 10 points are earned per dollar spent on room rate only. Qualified stay is subject to a total room rate of \$25 and up and other restrictions. See program terms at wyndhamrewards.com/terms.

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