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contents



Executives from across the industry weigh in on MICE opportunities—(top row, left to right): Sabine Chilton, Visit Florida Keys & Key West (p10) and Gregg Caren, Philadelphia CVB (p14); (second row, left to right): Sylvania Lee, San Francisco Office of the Taiwan Tourism Administration (p14) and Brooke Underwood, Destination El Paso (p36); (last row, left to right): Nathan Hickman, Oceania Cruises (p20) and Morgan Lexis, Hard Rock Hotels (p11)

14 Culinary Adventures

Serving up unforgettable group experiences

FEATURED

- 20 CREATIVE DINING ON THE WATER**
Cruise lines reimagine culinary experiences
- 36 LOCAL FLAVORS**
Small and mid-sized cities offer immersive dining
- 44 COASTAL MEETINGS**
Mexico and the Caribbean make their case for groups
- 53 ON LOCATION: THE DISNEY DIFFERENCE**
Return on experience—land and sea
- 56 ON LOCATION: WORLD EQUESTRIAN CENTER STRENGTHENS MICE OFFERING**
This Central Florida destination welcomes The Equestrian Manor
- 58 ON LOCATION: ROYAL CARIBBEAN DELIVERS ON THE VALUE PROPOSITION**
Inside the cruise line's meetings-at-sea program
- 60 ON LOCATION: SAY 'SI' TO SUCCESS**
A MICE insider's guide to Puerto Rico

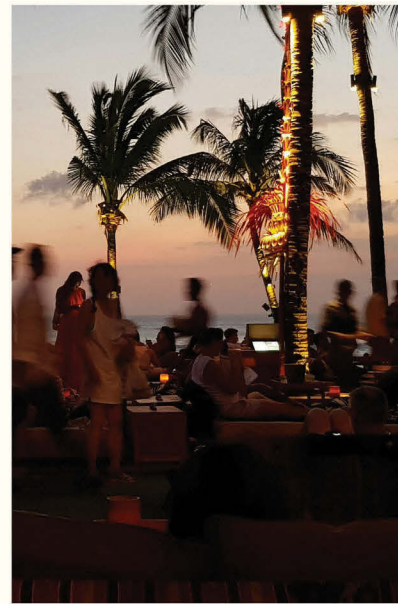
- 62 ON LOCATION: TORONTO TAKES THE TABLE**
Serving up global cuisine for groups
- 64 ON LOCATION: HARRAH'S RESORT ATLANTIC CITY**
A property built for meetings

DEPARTMENTS

- 10 Bureau Buzz: Florida Keys & Fort Lauderdale**
- 11 Fresh Meets: Hard Rock Hotels**
- 12 IM Inspired: Trust Your Data, Not Your Gut: Beyond Event Management Stress**
- 68 Checkout: Hotel Polaris, Colorado [ON LOCATION]**

On the cover: Group gathering at Albertine in Charlotte (photo credit: Blake Pope / CRVA)

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GROUP PUBLISHER/EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
Laurel Herman, laurel@worthit.com

EDITOR
Lisa Simundson

SENIOR EDITOR / GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Steve Grasso

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Deserae del Campo

SENIOR CONTRIBUTING/STAFF EDITORS
Regina Baraban, Robert Curley, Lydia Gregory, Sue Pelletier



PRESIDENT/EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
Laurel Herman, laurel@worthit.com

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Victor Diaz-Herman, victor@worthit.com

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
Gary Herman, gary@worthit.com

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Paloma Villaverde de Rico, paloma@worthit.com

DIRECTOR OF MEDIA & ENGAGEMENT
Jennifer Pichaco, jennifer@worthit.com

AD TRAFFIC MANAGER
Daimee Feliz, daimee@worthit.com

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
Andrea Sper, andrea@worthit.com

MARKETING MANAGER
Nicole Narciso, nicole@worthit.com

DIRECTOR OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS
Michael Bath, michael@worthit.com

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Vanessa Gaynor, vanessa@worthit.com

SALES STAFF

MARGARITA ALVAREZ
Quintana Roo, Mexico
011.52.998.287.1545, margarissima@gmail.com

LAURA LEE
AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, ID, IA, IL, IN, ME, MA, MD, MI,
MN, NH, NJ, NY, NM, OH, PA, RI, VT, WI, Canada, Europe,
Africa, Middle East, Asia & South Pacific
305.828.0123 x159, laura@worthit.com

COURTENAY MARTIN
HI, OR, WA, TX
305.828.0123 x161, courtenay@worthit.com

LAURIE MILLIS
AL, AR, FL, GA, KS, KY, LA, MS, MO,
NC, OK, SC, TN, VA
305.828.0123 x115, laurie@worthit.com

KAREN SMITH
MT, NE, NV, SD, UT, WY
305.828.0123 x162, karen@worthit.com

prevuemeetings.com / worthit.com
305.828.0123 / 800.447.0123

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from the editors



Laurel Herman



Lisa Simundson



Paloma Villaverde
de Rico



Steve Grasso



Lydia Gregory



Regina Baraban



Sue Pelletier

Food has always been central to how we gather. But in this issue, we explore how the culinary experience has become a strategic tool for planners, one that goes well beyond the banquet menu.

Our cover story, *Culinary Adventures* (page 14), looks at how today's most memorable group dining experiences are shifting away from the predictable and toward the deeply personal, connecting attendees to place, culture and each other. The destinations we explore, from the American South to the Pacific Rim, show how local flavor, indigenous traditions and world-class culinary recognition are giving planners a powerful new way to design programs that resonate.

That thread continues on the water in *Creative Dining at Sea* (p20), where ships are raising the bar with inventive F&B programs. Michelin-rated chefs, destination-driven menus and hands-on cooking schools are turning ships into floating culinary destinations, giving planners another way to weave cuisine into the broader event program.

We also make the case for opportunity closer to home in *Local Flavors* (p36), where emerging destinations are proving themselves more than ready for groups of every size. Then we head to the shoreline in *Coastal Meetings: Mexico & the Caribbean* (p44), surveying a region surging in both capacity and ambition—from new developments in The Bahamas and a surge in Barbados to expanding options across the islands and Mexico's Caribbean coast.

Our editors and writers logged serious miles this issue...and it shows. "On Location" reports take you to **Walt Disney World** and aboard the **Disney Wish** for *The Disney Difference* (p53), highlighting **Disney's** approach to group experiences at sea. We also check out what's new at **Ocala's World Equestrian Center** (p56) and **Colorado Springs' Hotel Polaris** (p68); put you on the scene aboard **Royal Caribbean** (p58); and get a first-hand look at what's happening in **Puerto Rico** (p60) and **Toronto** (p62). We've also got a wrap of **Prevue's** own **AI Visionary Summit at Harrah's Atlantic City** (p64), where the conversation around AI and event planning moved from theory to practice.

And don't miss our departments—*Bureau Buzz* puts the focus on bleisure in **South Florida** (p10), while *Fresh Meets* checks out music-inspired meetings and events at **Hard Rock Hotels** (p11).

Enjoy the issue! —Lisa Simundson

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Florida's Coastal Bleisure Appeal

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Above: Attendees gather for afternoon networking in the Florida Keys

The Florida Keys and Greater Fort Lauderdale offer business with a side of paradise, an ideal recipe for a bleisure getaway.

Florida Keys

“The Florida Keys and Key West,” says Sabine Chilton, Sr. Director of Sales, **Visit Florida Keys & Key West**, “offer the perfect destination for bleisure—from Key Largo to Key West. We’ve noticed that planners are mixing work and play, building in more free time, and the productivity, [combined with] the relaxation, that’s what the Keys are all about. Planners are accommodating attendees’ spouses and, on occasion, families, and offering optional experiences in the destination.... That’s our strength. We have snorkeling, diving, fishing, paddleboarding, kayaking, eco-tours, jet-ski tours and history in Key West such as the **Mel Fisher Museum** and the **Truman Little White House**.”

She notes that many of the historic venues in Key West can also be secured for events—imagine, she says “a private reception in the **Hemingway Home & Museum**. How cool is that?”

When it comes to the Keys’ F&B offerings, Chilton says that location is everything. It’s all “about the fresh seafood and fish. One of the great activities that you

can do as a group is charter a fishing boat and what you catch, your captain will fillet it, and any restaurant or hotel, they will actually cook your catch.”

To complement group activities, attendees can hit the many hotel spas sprinkled throughout the destination, says Chilton, or they can participate in a yoga session at sunrise to kick off the day.

“Many of the hotels also offer complimentary bicycles,” she says, “so attendees and their companions can go biking in the morning or afternoon during their free time and explore their surroundings.”

And in the Florida Keys, the natural surroundings aren’t confined to free time—they’re woven into the meeting experience, with Chilton noting that “most of our meeting spaces in the Keys have a view of the water. Plus, coffee breaks can be outdoors with a beautiful view.” In fact, she adds, “you can plan a meeting on the beach.”

She reminds planners that getting to the Florida Keys is easy, whether by car from Miami or through **Key West International Airport**, which recently added a new concourse as part of a modernization project.

Fort Lauderdale

“Before bleisure had a name, it was a thing for us,” says Stacy Ritter, President and

CEO of **Visit Lauderdale**. With 24 miles of beachfront, Greater Fort Lauderdale offers a natural extension of the meeting experience, notes Ritter. “After three or four days of meetings, you’re ready to decompress and you don’t have to go anywhere else. Even during your meeting or your conference, you can still decompress here.”

With its 300 miles of navigable inland waterways, Ritter says that Greater Fort Lauderdale offers planners a magnificent canvas for building leisure into their programs, including water-based, culinary and wellness activities. “In the past five years,” says Ritter, “we’ve really evolved into a better culinary destination, with better dining options. Last year, we got our first Michelin star, as well as one Bib Gourmand and three Michelin Recommended restaurants.” She recommends attendees enjoy a cocktail by the water after a long day of meetings as it’s something “different, which you might not be able to do at home,” or “go out to dinner on Las Olas Boulevard, with its new dining options.”

Additionally, the destination’s luxury market has exploded, with Ritter noting that they now have a **Four Seasons**, and the recently opened **Omni Fort Lauderdale**, she says, “has been an amazing addition to our portfolio. It’s the first and only Omni in Broward, and it’s allowed us to look at conferences that have always said to us, ‘Yeah, we love you, but you don’t have a hotel attached [to the conference center].’”

“I think what makes Fort Lauderdale so special is that it continues to evolve; it’s a thriving destination. We continue to grow and define ourselves as something better; the same, but better.

“If you’ve been here before, you’re going to see familiar things, but you’re also going to see new things that you didn’t expect.” —*Paloma Villaverde de Rico*

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Hard Rock Turns Up the Volume

Creating events that resonate.



Above: Hard Rock Hotels' music programming

At a time when meeting planners are looking for ways to boost attendee engagement and differentiate programs, **Hard Rock Hotels** is leaning into the one thing competitors can't easily replicate: music.

The hotel group's **Hard Rock Meetings and Events** program reimagines traditional meeting planning through music-driven programming, memorabilia and immersive brand experiences.

"During a conference it can get a little stale," says Morgan Lexis, Sr. VP of Global Sales for Hard Rock Hotels, "so for meeting planners who want to do something unique in their meeting space, we work with various partners that are music-centric."

With **Scratch DJ Academy's Spin Art DJ Session**, for instance, groups can create their own company-branded vinyl artwork.

"We also partner with [the teambuilding and corporate entertainment company] **SongDivision**," says Lexis. "They'll come in," she says, "and they'll do 'Song Slams,' where they'll get participation from the audience, they'll learn something about them and they'll make a song right [on the spot]."

Other music-centric activations that planners can incorporate into their

meetings and events include a music-infused yoga experience, "School of Rock" music lessons, immersive memorabilia experiences, interactive drumming, group ensembles and "learn to DJ" experiences, among others.

"Quite frankly," says Lexis, "a ballroom is a ballroom but it's what you do with that ballroom and how you activate it that really keeps the attendees engaged."

That includes adding music-infused decor to an event space or sprinkling in memorabilia, such as a guitar once owned by a music legend. "The guitar can be used as a backdrop and people get excited to take a picture with [it]," she explains.

These unique experiences, she says, "keep the meeting planners wanting to bring their programs back year after year, even to rotate between different Hard Rocks. You can go to Hollywood [Florida] one year and then you can go off to the Maldives another year. Where our properties are located, they're just incredible locations."

When it comes to unique spaces, Lexis points to **The Venue on Music Row**, a bi-level, 6,000-sf venue in Manhattan with capabilities for a stage, live performance or a DJ with A/V components.

"It's this incredible space that makes [the event] feel more special," she says. "We have venues like that everywhere. So, an outside venue, for instance—doing your general session outside in a garden as opposed to in the ballroom. It keeps your attendees a little bit more...attentive."

