

2023 Event Trends & Tips

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Industry experts share event design trends in food & beverage, format and speakers.

After years of having to stifle their creativity because of COVID restrictions, event designers are finally able to use their imaginations once again. The trend is toward meaningful, locally inspired, fun experiences.

F&B

2023 is the year for F&B to be playful, say the experts at Bill Hansen Luxe and Constellation Culinary Group. Among their favorites are:

- Snap & Sip Cocktail, which creates an edible printed image floating on a cocktail that can be customized with any shot. This Instagram-worthy idea adds a unique touch to the cocktail hour and gives guests something to buzz about.
- Creative mocktails are a must for attendees looking to abstain from alcohol. Kombucha is also making its presence known in mocktail form.
- Butter boards are a twist on the traditional charcuterie and an easy and flavorful way to give guests a creamy topping to their appetizer. The toppings are endless, from a chili drizzle with honey topped over the butter, to roasted garlic, lemon zest and herbs galore.
- Edible smoke bubble cocktails are all the rage! People can taste the alcohol or flavor through the smoke as they take a sip of the drink. Back again are champagne towers, which can be used to set a high-end vibe for any event.

For 2023, David Skorka, senior executive chef at Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas, has a fresh take on what he calls “culinary theater.”

“We’re always looking for the ‘wow factor’ with the guests, and coming out of COVID, the client’s expectations are even higher,” he says, pointing to hands-on and exciting action stations such as oyster shucking stations, English muffin

*Nitro sorbet at the JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort (previous page)
and Sip and Snap cocktails (below)*

stations, and wasabi dipping dots made with liquid nitrogen. Farm-to-table is no longer a request, it's an expectation of many clients, Skoka says. "If the menu is set far enough in advance, we will contact local hydroponic farms or beef farms, tell them the group size, and usually, depending on growth cycles, the farms can accommodate. We also like to call local vendors such as Paula with the Mozzarella Company to showcase incredible cheeses from right here in Dallas."

Let the group participate in the experience and use F&B as a form of teambuilding, says Jennifer C. Squeglia, CMP, principal at RLC Events, Inc. "When we were in at Zoom meetings and people took a lunch break, they turned off their cameras and headed into the kitchen alone. Being back to in-person events, meal and break times provide a great opportunity for people to truly connect through food. A trend that has flourished is the experiential side of enjoying a meal or snacks. This can mean giving attendees hands-on opportunities such as building their own trail mix or creating their own taco, for example." Healthy F&B remains a priority for many attendees, and four-time author, frequent industry speaker and wellness expert shares some do's and don'ts.

"First and foremost, ask chefs to get creative with vegetarian recipes that will appeal to everyone," she says. "For example, she recommends offering classic favorites as vegan options, such as a vegan beet burger made with oats, white beans, and walnuts; vegan avocado/cucumber sushi with pink rice, colored with beet powder; or vegan lasagna made with marinated carrots and cashew cream.

It's possible to create exciting and healthy plant-based hors d'oeuvres using fresh vegetables, fruits and herbs, says Day. Some fun options are chickpea "nuts" with cinnamon and sesame seeds, roasted cauliflower tacos with jalapeños and red cabbage, garlicky roasted-radish bruschetta on gluten free bread, or zucchanoush—a take on the classic baba ganoush that swaps zucchini for eggplant for a creamy, colorful dip.

EVENT DESIGN

Rudy Garza, CITP, IP, VP-Operations at Brightspot Incentives & Events Brightspot Incentives & Events sees a trend toward more meetings being designed with shorter meeting times and longer breaks to allow for attendees to reconnect with

colleagues and network with new connections. Among his event design strategies:

- Incorporate more TED Talks-style presentations followed by short, small group discussions and long breaks.
- Use mobile apps to capture attendee attention and create engagement. "Because we are tied to our devices, we are all easily distracted in every moment, but especially during meetings and events," notes Garza. "Whether it's through push notifications, gamification, real-time voting polls or social feeds, event apps are a great way to engage attendees and move them from the sidelines of the event to actually participating."
- Create experiences. "People don't want to just attend a meeting or event, they want to experience it," says Garza. Program design can achieve this in many ways, such as with activities that get attendees outside the four walls of a meeting space, themed welcome receptions, local shopping experiences and local gifting."
- Personalize room amenities. Instead of providing a one-size-fits-all traditional fruit and cheese tray, Garza recommends asking attendees whether their preference is sweet or salty, then surprise them with a dessert or a salty trail mix amenity based on their stated preference.

"Personalization is a buzzword that's been around for a while within the events industry but it's still important, and can be utilized in simple and creative ways with program design," says Garza.