Another important element for creating wow moments, says Lexis, is Hard Rock Hotels' F&B offerings. "I think one of the biggest things when it comes to culinary is a lot of activations...and it's investing in purchasing the items that can facilitate those types of experiences.

"Are you looking for something that's more engaging, where it's an action station and there's somebody there that's going to talk to you about it? We can do culinary classes and use our chefs. Or do you want something that's a little bit more 'do it yourself'? It's listening to our customers and staying on top of what the trends are."

Coming to Las Vegas

It's no secret that Hard Rock Hotels is about to debut a guitar-shaped hotel in Las Vegas, which, says Lexis, will top **The Guitar Hotel at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino** in terms of height.

"The one in Hollywood is [about] 400 ft; this one will be 700 ft., so it's massive," she says.

The Hard Rock Hotel & Casino and **Guitar Hotel Las Vegas** are set to open in fourth quarter of 2027, with the old Mirage hotel transforming into Hard Rock's **Resort Tower**, with about 3,000 rooms. The Guitar Hotel itself, says Lexis, will have about 650 accommodations and "will feature its own casino, its own spa, its own pool...beautiful suites. The convention center will be about 200,000 sf and we'll also have a 5,000-seat, state-of-the-art **Hard Rock Live** theater. [The property] is going to change the Las Vegas landscape." —*Paloma Villaverde de Rico*

[hotel.hardrock.com/meetings-and-events.aspx](https://www.hotel.hardrock.com/meetings-and-events.aspx)

Trust Your Data, Not Your Gut: Beyond Event Management Stress

Ask any event organizer to describe the final hours of a major conference, and they will likely paint a picture of controlled chaos.



By Nick Borelli

We live in a world of high-stakes logistics where success is often judged by the louder voices. Sometimes it is the executive who shares an opinion during the last month of planning or the handful of passionate attendees who fill out post-event surveys. For years, planners have relied on these anecdotes and their own hard-earned instinct to gauge whether an experience resonated.

But here is an uncomfortable truth that our industry must confront: your gut might be lying to you.

Relying on intuition or a vocal minority to measure event performance creates immense professional vulnerability. When we base strategic decisions on passive observation or low-percentage survey feedback, we risk

misinterpreting true audience engagement levels. The good news is that event technology for organizers has evolved. By leveraging modern event data solutions, we can now capture objective, aggregate behavioral insights that replace guesswork with ground truth.

The Problem with the Vocal Minority

Traditional feedback mechanisms are fundamentally prone to bias. Post-event surveys frequently suffer from low response rates, usually attracting individuals who had exceptionally positive or negative experiences. Meanwhile, the vast majority of your audience (the quiet middle) goes unrepresented.

Relying on these skewed data sets induces significant organizer stress.

Planners find themselves defending programming choices or shifting entire event formats based on isolated feedback. When leadership questions why a particular keynote speaker was chosen or demands proof of a session's success, a stack of incomplete surveys offers a weak defense.

To alleviate this friction, the industry is embracing privacy-compliant event analytics that measure aggregate behavior and experience. Rather than guessing how a crowd felt, advanced IoT sensors process visual data locally to deliver normalized benchmarks. These sensors do not capture photos or video; instead, they instantly transform the physical environment into anonymous metrics like room energy and attendance trends.

By evaluating the collective behavioral patterns of an entire room, organizers gain a holistic, unbiased view of audience engagement.

Turning Data into Resources

Shifting from instinct to objective event behavior analytics fundamentally alters the conversation with corporate stakeholders and board members. Every planner has felt the strain of being asked to do more with less. When you need more resources, whether that means a larger budget, better production, or expanded staffing, proving that need requires metrics that resonate at the executive level.

When we present stakeholders with definitive data points, such as real-time crowd density, demographic breakdowns, and positive energy trends, the narrative changes. Instead of pleading for a budget increase based on a feeling, you can show exactly how a specific session format or topic drove audience attention. If the data reveals

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The Future Is Conscious Leadership Through Nervous System Regulation

By Sepideh Eivazi, wellness advocate and keynote speaker featured on Caesars Entertainment's Wellness Menu

The future of leadership is not just strategic. It is physiological. For too long, leadership—especially in hospitality and events—has glorified endurance, overperformance and the ability to push through exhaustion as if burnout were a badge of honor. Long days. Constant stimulation. Emotional labor. Endless decision-making. The pressure to keep delivering no matter the personal cost. But neuroscience tells a very different story.

A leader operating from a dysregulated nervous system is not accessing their highest intelligence. When the body perceives ongoing stress as threat, the nervous system shifts into fight, flight or freeze. Cortisol rises. The amygdala becomes hyperactive. Decision-making becomes reactive instead of intentional. Creativity narrows. Emotional regulation weakens. Empathy decreases. Strategic thinking gets replaced by urgency. This is what burnout actually looks like beneath the surface: not simply exhaustion, but a nervous system that no longer remembers how to feel safe. By contrast, regulated leaders create a very different ripple effect. When the nervous system feels safe, the prefrontal cortex—the part of the brain responsible for executive function, emotional intelligence, innovation and problem-solving—comes back online. Leaders communicate with greater presence. They navigate complexity with calm instead of chaos. Their energy becomes stabilizing rather than contagious stress.

Regulation is not softness. It is leadership infrastructure. This is a conversation I've had the privilege of bringing to forward-thinking platforms like SXSW, where I spoke on Embodied Regulation in a Dysregulated World—because the reality is, we cannot continue building the future from burnt-out bodies. One of the most powerful and ancient tools we have to interrupt automatic survival patterns is breath. Long before modern science mapped the autonomic nervous system, ancient cultures understood breath as medicine. Today, science confirms what wisdom traditions always knew: breath directly influences the nervous system, helping shift the body from sympathetic activation (stress response) into parasympathetic restoration (calm, recovery, regulation).

In simple terms: breath helps the body remember safety. This matters deeply in hospitality, meetings, and events.

We are designing experiences for human beings yet often forgetting the nervous systems inside the room. What would shift if conferences included intentional moments of nervous system reset instead of nonstop overstimulation? What if event planners and hospitality leaders understood that wellness is not a luxury add-on, but part of responsible experience design?

Imagine guests leaving feeling restored instead of depleted. Imagine teams beginning meetings from presence instead of pressure. Imagine leadership measured not by how much stress someone can absorb, but by how effectively they can regulate through complexity. Conscious leadership is not about doing less. It is about leading from a place where your biology is working with you—not against you.

As our world becomes faster, louder and more demanding, the leaders who will shape the future will not be the ones who can tolerate the most pressure.

They will be the ones who know how to regulate through it. Because the most powerful rooms are not built by burnt-out nervous systems. They are built by regulated ones.

Sepideh Eivazi is the founder of Dawn of the Earth, where she integrates somatic breathwork, custom tea blends and EFT techniques to promote wellness and transformation. A member of the Breathe Initiative at the Global Wellness Institute, she advocates for breathwork as a tool for nervous system regulation. With a background in the events industry, including roles at Bellagio and MGM Grand, Sepideh now serves as Director of Global Accounts at Elevated Meeting Solutions, merging wellness and event expertise to inspire others.

that a certain demographic stayed longer and showed higher engagement during interactive panels compared to standard lectures, you have an evidence-based mandate to optimize your programming.

Furthermore, having access to standardized performance data allows organizers to demonstrate absolute value to sponsors and exhibitors. When you can hand a sponsor a comprehensive report showing precise traffic density, impressions, and attendee energy benchmarks, you secure contract renewals and justify premium pricing.

Embracing the Discovery of Truth

Stepping away from traditional assumptions can feel daunting. There is comfort in doing things the way they have always been done. Sometimes, objective data reveals that a concept we were highly enthusiastic about did not perform as expected.

However, realizing a hypothesis was incorrect should never be viewed as a failure. True leadership lies in the positive discovery of truth. Celebrating a data-driven pivot means recognizing that an unexpected result is simply a roadmap to a better attendee experience. When we insulate our planning with real-time, ethical insights, we don't just eliminate the stress of the unknown...we elevate event management into a precise, strategic science.

Nick Borelli is the Marketing Director of Zenus AI, the leader in ethical facial analysis for meetings and events. He presents globally on AI technology for the events industry as well as facilitates PCMA Institute's Enhancing Events with AI course.

Culinary Adventures

Serving up unforgettable group experiences.

By Lisa Simundson

For meeting and incentive planners, food has always been on the agenda. But some destinations have moved beyond the table with dining experiences that connect attendees to the cities and each other.

Across the globe, from the bayous of New Orleans to the harbor cities of Australia, culinary programming has ascended from afterthought to centerpiece. We spoke with industry experts across six culinary hotspots to find out what's new, what's next and what will make attendees talk long after they've returned home.

NEW ORLEANS: BORN TO HOST (AND FEED) YOU

Already considered one of the world's great food cities, the Crescent City is having what

Stephanie Turner, Sr. VP of Convention Sales and Strategies at **New Orleans & Company**, calls a moment of extraordinary recognition.

"We [just] hosted the 2026 edition of North America's 50 Best Restaurants," Turner says. "And New Orleans had three restaurants recognized in that list."

Those three—**Dakar Nola** (ranked 4th), **Emeril's** (20th), and **Acamaya** (30th)—tell a story that goes well beyond traditional Cajun and Creole cooking.

"Dakar Nola's Chef Serigne Mbaye trained at **Commander's Palace**, but he's from Senegal. Acamaya has Mexican roots. And Emeril's, of course, puts their own spin on New Orleans-style food. It really illustrates the variety of what's happening here," she says.

Added to that is praise from the inaugural *Michelin Guide American South*, which awarded Emeril's two stars—making its Chef EJ Lagasse (Emeril's son) the youngest, at age 22, to receive that distinction in the guide's history—along with two additional one-star restaurants and 11 Bib Gourmand recipients.

That recognition translates into extraordinary group experiences, with Turner describing a spectrum that runs from high end to deeply local.

"From cooking classes to interactive dinners, the variety is enormous, and we're really only limited by imagination," she says. "There's the **New Orleans School of Cooking**, the **New Orleans Culinary and Hospitality Institute**...we even did a professional group competition where we



"In Wynwood, world-famous street art and creative event spaces like Wynwood Walls add a distinctly Miami visual energy to receptions and dinners."

Carol Motley, Senior Vice President, Convention Sales and Services, Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau

Clockwise from top: Hakkasan at Fontainebleau Miami Beach; Tainan Shuxian Temple Market, Taiwan (photo credit: VISION); Yakisan, Adelaide, Australia





Above: Traditional Cajun gumbo in New Orleans

went into a kitchen, made the same dish and had judges pick a winner.”

For something theatrical, **La Criollo** at the **Hotel Monteleone** offers a 4K projection dining experience in which a virtual animated chef introduces each course. For something more intimate, planners can work with New Orleans DMCs to arrange private dinners with such well-known chefs as Donald Link, who helms **Chemin a La Mer** at the **Four Seasons**.

“Progressive dining—starting at one place for drinks, moving to another for an appetizer, creating a whole culinary journey—is something we really love to curate,” Turner says. “And if you have a medium-sized group, you can even second line from place to place. It’s basically a procession led by music, as a band takes you from one stop to the next. Only we do that.”

She also speaks to the power of tasteful takeaways. Recipes for bananas foster, kits featuring the distinct coffees of New Orleans and other custom gifts that let attendees bring the city’s culture home.

“When you learn a new skill and then take it with you, it becomes a special memory in your house,” Turner says.

On the hospitality horizon: The new **Fairmont New Orleans** opens later this

year with 253 rooms and 20,000 sf of meeting space, alongside the **Woldenburg Wharf**, a new riverfront event space. A \$763 million renovation of the **Ernest N. Morial Convention Center** is underway, with a new 1,000-room **Omni** hotel anticipated in 2030.

These updates join the recent rebranding of Harrah’s New Orleans to **Caesars New Orleans** following a \$435-million property-wide renovation. Here, attendees will find a range of culinary experiences, including Louisiana’s first **Nobu** and a celebrity chef-driven food hall featuring options by Bobby Flay, Buddy Valastro and Nina Compton.

MIAMI: GLOBAL FLAVORS & LANDMARK VENUES

Miami has always played in a different league when it comes to food, but the past year has taken the destination’s culinary profile to new heights.

“Greater Miami and Miami Beach once again claimed a prominent place in the global culinary conversation with the release of the *2026 Michelin Guide Florida*,” says Carol Motley, Sr. VP of Convention Sales and Services at the **Greater Miami CVB**, with the destination earning 16 Michelin stars overall.

Newcomer **Mutra**, where Chef Raz Shabtai earned a first star for his contemporary Middle Eastern cuisine, joined the ranks alongside **L’Atelier de Joel Robuchon Miami**, which maintained its two-star status for a third consecutive year. New openings—including **GAIA** in Miami Beach, **Mottai** in Coral Gables, and a forthcoming omakase concept from **Takay**—continue to extend Miami’s markedly global culinary identity.

For planners, the opportunity lies in how Miami’s venues and food scene intersect. Groups are increasingly using museums and art-driven spaces as dining backdrops: **Vizcaya Museum & Gardens**, the **Frost Museum of Science** and **Superblue Miami** all offer the chance to pair elevated food and beverage with architecture, immersive art and cultural programming, Motley says.

“In Wynwood, world-famous street art and creative event spaces like **Wynwood Walls** add a distinctly Miami visual energy to receptions and dinners,” she says.

Immersive dining concepts are also gaining traction: **The Cave at Ariete**—celebrating its 10th anniversary—and **Elcielo’s** multi-sensory dining experience offer something far more memorable than

a traditional group dinner. **Fontainebleau Miami Beach's Prime 54 Chef Counter** and **Hakkasan's** sommelier-led tasting menus reflect a growing appetite for curated, interactive dining moments.

For after-hours programming, the **400 Vinyl Room at Gale Miami** offers an intimate listening lounge experience, while **THROW Social Miami** features interactive games, live entertainment, and shareable food and beverage in a vibrant indoor-outdoor setting.

"Experiential entertainment is also gaining momentum across the destination," Motley says, pointing to the **Faena Theater's** new production, **Obsession**, and a nonstop events calendar—from the **South Beach Wine & Food Festival** and **Art Basel** to the **Formula 1 Miami Grand Prix** and **FIFA World Cup 2026**. The future **Grand Hyatt Miami Beach**, connected to the **Miami Beach Convention Center** via a climate-controlled skybridge, is due in late 2027.

PHILADELPHIA: A CITY OF FIRSTS

Philadelphia has quietly become one of the most celebrated food cities in the country, and in November 2025, the accolades made it official. Three restaurants received the city's first Michelin stars: **Friday Saturday Sunday**, **Her Place Supper Club** and **Provenance**, each recognized for chef-driven cuisine and tasting menus. Ten more earned Bib Gourmand honors, and 21 were Michelin Recommended.

Food & Wine had already named the city one of the Top U.S. Cities for Food and Drink, and Gregg Caren, President and CEO of the **Philadelphia CVB**, says the momentum is only building.

"Philadelphia's chef-driven dining scene helps it stand out from the crowd and elevates it on the international stage," he says. "Local chefs are pushing creativity and innovation, and the honors are following."

The biggest trend? The supper club—intimate, chef-curated, dinner-party-style dining that feels personal rather than programmed.

"Small independent restaurants with an intimate dinner-party atmosphere are gaining traction," Caren says. "Her Place Supper

Club is a perfect example; it truly feels born out of the city's love of hospitality."

Philly's neighborhood food culture is equally strong for group programming. At **Vernick Fish** in Logan Square, for example, groups of 12 to 28 will bond over a seated family-style dining experience. Meanwhile, **South Philadelphia's Italian Market**—where Chef Jacquie of **StrEATS of Philly** leads groups through tastings and stories about immigration and community—offers an experience as culturally meaningful as it is delicious. **City Food Tours** takes visitors through Chinatown, connecting Asian culinary traditions with the neighborhood's history.

In Center City, **SkyHigh** serves signature Jean-Georges cuisine, shareable plates and seasonal cocktails alongside panoramic skyline views from the 60th floor of the **Four Seasons Hotel Philadelphia**.

Classic Philadelphia experiences never go out of style: The cheesesteak rivalry between **Pat's King of Steaks** and **Geno's Steaks**, **Shane Confectionery** in Old City (one of the nation's oldest operating candy stores), and the legendary **Reading Terminal Market**. Also brewing in Philly:

Below: Vernick Fish, Philadelphia



Yards Brewery doubles as an event space, while **Triple Bottom Brewing**—Pennsylvania's first B Corp brewery—offers sustainability-focused tours and tastings.

"Philadelphia is a city of firsts, from being first in freedom...to first in innovation with the first hospital in America," Caren says.

AUSTRALIA: WHERE PLACE SHAPES THE PLATE

Australia occupies a category all its own when it comes to culinary travel. Here, the most extraordinary experiences are inseparable from the land itself—the coastlines, the desert, the vineyards and more than 60,000 years of continuous Indigenous culture.

From shucking oysters fresh from the waters of Tasmania to tasting native ingredients beneath an Outback sky, these are the moments meeting and incentive travelers carry home forever—and the experiences Sally Cope, Executive General Manager of Industry and Business Events at **Tourism Australia**, says planners are increasingly seeking out.

"Incentive and corporate groups are drawn to dining experiences that connect them with the local lifestyle and culture," she



Above: Bombo at the Seattle Convention Center's Summit building (photo credit: Geoff Smith)

says. "They're looking for food moments you can only have in Australia."

The range of experiences spans the continent. In South Australia's Eyre Peninsula, **Coffin Bay Spirits' Wild Spirits** experience pairs seaweed tastings with specialty gin cocktails and regional produce against a national park backdrop. In Adelaide, the capital of South Australia, the new **Yakistan** was designed for interaction, with three open kitchens and front-row seating. Off Rottnest Island near Perth, the **Luxe Island Seafood Cruise** offers up to 24 guests a seven-course chef-crafted menu of local catch paired with Howard Park wines.

Australia's wine regions are developing their group offerings in interesting ways, "building dedicated, private event spaces directly on their estates and combining fine dining with wellness activities. This evolution allows planners to design highly exclusive, mindful itineraries that go far beyond a traditional wine tasting," Cope says.

The newly opened **Chandon Homestead** in the Yarra Valley provides a refined private setting for up to 50 guests, while in the Barossa Valley, **The Louise** has partnered with **Barossa Wellness** to layer yoga and mindfulness into its farm-to-table programming. For group exclusivity, venue buyouts at heritage spaces like

Destination Pentridge in Melbourne—under Michelin-trained Executive Chef Tom Hoy—and the **Solare** superyacht in Sydney Harbour, with its three deck levels and private seasonal Italian tasting menu for up to 60 guests, represent the gold standard.

However, Indigenous culinary experiences also are a powerful tool in Australia's incentive arsenal. The country ranks number one globally for authentic Indigenous offerings, and demand has never been stronger.

"Weaving First Nations culture and native ingredients into programs gives delegates a meaningful, immersive connection to more than 60,000 years of continuous culture," Cope says.

At **Sydney's Opera House, Midden by Mark Olive** highlights native produce in seasonal dishes and curated high teas, with tailored *Tour & Dine* packages for groups. In Cairns, gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, the **Native Food Experience** at **Ochre Restaurant** looks at bush food unknown to chefs until recently.

For city dining, Sydney and Melbourne offer distinct but equally compelling personalities.

"Sydney serves up bright, coastal dining with dramatic harbor backdrops, while Melbourne offers a creative energy,

famous for its laneway culture and world-famous coffee," Cope says. "Both offer incredible variety, multicultural influences, and breathtaking wine regions just over an hour from the city centers."

Groups can experience Sydney firsthand at the new **Sydney Fish Market** or **Rick Stein** at Coogee Beach; Melbourne shines at the new **Lune Lonsdale** production "cube" beneath **The Ritz-Carlton**. *Conde Nast Traveler* recently spotlighted three new Australian openings among the world's best: **Feu** in Byron Bay, **Yiaga** in Melbourne and **Golden Avenue** in Brisbane.

"These aren't just great places to eat; they are highly immersive, design-forward spaces that represent the absolute cutting edge of regional, native and shared-table dining," Cope says.

TAIWAN: WHERE CULTURE MEETS CUISINE

For Sylvia Lee, Director of the **San Francisco Office of the Taiwan Tourism Administration**, the transformation of Taiwan's culinary scene is best summed up in four words: "Taste Taiwan, Discover Taiwan."

"Taiwan's culinary industry is evolving from simply offering great food to creating meaningful cultural experiences," Lee explains. "By integrating agriculture,

ecology, local terrain, Indigenous traditions, tea culture and community revitalization initiatives, food has become one of the most direct and emotionally engaging ways for travelers to connect with Taiwan.”

Night markets—visited by more than 80 percent of international visitors—have become a gateway to broader cultural exploration, with guided tours, interactive programming and storytelling now woven into what was once simply a casual evening out.

“The ‘localization of Michelin’ is expanding recognition beyond Taipei into New Taipei City, Hsinchu and beyond, encouraging visitors to explore diverse food cultures across the island,” Lee says.

Taiwan’s tea culture is a particularly rich area for group programming. Plantation visits, tea-making workshops, appreciation classes and pairing experiences are increasingly popular in premium incentive programs. And bubble tea—born in Taiwan—has evolved from a local beverage into a global cultural symbol, inspiring curated origin tours, DIY workshops and guided explorations of the island’s hand-shaken beverage culture.

Regional culinary tourism is opening new horizons for MICE planners. From farm-to-table programs in Yilan and tea-focused journeys in Nantou, to Indigenous culinary traditions in Eastern Taiwan and seafood experiences in Kaohsiung and Pingtung, the island offers programming that extends well beyond Taipei, “aligning naturally with corporate ESG priorities, cultural exchange objectives, and employee engagement goals,” Lee says.

Looking ahead, Lee says Taiwan is combining its role as a global technology

leader with its culinary trends, including AI-driven food recommendations, smart night market navigation, multilingual cultural interpretation and immersive tech-enhanced dining. The model she describes—AI + Food + Culture + Community—points toward a future where every Taiwan culinary experience is more personalized, more immersive and more deeply connected to the destination.

SEATTLE: A CULINARY SCENE BREWED TO PERFECTION

Few cities make it easier to turn a meal into an adventure. Seattle’s culinary scene is anchored in one of the most iconic food landmarks in the country—**Pike Place Market**—and for groups, it’s fully programmable.

At **Atrium Kitchen**, Chef Traci Calderon leads groups on market walks to shop for ingredients before cooking together in a hands-on experience. **Eat Seattle Tours** offers guided eating tours through the Market, while the **Wing Luke Museum** in the Chinatown-International District weaves food programming into the neighborhood’s rich cultural history.

Kris La Fata, Director of Destination Services and Events at **Visit Seattle**, says the city’s compact, walkable downtown only adds to the appeal.

“The beauty of Seattle’s downtown is that you’re only ever a short walk or light rail trip from your next great meal, whether it’s on the waterfront, up to Capitol Hill or to the CID [Chinatown-International District] and Central District,” she says.

La Fata also explains how Seattle’s chef community is engaged with the meetings world. James Beard-nominated restaurateur Ethan Stowell runs the elevated

pizzeria **Bombo** at the **Seattle Convention Center’s Summit** building; another Stowell concept, **Cortina**, located across from the center’s Arch building, is a natural destination for offsite team dinners. La Fata notes Stowell also oversees food and beverage at **Picklewood Paddle Club**, “one of our newest pickleball venues, a growing favorite for teambuilding events.”

In the nearby Central District, fellow James Beard nominee Kristi Brown operates **Communion**, which the *New York Times* named one of the best 50 restaurants in the country. In addition, her catering company, **That Brown Girl Cooks**, brings soul food-focused programming to events across the city.

La Fata also points to Seattle’s celebrated coffee culture, with dedicated carts featuring local roasters like **Creature Coffee**, as well as the **Monorail Espresso** location inside the Summit building.

A major development is the Convention Center’s hiring of Chef Amelia Warfel as a dedicated dietary chef—a first for any U.S. convention center, according to La Fata.

“Chef Amelia provides a higher level of customization for groups who want to be intentional with their meal planning and provide enhanced options to attendees with dietary restrictions,” she explains. In an era when dietary needs are increasingly varied and personal, that kind of specialized staffing stands out.

neworleans.com/meeting-planners;
miamiandbeaches.com/miami-meetings;
discoverphl.com/meet;
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“The beauty of Seattle’s downtown is that you’re only ever a short walk or light rail trip from your next great meal, whether it’s on the waterfront, up to Capitol Hill or to the CID and Central District.”

Kris La Fata, Director of Destination Services and Events,
Visit Seattle

Creative Dining on the Water



Cruise lines reimagine onboard culinary experiences. *By Steve Grasso*

Whether it's onboard fine dining experiences crafted by Michelin-rated chefs, curated destination-driven gastronomy or hands-on cooking schools at sea, these cruise lines offer a wealth of culinary options for groups.

CRYSTAL CRUISES

"Our ships deliver choice not found on any other cruise line from mainstream to ultra-luxury," says Matthew Boutwell, Sr. Director, Global MICE, **Abercrombie & Kent MICE/Akorn**, parent company to **Crystal Cruises**. "We partner with global brands who are the culinary experts in delivering the best choice, quality and group options at sea. All of these are free to our groups and we can offer group and private dining without any cost in all these venues, no other cruise line offers the same."