Nora Day



Daymon John and Jaki Baskow

SPEAKERS

Jaki Baskow, owner/founder of Las Vegas Speakers Bureau, is seeing several speaker trends for the coming year:

- Companies are seeking speakers that can help them embrace, educate, engage and retain employees. "Franchise companies in particular are concerned about their employees and looking to find ways to embrace them," she says. Companies also are concerned about newly onboarded employees who need to learn about the company, the products and other locations. "Companies want their employees passionate about their jobs and more knowledgeable about their products."
- There's increasing demand for executive and leadership training. "Executives feel they need more training in order to properly get the employees engaged," she says. Among the speakers in this niche she is seeing high demand for in 2023 is Eric Boles, president of The Game Changers, who shares his insights and strategies on leadership, culture change, team dynamics and peak performance. Another top talent for 2023 in this area is Waldo Waldman, whose keynotes promote high-performing cultures based on accountability, preparation, teamwork and trust. A member of the Speaker Hall of Fame, Waldman leverages his real-world military, sales and business experience into a transformational program that empowers leaders to take action and produce results.
- Motivational speakers continue to be hot. While most, if not all, professional keynote speakers strive to inspire their audiences and motivate them to change their behavior for the better, look for the trend to be super-charged in 2023. Baskow mentions as one example is Nick Santonastasso, who has opened for master-inspirer Anthony Robbins and "engages the audience by helping them find positive outlooks on negative situations and releasing their anger," she says.

The most sought-out speakers engage with the audience. While the word "engagement" is in danger of becoming the next "pivot" in terms of words that are so ubiquitous they begin to lose meaning, presenters that interact and engage with their audiences are a white-hot speaker trend for 2023, Baskow says. For example, "The People's Shark" Daymon John, a self-made multimillionaire, founder and CEO of fashion powerhouse FUBU and star of ABC's business reality TV show Shark Tank, shares his rags-to-riches story, plus tips on negotiating, improving employee morale, increasing productivity and optimizing staff talents in a rousing keynote presentation. Then he conducts an interactive think tank with the audience to help them put the skills they learn to use.

Diversity is important when choosing speakers, and that is the mission of the Black Speakers Collection. Speakers' areas of expertise range from healthcare to LGBTQA to employee engagement. Users can search the speaker database by clicking the tabs of around 40 categories of expertise. Madison Butler, founder of HR and DEI consultancy Blue Haired Unicorn, launched The Black Speakers Collection website with tech consultant Chris Dancy in 2021. "If you're still hosting all white panels, all male panels, all cis-hetero panels in 2022, it's intentional," she says.

In the end, 2023 Event Design Trends focus on about creating deeper, more engaging human experiences and connections, as Hilton concluded in its 2023 Travel Trends report: "As event organizers strive to make educational and networking sessions more engaging while at the event itself, the trend is to bring in the local environment to the meeting room. If you haven't already organized a corporate social responsibility event to benefit the local community, showcased local F&B on the meeting menu, provided local crafts as welcome gifts, or brought in local talent to entertain, 2023 is the year to start."



Las Vegas knows what it takes to be a great meetings destination – namely, you have to be a great leisure destination first. And Vegas has that quality, in spades.

Legendary resorts, spectacular shows, incredible dining, and unparalleled accommodations are the basis of an entertainment and sports oasis that also sets the stage for world-class meetings and conventions.

Now offering nearly 3 million square feet of exhibit and meeting space, the **Las Vegas Convention Center** opened in 1959 – when Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby and Liberace were among the headliners – and this neon city in the desert has been growing as a convention hub ever since. Conventions also continued to ramp up in 2022 – the first full calendar year of tradeshow and meetings since early 2020 – hosting nearly 5 million meeting attendees in the Entertainment Capital of the World, gathering in premier meeting spaces that set the benchmark in quality and innovation for the rest of the world.

Names like **CAESARS FORUM, Wynn Las Vegas, Virgin Hotels Las Vegas, Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino** and **Resorts World Las Vegas – Hilton, Conrad & Crockfords** continue to break new ground to meet the growing needs of the modern global business community, with onsite planners offering their expertise in everything from teambuilding to group dining. Meanwhile, destination management experts based at resorts and throughout the city are at your service to guarantee your event – whether large or small – is a complete win.

Planners love the flexibility Las Vegas offers, not to mention the shorter planning windows created by such convenient features as **Harry Reid International Airport's** location just three minutes from the Strip. And attendees love the ease of getting around the Strip, where resorts, attractions and convention venues are easily reached thanks to the new **Vegas Loop at Las Vegas Convention Center**, and the **Las Vegas Monorail** providing quick access to the premier features. Indeed, Las Vegas is always a planner's best bet.

About Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

When it comes to business, Las Vegas has the most incredible range of unique meeting venues that are suited for groups of all sizes. The destination also has the partners and resources to create a successful event that will inspire attendees long after they return home. Plan now at **VegasMeansBusiness.com**.

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EXPERIENCE SCOTTSDALE

When it comes to today's ever-changing meetings landscape, keeping up with current trends helps industry professionals stay ahead of the game. Experience Scottsdale reached out to two of our area's top DMCs, Vermilion Events and MC&A USA, to find out what's trending locally in 2023.