Culinary options with Crystal Cruises include **Umi-Uma**, featuring a Japanese-Peruvian fusion menu and the only **Nobu** restaurant at sea, as well as the only **Beefbar** at sea, bringing Chef Riccardo Giraudi's "beef, reef and leaf" concept to Crystal guests.

The cruise line's largest venue for groups is **Waterside**, which can seat between 425-568 guests at a time and offers a menu

that changes every 21 days. Another recent addition to Crystal's culinary offerings is the **Osteria d'Ovidio** Italian restaurant, overseen by the Michelin-rated Alajamo brothers. Crystal is also the only cruise line to offer gelato by the renowned ice cream-maker **Badiani**, founded in Florence in 1932.

"Being owned by Abercrombie & Kent has opened our tour and shore excursions to a level never seen before in the cruise industry," says Boutwell. "We meticulously plan every port of call based on the groups' needs, desires and budget. As an example, we chartered a yacht during the **Monaco Grand Prix** for a group sailing, fully catered and arranged by our team. We also have another group who will arrive in Rome too early to board the ship, so instead of putting 200 guests on buses and guiding tired guests around the city, we privatized a large villa with snacks, music and full pool facilities for our guests to enjoy instead of waiting in the terminal. The choices we can offer are truly endless based around the client's needs and the most important is it is a single point of contact. The person handling the group or charter is also handling all pre/post and events during the cruise."

OCEANIA CRUISES

"Creating meaningful connections to the destinations we visit is central to the Oceania Cruises experience," says Nathan Hickman, Chief Sales Officer at **Oceania Cruises**. "Through our **Culinary Center**, the first hands-on cooking school at sea, introduced in 2011, groups can participate in private culinary workshops inspired by the regions they're sailing through. In a state-of-the-art teaching kitchen with fully equipped individual workstations, guests learn regional techniques, ingredients and recipes that reflect the cultures and flavors of the ports they visit, directly integrating the culture of each destination.

"The authentic and immersive experiences are not limited to just on board. With over 250 unique itineraries calling on over 600 unique ports of call, we can create custom excursions to perfectly complement the onboard experience—from chef-led market tours to private group experiences; all designed to allow guests to engage with destinations more deeply."

Overseen by two Master Chefs of France, Executive Culinary Directors Chef Alexis Quaretti and Chef Eric Barale,

Previous page: Group dining with Crystal Cruises (photo credit: Tom Griffiths)
Below (l-r): Riverside Luxury Cruises' The Vintage Room; dining on the Douro with Emerald Cruises

Oceania Cruises' culinary team can create an innovative onboard dining experience for groups of all sizes. The cruise line's newest ships, **Oceania Vista** and **Oceania Allura**, offer immersive, hands-on culinary experiences at its expansive Culinary Center and adjacent **Chef's Studio**, where onboard chef instructors share techniques, recipes and culinary inspiration from around the world. Meanwhile, one of its newest offerings, *Snap & Savor*, combines digital storytelling with culinary artistry, reflecting the growing demand for interactive, skills-based experiences at sea.

Oceania also reports strong interest in its new Gerard Bertrand food and wine pairing experience, which matches French wines with dishes such as potato fritters with Ossetra caviar, duck and foie gras pate, as well as braised beef short rib. Originally introduced aboard *Oceania Allura* last year, the experience has since expanded to *Oceania Vista*, **Oceania Marina** and **Oceania Riviera**.

"One of Oceania Cruises' greatest differentiators is our ability to deliver an elevated, highly personalized experience that feels both luxurious and approachable for groups and incentive travelers," says

Hickman. "The genuine hospitality felt on board is incredibly valuable for MICE planners looking to deliver meaningful, memorable programs that go beyond traditional meetings or incentives. Another key advantage is the flexibility and intimacy our ships provide for groups. Whether it's a culinary workshop in the Culinary Center, a custom private dining experience in **Privée** or curated shore experiences tailored to a group's interests, planners can create programs that feel bespoke rather than one-size-fits-all."

RIVERSIDE LUXURY CRUISES

"We have unbundled and added to our **Vintage Room** experience. Now guests can enjoy the Vintage Room for lunch or dinner or a tasting menu with wine and light bites versus a full 7-course meal," says Jennifer Halboth, CEO, **Riverside Collection, Americas**. "They can have the full experience or purchase just the menu without wine or perhaps with mocktails instead of wine. Since lunch is shorter and less expensive, the experience will appeal to a wider range of our guests. The Vintage Room can be bought-out for groups."

A key differentiator for **Riverside Luxury Cruises** are its smaller ships with capacities for only 110 on the **Debussy** and **Ravel**, which means that a charter becomes an option for smaller incentive trips. All amenities—including a butler, robes and in-room bath essentials—are available to all suite categories, and four levels of pricing allow planners more flexibility to quote groups and charters with or without excursions, and with or without drinks packages. Meanwhile, its **Green Egg BBQs**, available during the summer months, offer groups the potential for a high-end culinary experience under the sun or stars. The ships also offer a spa and indoor pool, with a more expansive spa on the **Mozart** featuring two spa treatment rooms, a jacuzzi, indoor pool, and male/female steam and sauna rooms.

"We can take any of the included excursions that we offer and make them private for groups with their own guide and driver, for a nominal cost," says Halboth. "With enough time, we are happy to curate and quote 100 percent exclusive group excursions, which can be driven by group interest such as ancestry, history, gardening,





Above: Oceania Cruises' Culinary Center

literary and so on. We regularly do wine tastings, cooking demonstrations and even a live Q&A with the captain on board. We'd be more than happy to be asked about executing an onboard idea from a particular group, as long as the group was comfortable with making the experience available to the other guests on board. If you charter, we could completely customize the excursion offerings to the groups' tastes, preferences and interests."

SCENIC GROUP

"For travelers seeking something beyond traditional cruising, both **Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours** and **Emerald Cruises & Tours** are significantly expanding their culinary-focused themed sailings across both ocean and river itineraries for 2026 and 2027," says Ken Muskat, President of USA & LATAM, **Scenic Group**. "These voyages are designed to feel far more immersive and intimate than a standard food-and-wine cruise, combining destination-driven gastronomy with chef-led programming,

intimate ship access and highly curated onboard experiences."

Emerald Cruises' *Savor the Moment* series is offering the *Sommelier Collection*, hosted by Sommelier Alejandro Ferris, director of the **Academia de Sommelier de Puerto Rico** and VP on the board of the **Best USA Sommelier Association**.

The *Danube Delights* itinerary aboard the **Emerald Sky** will sail from Munich through Central Europe to Budapest from March 29 to April 5, 2027, exploring wine traditions that reflect centuries of history and craftsmanship. The sailing will pair river cruising with hosted tastings, educational sessions and regionally inspired dining moments.

"For groups specifically, the culinary voyages create a highly social and interactive environment," says Muskat. "Guests participate in hosted dinners, demonstrations, tasting events and destination-inspired culinary conversations while sailing aboard a vessel carrying far fewer guests than traditional luxury cruise ships. The intimate scale naturally encourages connection and shared

experiences, which has become increasingly appealing for affinity groups, food and wine enthusiasts and experience-driven travelers."

VIRGIN VOYAGES

"Indian cuisine is finally getting the global recognition it's always deserved, and we wanted to be part of that conversation in a meaningful way," says Chef Levi Mezick, Sr. Director of Culinary Program Development, **Virgin Voyages**. "We just introduced **Ariya** aboard **Valiant Lady** in partnership with **Indie Culinaire** and Chef Maneet Chauhan. The experience celebrates the depth and diversity of Indian cuisine through regional dishes, layered spice profiles and a beverage program inspired by historic trade routes.

"What makes Ariya special is its sense of discovery. Sailors [guests] move through flavors and traditions from across India and the world, brought to life through the chef's passion, personal experiences and deep connection to the cuisine. The setting is designed to evoke the energy and richness of the country's spice markets, creating an experience that feels immersive without becoming theatrical. It reflects our broader approach to dining: creating restaurant experiences that feel worthy of a destination in their own right."

The cruise line has eliminated the traditional cruise buffet model from its ships and instead built a collection of more than 20 distinct eateries inspired by some of the world's best dining cities. Options include Korean barbecue and elevated Mexican cuisine to modern Italian, steakhouse classics and inventive vegetarian dishes, all included as part of the voyage experience.



"Our role on board is not to replicate or compete with the food culture of a port, but to complement the journey by delivering the strongest food and beverage program we can offer."

Chef Levi Mezick, Sr. Director of Culinary Program Development, Virgin Voyages



“With enough time, we are happy to curate and quote 100 percent exclusive group excursions.... We regularly do wine tastings, cooking demonstrations...on board.”

Jennifer Halboth, CEO, Riverside Collection, Americas

“Our role on board is not to replicate or compete with the food culture of a port, but to complement the journey by delivering the strongest food and beverage program we can offer,” says Mezick. “For us, that means looking at each itinerary, the rhythm of the voyage and the expectations of our Sailors, then asking how we can bring forward the best products, most exciting cuisines and most memorable restaurant experiences onboard. Sometimes this may include ingredients or inspiration that naturally connect to the regions we are sailing through, but the focus is always on quality, creativity and creating dining experiences that feel distinctly Virgin Voyages.

“A good example is our inaugural Alaska season aboard **Brilliant Lady**. With access to incredible products like King crab, halibut and black cod, we saw an opportunity to showcase those ingredients in a way that felt elevated, thoughtful and aligned with our overall food philosophy. It was not about recreating Alaska on board, but about using exceptional ingredients to enhance the voyage.”

MICE groups booking with Virgin Voyages can take advantage of the cruise line’s *Always Included Luxury* guarantee, which means that WiFi, all dining (including specialty dining), soda & water, fitness classes

and entertainment are all included in the voyage fare, providing \$1,000+ in value per attendee. Groups also receive complimentary meeting space and A/V equipment, as well as one complimentary cabin for every 10 cabins booked. Options include full-ship charters for 2,700+ attendees, corporate meetings or incentive programs, and spaces can accommodate up to 435.

crystalcruises.com/events;
oceaniacruises.com/charters-meetings-incentives;
riverside-cruises.com; **scenic.cruises/CA/en-US/events**;
virginvoyages.com/charters-incentives

Below: Virgin Voyages’ new Ariya restaurant



Atlas Ocean Voyages

Atlas Adventurer: A new era in luxury expedition sailing.



Atlas Adventurer is the world's first luxury expedition sailing yacht and your new flagship platform for high-touch, high-impact adventures at sea, pairing a next-generation expedition sailing experience with an inaugural season designed for once-in-a-lifetime charters. Purpose-built for intimate groups and full-ship incentives, it transforms every voyage into a private yacht experience where your brand, your guests and your story take center stage.

Designed to feel more like a private floating resort than a traditional cruise ship, *Atlas Adventurer* offers all-suite accommodations for up to 392 guests and an elevated service experience that feels personal from embarkation to farewell. Seven distinct dining venues, a new hands-on culinary studio, multiple lounges and expansive open-air decks create a setting where guests can gather, celebrate and unwind in relaxed luxury. A spacious wellness area, ocean-view pool and marina platform with water-level access deepen the sense of connection to the sea while keeping every moment comfortably refined.

Launching in late 2028, *Atlas Adventurer's* inaugural season will sail through Asia

and Africa, opening the door to destinations rich in culture, cuisine and discovery. Guests can explore places such as Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, the Seychelles, Madagascar, Tanzania and South Africa, with itineraries designed to reach less-crowded ports and story-rich coastlines. Expedition-style outings and expert-led enrichment turn each voyage into something deeper than a getaway, creating immersive experiences that stay with guests long after they return home.

For charters, *Atlas Adventurer* hits the ideal balance of scale and exclusivity. With just 196 all-suite accommodations, it is perfectly suited for full-ship buyouts

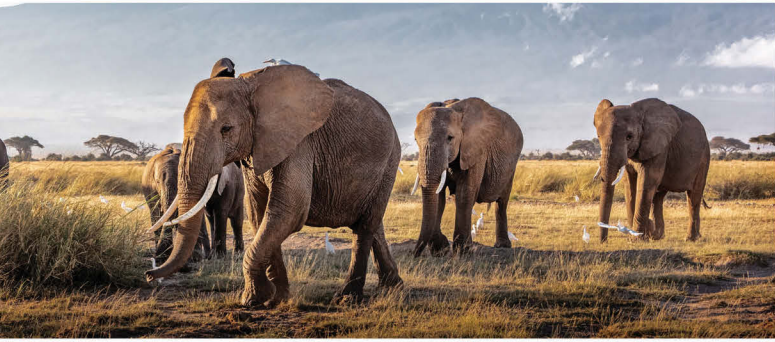
and incentive programs in the 100–200 room range, allowing planners to create a true “your yacht, your crew, your itinerary” experience. Flexible venues—from show lounges and auditoriums to expansive outdoor decks—adapt seamlessly for general sessions, award celebrations or private events, while an all-inclusive model that includes gourmet dining, beverages, gratuities and many onboard experiences simplifies planning and strengthens perceived value.

CONTACT

Robert Cao
 T: 305-753-4527
 E: robert@atlasoceanvoyages.com
 W: atlasoceanvoyages.com



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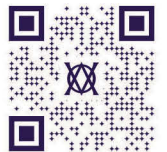


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Robert Cao
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robert@atlasoceanvoyages.com



Atlas Ocean Voyages purpose-built yachts are uniquely designed for private charters, executive retreats, and high-impact incentive travel across the globe.

Atlas Adventurer™, the world's first luxury expedition sailing yacht and the next evolution of Atlas Ocean Voyages' fleet, is now welcoming advance charter inquiries for her inaugural season exploring Asia and Africa.

EXCLUSIVITY BY DESIGN

Seven unique dining venues and four distinct lounges and cocktail bars, offer flexibility and personalization throughout.

ALL-INCLUSIVE SIMPLICITY

Premium dining, beverages, gratuities, and luxurious amenities included.

**DESIGNED FOR LARGER
INCENTIVES**

196 suites / 392 guests

**FULLY CUSTOMIZABLE
EXPERIENCES**

Itineraries, dining, branding, and onboard programming.

EXPANDED GLOBAL REACH

New itineraries across Asia and Africa, unlocking diverse cultures, landscapes, and incentive destinations.

**THE ATLAS
FLEET**

WORLD-CLASS
YACHTS

100 SUITES

World Navigator® | World Traveller™ | World Voyager®

ATLAS-CLASS
YACHTS

196 SUITES

Atlas Adventurer™ Arriving 2028

Crystal

Discover the endless opportunities for exceptional incentive experiences on board Crystal's first new-build ocean ship in 25 years.



Crystal Grace Fast Facts

- 650 guest capacity.
- Launching in June, 2028.
- One of the highest space-per-guest ratios at sea.
- All-suite, all-veranda accommodations.
- First ever Owner's Suite.
- Nine distinct dining options, including the only Nobu at sea, 24-hour in-suite dining, and new outdoor dining.
- Inaugural season now on sale.

CRYSTAL

Crystal has an established legacy of tailor-making elevated group experiences at sea. The 606-guest *Crystal Symphony* and 740-guest *Crystal Serenity* have long been favored by groups of all sizes for their ultra-all-inclusive programs that encompass fine dining, versatile public spaces for inspiration and enrichment, elevated entertainment and butler-attended suites and guest rooms.

Looking ahead to 2028, Crystal's first new-build ocean ship in 25 years, *Crystal Grace*, is set to join the fleet. Incentive groups can anticipate Crystal's signature service, comfort and elegance, plus several new features, including outdoor dining, the brand's first-ever Owner's Suite and wraparound verandas.

With a guest capacity of 650 and an unparalleled

guest-to-staff ratio, the all-suite, state-of-the-art *Crystal Grace* balances ample onboard space with an exclusive atmosphere and personalized service. Her plentiful public spaces, including elegant lounges, intimate club-style spaces and spacious outdoor decks, are ideal for all manner of meetings, events and celebrations.

A world of flavors

Dining on board *Crystal Grace* is an experience unto itself. There are nine distinct options to choose from—all complimentary—including Umi Uma, the only Nobu restaurant at sea; and the world-renowned Beefbar, which features a spectacular outdoor terrace with ocean views. Dining can be tailored specifically for groups, with options ranging from elegant private dinners and multi-course wine pairings to casual brunch affairs.

The main event

Equipped with cutting-edge AV technology and backed by expert technical support, *Crystal Grace's* myriad spaces ensure seamless presentations and memorable experiences for all occasions, including meetings, breakout sessions and receptions. Elevate presentations with theater-style sound and lighting in the 400-person Galaxy Lounge, or enjoy a cocktail soirée for up to 195 guests in the bright and airy Palm Court, with its fabulous 270-degree forward view. *Crystal Grace's* flexible spaces mean that business programming can transition seamlessly into leisure time or informal networking opportunities.

Off the clock

When it's time to unwind, *Crystal Grace* has something for everyone. An exceptional variety of entertainment options range from Broadway-

standard shows to fascinating lectures by expert speakers, while the spacious fitness center, golf nets and pickleball courts are perfect for a daily dose of onboard exercise. The Aurora Spa, meanwhile, offers a variety of pampering treatments. After a busy day, guests can retire to their elegant suites, which showcase the brand's signature sophistication along with thoughtful new features, including clever additional storage and, in some suite categories, spectacular wraparound verandas. All come with private butler service, sumptuous linens and fully stocked minibars.

CONTACT

Matthew Boutwell
T: +44 (0) 7508-105186
E: mboutwell@crystalcruises.com
W: crystalcruises.com



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Disney Cruise Line

Design your next meeting or incentive with a touch of Disney magic at sea.



Standouts

- Sailing from various U.S. ports including Florida, Galveston and San Diego.
- International destinations include the Mediterranean, UK, Vancouver and now Singapore
- From sun-up to well past sundown, adults can escape to exclusive locations and experiences—from exciting nightlife and an adults-only pool area to intimate dining and luxurious spa treatments.



From innovative networking events designed to engage, inspire and maximize team productivity, to imaginative ways to convey your message, it only takes a little Disney magic to deliver a big impression. Host your next meeting or incentive at sea with Disney Cruise Line. Our team of Disney Event Architects can help you design a memorable experience on board one of our 6 ships, including the newest addition to our fleet, the Disney Treasure.

Staterooms

Designed with you in mind, Disney Cruise Line staterooms

are among the foremost in the industry. Each stateroom is equipped with innovations that ensure the ultimate in comfort and relaxation for Guests of all ages. From an imaginative inside retreat to an abundantly appointed suite, all of our world-class accommodations feature artwork and subtle decorative touches that celebrate iconic animated films and characters, letting you and your loved ones stay connected to the magic of Disney storytelling while traveling the high seas in high style.

Amenities

On board, you will find amenities that elevate your meeting or incentive experience including Broadway-caliber theaters and entertainment, various culinary experiences (including adult-only dining),

a blissful retreat in a spa that provides tranquility, pampering and relaxation, and recreation that allows you to be as active as you want to be. And of course, if traveling with kids, young cruisers can set sail for play and discovery through imaginative activities, games and more in our Kids Clubs.

Discover Disney Island Destinations

When the magic of Disney meets the beauty of The Bahamas, two vivid island destinations come to life! Soak up the ease of paradise at Disney Castaway Cay with everything you need for the perfect day at the beach. Join a lively Junkanoo celebration and dance to the beat of a vibrant retreat at Disney Lookout Cay at Lighthouse Point. Enjoy

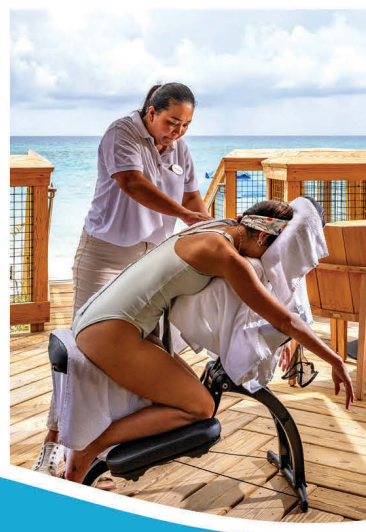
every moment spent together no matter which island you choose to visit—included on most Caribbean and Bahamas itineraries sailing from Florida.

Fleet Additions

Two newest ships joining our fleet include *Disney Destiny* (sailing out of Ft. Lauderdale) and *Disney Adventure* (sailing out of Singapore). Our team of Disney Event Architects can collaborate with you to design a memorable and personalized experience on board one of our growing fleet of ships.

CONTACT

Carla Hunt, National Sales Director
 Disney Meetings & Events
 T: 321-939-7129
 E: Carla.Hunt@disney.com
 W: disneymeetingsandevents.com/disney-cruise



The magic is in the collaboration.

Whether it's a meeting or incentive, Disney Meetings & Events creates magic for your next event. Collaborate with our Disney Event Architects to design a memorable and inspirational experience for all. And for some magic at sea, *Disney Cruise Line's* fleet provides spacious staterooms, gourmet dining, exciting entertainment and even fireworks on most cruises, creating an unforgettable experience.

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Norwegian Cruise Line

For a great corporate event just add water.



What's New

New at Great Stirrup Cay, Norwegian Cruise Line's private island in the Bahamas: Great Tides Water Park is bringing a new level of excitement to incentive programs. Groups can race down Tidal Tower's exhilarating slides, float through the Wandering River's unexpected twists and turns, or take the leap at Cliffside Cove. This all-new private island experience combines adventure, connection and unforgettable moments for rewarding and inspiring top performers.



It's Different Out Here™

The most successful incentive programs do more than reward performance; they create anticipation, strengthen relationships and leave a lasting impression. Norwegian Cruise Line gives planners the ability to deliver an experience that feels exclusive, meaningful and truly earned. By combining multiple destinations, world-class dining, entertainment, accommodations and customized group experiences into one seamless program, incentive travel becomes easier to manage and more impactful for attendees.

Reward Experiences, Not Just Destinations

Today's top performers increasingly value memorable

experiences over material rewards. Incentive travel provides an opportunity to recognize achievements while fostering deeper connections among colleagues, partners, and clients. Whether celebrating success over a group dinner, participating in onboard activities or exploring destinations together, these shared moments create lasting memories that extend well beyond the trip itself.

More Value, Less Complexity

What sets NCL apart is its role as both a venue and strategic event partner. Unlike land-based programs that require multiple hotels, venues and vendors, NCL delivers a fully integrated experience where accommodations, meeting space, dining, entertainment and destination experiences are seamlessly combined

into one program. This simplifies planning, maximizes value and enables highly customized experiences that drive engagement, strengthen relationships and reward achievement.

New Experiences, More Ways to Inspire

Innovation remains a key differentiator. Norwegian Aqua introduced the Aqua Slidecoaster, the world's first hybrid roller coaster and waterslide at sea. NCL is also transforming Great Stirrup Cay through a range of enhancements, including the debut of Great Tides Waterpark. The attraction features the cruise industry's first cliff-jumping experience, and the Caribbean's only four-person family body slide. Together with a new multi-ship pier and expanded gathering spaces, these developments create

exciting new opportunities for meetings, incentives and exclusive group events.

Looking Ahead

With Norwegian Aura joining the fleet next spring, Norwegian Cruise Line continues to expand the possibilities for meetings, incentives and charter programs. New ships, enhanced destinations and evolving experiences provide planners with fresh opportunities to create programs that stand out, drive motivation and deliver meaningful recognition for top performers.

CONTACT

NCL Charters, Meetings & Incentives
 E: events@ncl.com
 T: 1-866-NCL-MEET / 305-436-4465
 W: ncl.com/events



LASTING IMPRESSIONS WAY OUT OF CONVENTIONS.

Set sail for success with Norwegian's Charters Meetings & Incentives. Our team of experts are dedicated to creating unforgettable experiences at sea for any kind of gathering. With our award-winning fleet cruising iconic destinations across the globe, we can personalize events to fit your clients' needs.

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**NORWEGIAN
CRUISE LINE®**

Uniworld Boutique River Cruises

New ships, new itineraries and new ways to travel in 2027-2028.



What's on the Horizon

The leader in luxury river cruising is adding six new ships by 2028, bringing charter planners new high-end venues to consider for group sailings. Alongside the fleet expansion, Uniworld has unveiled several soon-to-come itineraries, including a new Cruise & Tour line that combines their all-inclusive river cruises with luxury land touring packages.

A Growing Fleet

The *S.S. São Rafael* will soon sail Portugal's Douro River Valley, with space for up to 100 guests to experience the breathtaking wines, cuisine and landscapes of this stunning region. On the Rhine and Danube, get ready to welcome

the *S.S. Audrey* and the *S.S. Marlene*, 154-passenger ships whose boutique decor will be inspired by Hollywood starlets Audrey Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich. Following the success of their partnership with Aqua Expeditions, Uniworld has also added charters aboard the 30-passenger *Aqua Blu* to their offerings, enhancing Aqua's coastal Indonesia expedition with an exclusive land tour of Bali and Singapore.