- **Make it Personal.** Make it Fun! After years of virtual meetings, attendees are craving human connection and good old-fashioned fun – think collaborative, hands-on creative activities or interactive fun, like an adult bounce house paired with a slow-motion camera to capture the excitement. For gifts, look for ways to personalize them to your individual attendees, such as branding their initials on a leather bag.
- **Appeal to All the Senses.** Events that go beyond sight and sound fully immerse attendees in the moment. Textile touch activations, soft seating, signature aromatherapy, meaningful messaging and regional cuisine are all great ways to create a memorable experience using all the senses.
- **Keep it Local.** Local sourcing is experiencing a post-pandemic revitalization. Experiencing local F&B and entertainment vendors is great way for your guests to engage with the destination's culture. Browse local publications or consult the city's CVB for tips on new restaurants, hot local bands and exciting cultural activities.
- **Look Beyond "Industry Experts."** Entertaining speakers don't have to be industry experts. In fact, after absorbing days' worth of information, your attendees will appreciate a change of pace. Look for speakers that are positive, upbeat and can speak to post-pandemic macro-trends everyone can relate to: joy, self-care, mental health and human connection.

About Scottsdale

Experience Scottsdale is a full-service CVB that brands the Scottsdale area as a world-class meeting and travel destination through strategic sales and marketing efforts. Their destination experts work with meeting planners worldwide to help them confidently select and book Scottsdale, then provide comprehensive support from planning to program completion.

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The Lansdowne Resort team prides itself on leading the way in the MICE sector and staying ahead of industry trends to ensure planners and groups get the most out of their meetings, incentive trips, conferences and events.

While other hospitality brands leverage wellness as a buzzword, Lansdowne Resort has fully committed to the holistic well-being of guests and groups – both now and in the future. As the exclusive destination to deliver the transformational experiences of wellness leader Deji Harmony, this AAA Four Diamond resort harmonizes the best of Eastern and Western therapies to create a unique and balanced approach in support of the mind, body and spirit.

Everyone who walks through the doors at Lansdowne Resort is encouraged to immerse themselves in the services, amenities and cuisine that will help transform their health and well-being. The culinary philosophy is guided by The Five Element Theory and seasonal flavors. The lettuce, herbs and microgreens presented on the plate aren't just locally sourced, they're hydroponically grown on-site. To further fuel progress, conference center refreshment kiosks are continuously stocked with in-season fruits and other nutritious options.

When it comes to team building, groups can inspire their attendees to take that first step on their journey to physical and mental well-being with experiences that include Nature Walks, Wine & Zen sessions, Tennis and Pickleball, Fitness Classes and more hosted in serene indoor venues or nestled into idyllic settings across the property's 500 sweeping acres in the Potomac River Valley.

About Lansdowne Resort

At Lansdowne Resort, you and your team will experience the transformative moments that ignite creativity and advance progress. This Northern Virginia property delivers 55,000 square feet of award-winning meeting space that have earned them the distinction as the best DC-area conference center over 25 years in the making.

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The biggest shift we've seen is that we've evolved as people. We're studying personas more than ever; we're studying people within the organization. What do they do in their everyday life? Are they more foodies? Are they more adventurous? What do they like? We're creating experiences based on studying these personas within companies. In the past, the trend was more about the top activities or experiences we offer; now we customize these experiences to people according to their specific needs and likes. It's about personalization because people have shifted to understand what they like. There's now an expectation of elevating luxury to their standards and everyone's interpretation of luxury is different, and it comes down to personalization, customization, and anticipating people's needs.

People are redefining what is valuable to them, it's about genuineness and authenticity, and the memories and curated experiences we create for them.

About Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH)

NCLH is a leading global cruise company that operates Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania Cruises, and Regent Seven Seas Cruises. NCLH is emerging to hold the leadership position in Immersive Destination Events at Sea due to having The Best Event Outfitted Ships and Island, The Most Experienced Teams, and the Best-in-Class Operational Execution.

<https://www.nclhltd.com/>

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From stargazing cocktail parties to sunrise yoga sessions as the ship sails to some of the most captivating destinations around the world, your Sailors are in for an extraordinary experience and a reward they deserve with Virgin Voyages.

After all, our exclusively adult sailings are built around making your celebrations epic. We've designed our four gorgeous lady ships to combine the warmth and luxury of yachts with the endless options of larger ships, complete with meeting spaces that excite and allow for different vibes at different times of the day.

And, as winner of the Cruise Critic's Editors' Picks Award for Best Dining, you know that we're primed to please every palate. We've ditched buffets and pre-set dining times to bring your Sailors fresh flavors and unexpected pairings with made-to-order food and menus from Michelin-starred chefs. They'll dine on churrasco steak and lemon cheesecake at The Wake, mezze-style bites and glasses of rosé in the open air of The Dock, or get their crew together for a lively Korean BBQ free-for-all at Gunbae — all On Us.

Plus, with flexible booking policies, special pricing and perks, and a personal concierge ready to assist with setting up your events, your groups are ensured more than the best week of their year, but the best adventure of their lives.

About VV

Virgin Voyages is a new wave — exclusively adult voyages that include WiFi, dining at 20+ eateries, tips, fitness classes, and essential drinks. The sailings are transformative travels, with late stays and overnights to give your groups the opportunity to get to know the real people and experiences of each destination.

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