Cruise & Tour

These itineraries bring the Uniworld standard of luxury beyond the riverbanks with 5-star hotel stays, dining experiences at acclaimed restaurants, VIP access to destinations and personalized service throughout. With demand growing for longer, more immersive trips, these curated packages offer guests

and advisors a hassle-free all-in-one option that ensures seamless execution throughout.

Featured programs include Indulge in France & Britain, which pairs Uniworld's popular Seine River cruise through Paris and the Normandy countryside with a tour of England and Scotland that includes a private high tea at Castle Howard and an after-hours visit to see the Ceremony of the Keys at the Tower of London without the crowds.

Revel in Switzerland & the Danube starts with a memorable voyage through Switzerland—think fondue in Gruyeres and snow-capped scenery viewed from the Glacier Express—and continues on to the Danube River for a private concert in Vienna and wine tasting in the Wachau Valley.

View the full collection at Uniworld.com/Cruise-and-Tour

for more offerings in Italy, the Iberian Peninsula, Croatia and other incredible locales.

A Charter Planner's Dream

Over five decades of crafting one-of-a-kind travel experiences, Uniworld has earned a reputation for quality that you can rely on. Their signature: a beautiful fleet of river ships, each with a unique character reflecting the destinations it sails. But it doesn't end there; it's their unparalleled service, thoughtful inclusions and attention to detail that really set their trips apart. Operating across Europe, Egypt, India, Southeast Asia and Peru, their itineraries are fully customizable for charters.

CONTACT

T: 1-888-471-7936
E: charters@uniworld.com
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SAIL THROUGH THE HEART OF THE RHINE

A journey lined with castles, vineyards and timeless traditions

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S.S. AUDREY

Sail the *S.S. Audrey* (2027), a Super Ship inspired by Audrey Hepburn's timeless elegance. Hosting up to 154 guests, it offers elegant design, attentive service and inviting spaces for group experiences.



EVERY LUXURY INCLUDED

Enjoy curated excursions, regionally inspired cuisine, premium wines and spirits, exceptional service, and all gratuities—thoughtfully included from beginning to end.



THE FABLED RHINE

Discover Strasbourg, Rudesheim and Cologne, along with an exclusive visit to historic Marksburg Castle, as you journey through the heart of the Rhine Valley.

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Scan here to book and view more information

Virgin Voyages

Turn your next meeting into an award-winning moment that matters.



Meeting planners know that the most successful events aren't just well executed— they're the ones attendees remember long after they're over. Whether the goal is strengthening client relationships, rewarding top performers, launching a new initiative or bringing teams together in a meaningful way, the setting matters. That's where Virgin Voyages offers something fundamentally different.

Virgin Voyages combines the convenience and efficiency

of a traditional meeting venue with the energy, exclusivity and built-in experiences of an award-winning cruise line. Our exclusively adult fleet of boutique, yacht-inspired ships provides an environment where business objectives and unforgettable experiences work together seamlessly.

Designed for groups seeking more than a standard hotel ballroom, Virgin Voyages offers flexible solutions for corporate meetings, incentive programs and full-ship charters. From executive retreats and leadership summits to large-scale

corporate gatherings and client appreciation events, every voyage is tailored to support your goals while delivering an experience attendees genuinely want to be part of.

Meeting planners get dedicated support throughout the planning process, including access to meeting spaces, AV capabilities, and an experienced onboard operations team. Our flexible approach helps simplify logistics while creating opportunities to customize experiences that reflect your organization's objectives and culture.

Virgin Voyages offers three distinct ways to bring your event to life:

- Full-ship charters—Create a completely private experience by taking over an entire ship for up to 2,700 attendees. Transform venues, customize programming and build a one-of-a-kind branded environment from bow to stern.
- Corporate meetings and conferences—Host productive sessions in sophisticated venues with sweeping ocean views, then allow attendees to connect and recharge throughout the ship's many social spaces.



- Incentive and reward programs—Recognize top performers with an experience that inspires loyalty, drives engagement and delivers lasting impact far beyond a traditional reward trip.

The onboard experience is designed to eliminate many of the friction points associated with traditional event venues. Virgin Voyages' Always Included Luxury means WiFi, fitness classes, world-class entertainment and dining at more than 20 unique eateries are included in the voyage fare. With fewer line items to manage and more value built in, planners can focus on creating meaningful experiences rather than coordinating endless logistics.

Beyond the meeting room, attendees gain access to spaces designed to encourage connection and discovery. From intimate lounges and outdoor gathering areas to live entertainment, wellness experiences and award-winning dining, every element

of the voyage contributes to a more engaging and memorable event environment.

That commitment to experience has earned Virgin Voyages some of the travel industry's highest honors. We've been recognized by Travel + Leisure, Condé Nast Traveler, Cruise Critic and Prevue for delivering

exceptional guest experiences, innovative design, outstanding dining and best-in-class service. The result? An event that feels less like an obligation and more like an opportunity, where attendees return home energized, connected and inspired. Because when the destination, accommodations, dining,

entertainment and venue all come together at sea, the possibilities extend as far as the horizon.

CONTACT

Learn more at virginvoyages.com/charters-incentives



“From executive retreats and leadership summits to large-scale corporate gatherings and client appreciation events, every voyage is tailored to support your goals.”

Local Flavors



Small & mid-sized destinations offer immersive dining. *By Steve Grasso*

Groups seeking compact and walkable destinations can discover a wealth of culinary highlights on offer in small and mid-sized cities—from much-loved local neighborhood spots to award-winning fine dining.

LANCASTER COUNTY, PA

“Lancaster County offers a refreshing break from predictable convention cities. It’s incredibly easy to build a unique schedule here,” says Chris Ackerman, Director of Sales, **Discover Lancaster**. “Your attendees can grab a farm-to-table lunch at the historic **Lancaster Central Market**, explore the shops in Lititz, or unwind with a traditional PA Dutch smorgasbord. Moving between our vibrant downtown and the quiet countryside naturally boosts event attendance.”

Two of Lancaster County’s most popular dining spots—the **Bird-in-Hand Family Restaurant & Smorgasbord** and the **Hershey Farm Resort**, both offering authentic Pennsylvania Dutch cuisine—have recently reopened following significant renovations. **Barry’s Car Barn** has recently added a restaurant on its second floor—**BJ’s Pit Stop Bar & Grill**—combining the nostalgia of classic American cars with traditional pub fare. **Chellas Arepa Kitchen** in Lancaster City has been ranked

#5 in Yelp’s Top 100 U.S. Restaurants for 2025, while **LUCA** by 2026 James Beard finalist Chef Nathan Flaim offers a fine dining experience in Lancaster City.

Just a few years old, **Southern Market** showcases diverse fare and libations located within a redesigned historical building, featuring a central food hall and **Bar 1888**. The space is intended to serve as an incubator for businesses to get their start and then graduate to their own brick and mortar location, thus making room for a new outlet within the food hall, and many of its 13 standholders are from Lancaster County’s refugee and immigrant communities.

With an anticipated opening date in mid- to late-summer this year, the unique **Hampton Inn by Hilton at The Chip Factory** will be an 80-room hotel that preserves the facade of the former Becker Pretzel Bakeries potato chip division building in Columbia, which has been closed since the 1960s. The \$22-million development will include a first-floor restaurant and rooftop lounge with views of the Susquehanna River.

“Lancaster County gives groups a complete destination experience without the high price tag or stress of a massive city,” says Ackerman. “You get up-to-date event spaces, great food and a walkable downtown right

next to scenic countryside. Best of all, it is just a short, easy drive for travelers coming from major Northeast markets.”

CHARLOTTE, NC

“Charlotte continues to earn national recognition for its dynamic, award-winning culinary scene, where acclaimed chefs and memorable dining experiences further position the city as one of the Southeast’s premier destinations for meetings and conventions,” says TK Knight, VP of Sales and Executive Director, **Visit Charlotte**. “The city also recently stepped into the national spotlight as the backdrop for season 23 of Bravo’s Emmy Award-winning “Top Chef” series, themed “Top Chef: Carolinas,” which aired in spring 2026. Home to James Beard-recognized culinary talent, Charlotte also made history as the only city in North Carolina to receive a Michelin star in the inaugural *Michelin Guide American South*.”

The city’s culinary offerings include fine-dining experiences by acclaimed chefs as well as popular neighborhood favorites, many of which are located just minutes from Uptown Charlotte’s convention district. The **Charlotte Convention Center** features 600,000 sf of flexible meeting and exhibit space, all within walking distance of more than 6,400 hotel rooms and 200

Continued after insert on p37

BRANDING AN ENTIRE SKYLINE.

'cause we can

Immediately recognizable and ever-changing, the eye-catching architecture of the Dallas skyline presents the ultimate visual mic drop – a bright, innovative way to amplify your brand and make your event iconic. We lit up the evening sky for one of the world's biggest airlines, imagine what we can do for you.

VISIT
DALLAS



Scan here to see
what we can light up
for your meeting





Add Some Swagger To Your After-Meeting

VISIT **DALLAS**

In a place like Dallas, the after-meeting isn't an afterthought. It's the main event. Because once the meeting wraps up is when jaws really drop. Sure, there's unique spots all over the city to make your meeting memorable. But here post-meetings mean swapping slides for skyline views, and small talk for real talk. Even better—you and your team bringing home stories, and hopefully some of Dallas' signature swagger, in your carry-ons.

Ignite Your Artistry

Creativity flows through every part of Dallas. And it all starts with the beating heart of downtown: Dallas' nationally-ranked Arts District. It's a blocks-long symphony of sights and sounds that pulses with art for all the senses. Catch a live performance at the world-renowned AT&T Performing Arts Center. Or,



see how decades of history and pop culture paint the town through the city's sprawling mural landscape. Dallas is a playground for all things artistic, and your group is sure to find inspiration in plain sight.

At the Nasher Sculpture Center your attendees won't step into just any museum. They'll transport into what feels like a calm exhale right in the middle of the bustling city. In this space designed by world-renowned architect Renzo Piano and landscape architect Peter Walker, sunlight pours through sleek galleries and a serene sculpture garden. It's modern, it's magnetic, and it has that kind of "wow" factor your group will be talking about the whole flight home.

When the meeting wraps, take your team to something worthy of a standing-ovation. The AT&T Performing Arts Center is home to the soaring Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House and the versatile Wyly Theatre, complemented by the outdoor Strauss Square and Sammons Park. Some of the biggest names in the world roll through these iconic venues year-round, and your team could have front-row seats to one of those "you had to be there" moments.

Even outside the Arts District, Dallas keeps the rhythm alive. With venues like the historic Granada Theater and the intimate Bishop Arts Theatre, you can catch world-class talent, local legends and unexpected gems alike. Who knows, your crew might even just come back with their very own theme song!

Become a Super-Fan

To electrify the meeting post-game, grab your team and take 'em to see one of Dallas' iconic sporting events. Home to renowned brands like the NFL Cowboys, NBA Mavericks, NHL Stars, MLB Rangers and more, this city always has its game face on. Whether you're in the stands or at one of Dallas'

legendary sports bars, you'll be on your feet—and definitely cheering a little louder than you thought possible.

Taking your attendees to one of Dallas' electrifying sports venues is a surefire post-meeting win. From cheering on the Cowboys at the high-energy AT&T Stadium, to rooting for the Mavs and Stars at the American Airlines Center, to watching the Rangers hit a home run at Globe Life Field, there's an event for every kind of sports fan. Even if someone in your group doesn't call themselves a sports fan, they definitely will after one of these games.

If you can't fit a stadium into your agenda, no problem. Gameday in Dallas means the good energy is pulsing through the entire city. And you'll be sure to feel it. Hit Happiest Hour, one of the city's iconic sports bars, and it'll be like you're at the real deal. Plus, this indoor-outdoor rooftop bar is great for larger groups. You'll have room to mix, mingle and have even more room to practice your scoring celebration dance.

Taste the Creativity

Fresh off a nod from the MICHELIN Guide Texas, prepare to taste how Dallas breaks rules and blows minds. Shake up your group dinners and pull up some chairs to some of the country's most inventive tables. Dallas solidified its mouth-watering claim to foodie fame with 25 culinary standouts. And there's even more heat beyond the kitchen. The Dallas restaurant scene is always on-point, with ultra-stylish spaces just as decadent as the flavors they serve. So, let the creativity in the air fuel bonding and conversation like

never before. Because Dallas can satisfy cravings you didn't even know you had, while sparking ideas you never thought possible. From omakase to osso buco, Dallas eats will leave even your most discerning foodies speechless.

Got room for 15 courses? Tatsu Dallas is an 8-seat Omakase restaurant that will leave your group wanting another round. And another. And another. Tucked away in a serene alcove of the bustling Deep Ellum neighborhood, this intimate dining experience humbly holds one well-earned MICHELIN Star. Even better, this spot won't just satisfy your taste buds, but your spirits too. Chef Tatsuya Sekiguchi thrives on guest interaction, and what better ice breaker than kickin' it with a world-class chef?

Book your team a one-way ticket to the French Riviera at Mister Charles, and step into that feeling of Côte d'Azur-cool. Perched in Dallas' Knox/Henderson neighborhood, this MICHELIN Recommended restaurant serves opulence and attitude on a silver platter. Its soaring ceilings, extravagant chandeliers, vibrant colors and unexpected design-forward twists compliment Chef Brendan Frankel's bold, creative flavors. Plus, who doesn't want to synergize over fusilli and caviar? Make sure to order a drink, as they recently took home the 2025 Exceptional Cocktails award.

Dallas chefs continue to raise the bar, and Chef Christophe De Lellis is making his mark on the city's evolving MICHELIN scene with his French-Italian bistro, Mamani. At this chic, design-forward restaurant, he brings a bionomie-inspired approach shaped by a decade at Restaurant Joël





- 5% off the Master Account
- Up to 10% discount on food and beverage for your meeting
- Savings up to 20% off on audio/visual packages
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- 18 Participating Hotels
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Robuchon in Las Vegas. The menu showcases refined dishes from Dover sole to a classic Paris-Brest, reflecting a dining scene that's increasingly bold. For meeting planners, Mamani offers an elevated yet inviting setting ideal for group dinners, client entertainment, or memorable off-site experiences that leave a lasting impression.

Drink Margs by the Mile

In Dallas, doing things better is just the beginning. And if there's one thing this city knows how to do better than the rest it's the margarita. As the birthplace of the frozen marg, bars and restaurants across town beckon with their creative takes on this classic drink on what's known as the world-famous Margarita Mile. Make "salt or no salt" the ice-breaking question of the hour and take your team on this only-in-Dallas sipping experience.

Dallas coined the frozen margarita in 1971 when restaurateur Mariano Martinez retrofitted a soft-serve machine to serve this ultimate chilled cocktail on the fly. From that delicious day forward, Mariano's Hacienda has been the revered birthplace of the frozen margarita, forever freezing in time Dallas' claim to America's favorite cocktail. And this title isn't taken lightly. Your team won't get a true taste of Dallas until they sip on its iconic history.

With stops all over town, let The Margarita Mile introduce you to some of Dallas' most-happening neighborhoods. Head into Deep Ellum, where a few of the Mile's spots sit right near Elm Street. At Electric Shuffle, your group can connect over electric shuffleboard and this restaurant's

standout margarita: The Spicy Lucy. Or head to the art-centric cocktail bar Ruins for live music and their classic drink: the Diabólico.

It's Dallas Deals Season

Dallas knows how to host. That means more flavor, more culture and more energy than you'll find anywhere else—plus a walkable downtown, a thriving dining scene and unique experiences to help your attendees connect beyond the ballroom.

And thanks to new group incentives from Visit Dallas, there's even more reason to bring your next event here. Whether you're planning for twenty execs or two thousand attendees, now it's easier than ever to say yes to Dallas. When you take advantage of our limited time Dallas Deals, you're unlocking more than just space. You're opening the door to richer experiences, unexpected perks and the kind of hospitality that turns attendees into loyalists.

Here are just some of the exclusive, limited time perks you'll find for new RFPs booking in 2026:

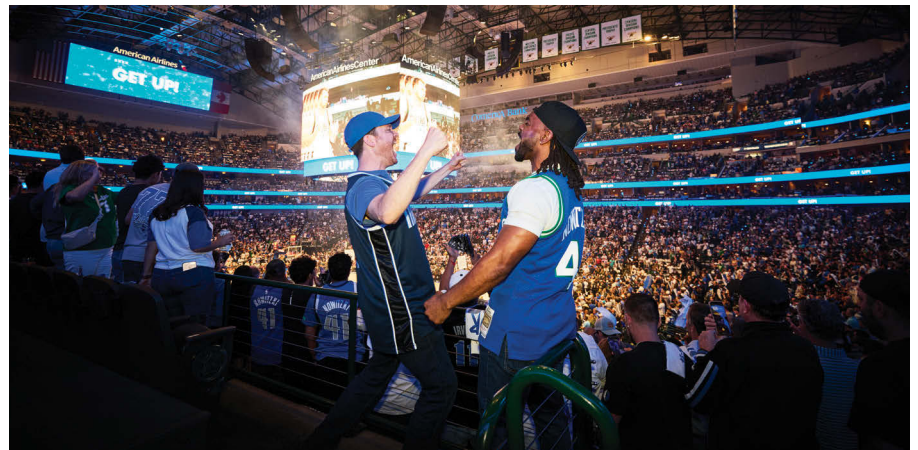
In Dallas, your meeting will be worth remembering, with swagger on the agenda from the first sip to the final standing ovation. With the best move of all, getting a deal.

Where Business Breaks Out

Meetings in Dallas don't clock out after the closing slide. They level up. From mural-lined streets to margaritas worth writing home about and chef's tables to superfandom, this city serves up inspiration like it's on tap. Pack your curiosity, bring your stamina, and let the city do the rest. Because in Dallas the meetings may end, but the energy of 20+ neighborhoods brimming with post-meeting possibilities? Well, that never runs out.

CONTACT

D. Bradley Kent
Senior Vice President,
Chief Sales Officer
T: 214-571-1000
E: sales@visitdallas.com
W: visitdallas.com/meetings-events



Previous page: Outdoor event setup at Flying W Ranch, Colorado Springs
Below (l-r): Bird-in-Hand Family Restaurant & Smorgasbord, Lancaster County;
Supperland, Charlotte (photo credit: Savor Charlotte)

Continued from p36

restaurants. Notable Uptown dining options include **La Belle Helene** and **Church & Union** from Top Chef alum Jamie Lynch, as well as **Albertine** from five-time James Beard Award semifinalist Joe Kindred.

Restaurant Constance, led by James Beard Award semifinalist Chef Sam Diminich, is well suited for medium-sized gatherings, offering a seasonal farm-to-table menu featuring ingredients sourced from Carolina farmers. And for larger VIP events, Michelin *Recommended* **Supperland** provides a distinctive setting inside a renovated historic church.

"Charlotte is experiencing a significant period of growth and reinvestment across its hospitality and infrastructure landscapes," says Knight. "We've seen meaningful enhancements across key properties over the past year, including **The Westin Charlotte's** recent \$24-million transformation of its meeting and public spaces. Nearby, the **Sheraton Charlotte Uptown** completed a \$12-million renovation focused on refreshed guest rooms. We also welcomed **The Mecklen Hotel, a Tribute Portfolio** property in University City adding 175 boutique-style rooms, along with the **Moxy Charlotte**, which brings further social energy to the city's core.

"Looking ahead, Charlotte's pipeline is equally strong. The historic Johnston Building is being reimagined as **The Beckworth Hotel**, a 245-room boutique property with a 35,000-sf ballroom and rooftop views of **Romare Bearden Park**, targeting a late 2026 opening."

VIRGINIA BEACH

"There are several advantages that set Virginia Beach apart as a meeting and event destination," says Anissa Ladd, VP of Sales & Services, **Visit Virginia Beach**. "Attendees enjoy the convenience of a walkable oceanfront district, with easy access to hotels, restaurants, the boardwalk and the beach. Our convention center is an architecturally striking, LEED Gold-certified facility—one of the first of its kind in the country. We provide exceptional value compared with peer coastal cities, while remaining easily accessible, with one-third of the U.S. population located within a day's drive."

New culinary openings in Virginia Beach include **Rose's Hi-Fi Bar & Restaurant**, which opened in May in the city's ViBe District. Rose's is the region's first Japanese-inspired high-fidelity (hi-fi) listening bar and restaurant and pairs a rotating

selection of records from around the world and appearances by guest DJs with a chef-led menu and craft cocktails.

Chic's Laundry opened in March this year inside a former laundromat in the heart of Chic's Beach. The restaurant offers modern Mid-Atlantic cuisine with a menu anchored by seasonal ingredients and wood-fired cooking. **Ocean Eddie's**, a popular oceanfront spot that has been located on the Virginia Beach Fishing Pier since 1950, debuted a new rooftop patio this summer. Chef Baxter's locally inspired menu features Lynnhaven River oysters, farm-raised soft shells and the freshest catch available.

"Our team can create authentic, intimate, one-of-a-kind experiences, such as an exclusive trip to an oyster farm where you can see how oysters are harvested and participate in a tasting," says Ladd. "Our services team has the depth of knowledge to create exclusive itineraries that are tailored to the group's needs and integrate the culture of Virginia Beach."

COLORADO SPRINGS

"We've seen a good number of new and exciting culinary experiences in Colorado Springs the past few years," says Dina

Continued on p42



Gatlinburg, Tennessee

The Mountains are calling.



Nestled in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountain Park, Gatlinburg is a quaint town filled with everything a meeting planner needs for a successful event: a beautiful, state-of-the-art convention center, and 16,000+ sleeping rooms comprised of full service and limited-service hotels, cabins, and condominiums. Gatlinburg also offers 500+ shops and 100+ restaurants as well as entertainment attractions for every age and interest.

Historic Convention Center

From natural light flooding in through the gallery skylights to

the exposed wooden beams, the Gatlinburg Convention Center has 160,000 square feet of total space and is a venue of great beauty with a warm and spacious feeling. Reminiscent of the great lodges in America's national parks, the Convention Center is built in an Arts and Crafts style that features a generous use of mountain stone and woodwork.

Unique Team Building Options

Searching for a unique activity that gives attendees an immersive local arts scene experience? The Great Smoky Arts & Crafts Community, which includes more than 100 independent artisans – the largest arts and crafts community in North America

– offers a “Create Your Own” program. Participating shops offer hands-on workshops for participants to make their own crafts to take home.

Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts

Event planners who want to kick it up a notch and immerse their attendees in the mountain arts experience can plan an event at the city's famed Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, located in the heart of downtown. Established in 1926, Arrowmont is an internationally recognized visual art education center that offers lodging, dining and events spaces.

Getting to and Around Gatlinburg is Easy

Gatlinburg is centrally

located in the eastern U.S., which means it is less than a day's drive from most major cities. Once you are in Gatlinburg, getting around is easy as well. Gatlinburg is a pedestrian-friendly destination where visitors can walk or take the trolley from their accommodations and convention center to most attractions. It is a wonderful way to soak up the sights and sounds on a fun ride aboard a nostalgic streetcar trolley.

CONTACT

Dave Esslinger
 Vice President of Sales & Marketing
 T: 865-430-1058
 E: dave@gatlinburg.com
 W: Gatlinburg.com/info

Gatlinburg TENNESSEE



DESCRIBING GATLINBURG IS EASY!

Nestled in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountain Park, Gatlinburg is a quaint town providing everything a meeting planner needs for a successful event: a beautiful, state of the art convention center, 16,000+ sleeping rooms, comprised of full and limited service hotels, cabins, and condominiums. Gatlinburg also offers hundreds of shops and restaurants as well as entertainment attractions for every age and interest. Your event will shine in Gatlinburg against nature's stunning backdrop.



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St. Pete-Clearwater

Here's why event planners keep coming back to St. Pete-Clearwater.



Great meetings happen when the destination does half the work. St. Pete-Clearwater delivers world-class beaches, a nationally recognized culinary scene, a thriving arts district and walkable nightlife—all within minutes of your venue. For planners, that

means less hunting for off-site programming and more time designing experiences that attendees actually remember.

The Beach is Just the Beginning

St. Pete-Clearwater is home to some of the most famous white-sand beaches in the world. Whether it's a sunrise walk before sessions or a sunset reception on the Gulf,

St. Pete-Clearwater offers world-class beaches, thriving arts, MICHELIN-recommended dining and vibrant nightlife, giving event planners programming that feels authentic and memorable.

America's Favorite Beaches give your event a backdrop that no ballroom can match.

Culture That Programs Itself

St. Pete's thriving arts district isn't just a backdrop; it's programming. The Dalí Museum, Chihuly Collection and hundreds of murals across the EDGE District give planners ready-made cultural excursions that feel curated, not generic.

Dining Worth Putting on the Agenda

St. Pete-Clearwater has earned national recognition as one of America's next great food cities. From laid-back Gulf Coast seafood shacks to MICHELIN-recommended

kitchens, the range and quality give planners a roster of restaurants that impress any attendee and appetite.

Nightlife That Keeps the Networking Going

St. Pete's Central Avenue corridor is walkable, vibrant and authentically local. With rooftop bars, live music venues, and craft cocktail spots that keep the energy going well past the keynote.

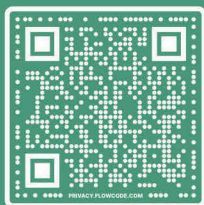
CONTACT

Stephanie Alexander-Priakos
Director of Meetings & Conferences
Visit St. Pete-Clearwater
T: 727-259-8496
E: stephanie@visitspc.com
W: MeetSPC.com



Beaches & Business

St. Pete-Clearwater delivers 35 miles of Gulf Coast beaches, 7,000+ guest rooms, and 750,000+ square feet of flexible meeting space across dedicated meetings properties—all within minutes of Tampa International Airport. Your attendees get award-winning beaches, walkable neighborhoods, world-class art museums and waterfront dining. Downtime worth taking. Plan smarter. Book beachfront.



Explore all of our unique
meeting venues for
your next event.



Above: Rose's Hi-Fi Bar & Restaurant, Virginia Beach; Taconeta, El Paso

Continued from p37

Worthen, MBA, Director of Sales, **Visit Colorado Springs**. “Those include **Roth Sea and Steak**, which sits above the new **Ford Amphitheater** on the northern end of Colorado Springs. Downtown, visitors will find the **Brit Pub** and **Latin Social**. We also have long-standing unique experiences to offer groups, like **The French Kitchen**, who offer cooking classes, and the famous **Flying W Ranch** chuckwagon dinner. Visitors can enjoy a **Rocky Mountain Food Tour** around Colorado Springs, customizable based on group size or food interests. They handle all of the reservations and coordination—attendees can simply show up and enjoy. Additionally, **Restaurant 1858** at the base of the iconic Seven Falls, is a favorite for groups and solo travelers alike.”

Upcoming developments in Colorado Springs include a new **El Pomar** conference center for non-profits to use at no cost. The **El Pomar Foundation** was established in 1937 by Julie and Spencer Penrose, who also built **The Broadmoor** hotel in Colorado. The new 6,000-sf event center—originally built as a medical facility—will have capacity for up to 450 people and is slated to open in January 2027 following a multi-million dollar makeover. **Cheyenne Mountain Zoo's Giraffe Center** is adding a 12,000-sf giraffe barn with a new indoor/outdoor event plaza this year. The indoor space will include a garage door so that attendees will be able to feed the giraffes from inside the room.

Historic Manitou Springs property **The Cliff House**, originally constructed in 1873, has come under new ownership and will be extensively remodeled over the next 18

months. Upon completion it will feature a newly constructed bar and restaurant as well as renovations to its 57 guest rooms.

“Our sales and servicing team can help connect planners with local chefs and restaurant owners to craft unique and hands-on experiences,” says Worthen. “Additionally, we are always happy to help craft itineraries and coordinate group outings to exciting restaurants or culinary experiences. Not only does Colorado Springs offer big city amenities with a small-town feel, but we also have an incredible access to the outdoors you can't find anywhere else. Whether it's dining at the base of a waterfall or enjoying a Colorado craft beer after a long hike, groups will enjoy our proximity to beautiful landscapes.”

EL PASO

“El Paso is a city of makers, and nowhere is that more evident than in our culinary scene,” says **Destination El Paso's** new President and CEO Brooke Underwood. “Here, generations of families have been making authentic Mexican and border-inspired cuisine long before it became trendy. From locally owned restaurants serving recipes passed down through generations to chefs reimagining regional flavors, food in El Paso tells the story of a community that creates, crafts and shares its culture through every meal.”

El Paso's Tex-Mex culinary offerings contain much variety across the city, with Central El Paso offering multi-generational establishments such as **L&J Cafe** with roots going back nearly a century. **Kiki's**

Mexican Restaurant is another favorite with locals and **El Cometa** has a loyal neighborhood following, and El Paso's historic walkable Downtown offers local institutions such as **Tacotote! El Paso Magruder** and **La Malinche (Zaragoza)**. **Taconeta** is another popular option that offers a fresh spin on traditional tacos and is known for its sweet potato tacos, shrimp tacos and deep-fried green bean tempura.

Recent openings in El Paso include **Nuevo Uno Cinco**, a high-end cocktail bar located in the city's downtown that serves as a social hub catering to events and live music. **The Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC)** opened in 2025 and celebrates the heritage, history and cultural contributions of the Borderland region through exhibits, educational programming and community events. New hotel openings include the **Residence Inn by Marriott El Paso East**, a 120-room extended-stay property offering business-friendly suites.

“Authenticity is one of El Paso's greatest strengths,” says Underwood. “Our team works closely with planners to incorporate local culture into every aspect of an event. Culinary experiences can be customized to showcase the flavors and traditions of the region, while volunteer opportunities and community partnerships allow visitors to connect with El Paso on a deeper level.”

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Sands Resorts Macao

Hospitality accolades and multi-faceted events lure MICE groups.

With visitation to Macao exceeding 40 million annually, the region is seeing a significant shift toward high-value MICE travel, and is prioritizing a “MICE+” approach that integrates business travel with wellness, elite sports and world-class entertainment. The region’s MICE capacity is also increasingly being utilized for multi-faceted events that require sophisticated digital infrastructure and sustainable green meeting options, which are now standard across Macao’s resorts.

One of the things that makes Macao—and **Sands Resorts Macao** specifically—such a compelling destination for MICE groups is its sheer scale and synergy between tourism and business travel. With over 29.9 million sf of interconnected facilities, Sands Resorts Macao provides a modern, accessible and diverse environment that is perfectly positioned to capture the growing global demand for world-class business travel.

The region’s commitment to excellence has been recognized by some of the world’s most prestigious bodies. Sands Resorts Macao maintained its strong presence in the **Forbes Travel Guide 2026**, with seven of its hotels receiving a Five-Star accolade including the new **Paiza Grand at Londoner**, which received the coveted rating in its first year of operation. The results place Sands Resorts Macao in the position of having the most Forbes Five-Star hotels under one roof worldwide.

Sands China’s other Five-Star award winners for 2026 include **Londoner Court** and **The Londoner Hotel**, which won the award for the fourth consecutive year. **Paiza Lofts at The Parisian Macao** won for the third consecutive year; **The Grand Suites at Four Seasons** won for the fifth consecutive year; **Four Seasons Hotel Macao** won for the 13th consecutive year; and the new **St. Regis Macao** won an inaugural award. Additionally, restaurants **The Huaiyang Garden** at The Londoner Macao won the rating for the second year, and **Zi Yat Heen** at Four Seasons Hotel Macao won the award for the fourth consecutive year.

Three of Sands China’s signature restaurants were also honored in the **Black Pearl Restaurant Guide 2026**, with The Huaiyang Garden at The Londoner Macao making its debut in the Guide, and **La Chine** at The Parisian Macao and Zi Yat Heen at Four Seasons Hotel Macao earning their diamond ratings for the ninth consecutive year. Five of Sands China’s flagship restaurants also received accolades in the **Michelin Guide Hong Kong & Macau**. The Huaiyang Garden continues its reign as the only two-star Huaiyang cuisine restaurant in Hong Kong and Macao, a distinction it has held for three consecutive years. Zi Yat Heen received a one-star rating for the 17th consecutive year; while **The Mews**, **Pin Yue Xuan** and **Chiado** won Michelin Selected ratings for the third consecutive year.

Sands Resorts Macao’s success in receiving these accolades is driven by three core pillars. Culinary mastery—by partnering with world-class chefs such as Chef Zhou Xiaoyan to offer authentic yet contemporary interpretations of traditional cuisines. Unrivaled service standards—including highly trained team members that provide customizable service that meets over 900 objective Forbes criteria. And bespoke luxury infrastructure—which includes investment in unique, themed environments such as the residential London experience at Londoner Court.

Key upcoming events of interest to MICE visitors in 2026 will include the NBA China Games 2026, hosted at The Venetian Arena in Oct. 9 & 11, 2026, offering high-energy entertainment for incentive groups.

en.sandsresortsmacao.com/meetings/index.html



Coastal Meetings



Mexico and the Caribbean make their case for groups.

By Lydia Gregory

With new and updated meetings facilities, stronger air access and a growing inventory of luxury properties, both regions are making a compelling pitch to planners looking beyond the traditional boardroom. Here's a snapshot from the recent **Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association's Caribbean Tourism Marketplace** as well as what's making news in Mexico.

A PREMIER MICE DESTINATION

Antigua and Barbuda is positioning itself as a premier MICE destination with infrastructure investments and a growing hotel pipeline. A \$50 million expansion of **V.C. Bird International Airport** is underway, and the **Burton-Nibbs International Airport** on Barbuda is now open. "We anticipate that we will probably see even greater conferences and exhibitions," said Tourism Minister Charles Fernandez during the Marketplace.

Marriott Leisure World Hotel, opening in 2027 with 414 rooms, will anchor conference and incentive business. **Moon Gate Antigua**, debuting late 2026 with 71 units, offers a boutique option for executive retreats and small-group buyouts. **Nobu Beach Inn** delivers 36 ultra-luxe rooms on

Princess Diana Beach. **Rosewood Barbuda** arrives in 2028, followed by **Nikki Beach Resort & Spa** in 2029, adding 84 rooms and 127 residences.

GROWING NUMBERS

Saint Lucia is becoming "an increasingly viable destination for planners," according to Louis Lewis, CEO of the **Saint Lucia Tourism Authority**. Hotel development is adding nearly 20 percent more guest room capacity, led by **Alila Saint Lucia** alongside **HQ Cas en Bas Hotel & Residences** and **TheLifeCo St. Lucia**. Infrastructure improvements include a \$175 million modernization of **Hewanorra International Airport** and a \$60 million **Castries Harbor** redevelopment. On airlift, **American Airlines** adds daily Miami service for winter 2026–27, **Delta** increases Atlanta frequencies, **JetBlue** adds a second weekly New York service and **United** plans to reinstate Newark service.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

For meeting and incentive planners, "the more relevant headline is what's being built," said Dupree Smith, Director of Global Sales

for the **Bahamas Ministry of Tourism**.

The \$700 million expansion of **Baha Mar** in Nassau targets a 2029 completion, making it "an even better option for large-scale events." The 33-suite **Rosewood Exuma** opens on East Sampson Cay in 2027–28, offering "ultra-exclusive, full-buyout" appeal. **Six Senses Grand Bahama**, a 50-acre, 70-villa development, targets sustainability-focused groups. **Amancaya Exuma** adds another ultra-luxury **Out Islands** option in 2027 and Nassau debuts **Hilton's Paradise Breeze Nassau, Curio Collection by Hilton** in 2028.

STRONG PIPELINE

"In 2025 for the first time ever the U.S. was our number one performing market," said Andrea Franklin, CEO of **Barbados Tourism Marketing, Inc.** The island recorded 3.3 percent growth in long-stay arrivals, with the U.S. accounting for 34 percent of total arrivals. **Grantley Adams International Airport** is undergoing a \$50 million expansion. **One | GT, Hotel Indigo Barbados** and **Royalton Vessence Barbados** are open; **Marriott's Tamarind Resort** reopens this August. **Pendry**

Previous page: Event setup at Buoy Haus Beach Resort's Island Club, St. Thomas
Below (l-r): HQ Cas en Bas Hotel's Sky Bar, Saint Lucia; event at Park Hyatt St. Kitts Christophe Harbour

Barbados, arriving in 2027, adds 80 oceanfront guest rooms and a *Spa Pendry*.

TOURISM MOMENTUM

"Dominica is experiencing strong tourism momentum, supported by major infrastructure milestones, expanding visitor experiences and growing international recognition, all of which are to a planner's advantage," said CEO and Director of Tourism Marva Williams. Airlift through **Douglas-Charles Airport** now includes service from Miami, New York and San Juan. The new \$200-plus-million **Cabrits Marina** in Portsmouth offers deep-water berthing for superyachts up to 150 ft adjacent to the **InterContinental Dominica Cabrits Resort**. Incentive groups will love the **Dominica Cable Car Project**—opening October 2026 as the world's longest, it will reach the Boiling Lake area in under 20 minutes.

COMEBACK KID

The **Montego Bay Convention Centre** has officially reopened following hurricane damage with expanded exhibition space and upgraded technology. Tourism Minister Edmund Bartlett calls it "the most well-appointed meeting convention and

exhibition space in the English-speaking Caribbean." His ministry is focused on bundling accommodations with the venue to create competitively priced packages.

"We're doing what is necessary to get Jamaica back on the map as a meeting place of the world," he said. Recent openings include the 352-room **Hideaway at Royalton Blue Waters** and the 753-room **Riu Palace Aquarelle**, while the 2,000-room **Princess Grand Jamaica Resort** and **Grand Lido Negril** are in development. The island targets 10,000 new guest rooms by 2030 along Montego Bay's Rose Hall Corridor.

MICE WELCOME

"We've put together a really strong strategy to do more in the MICE market because it is one of the strongest niche markets for Saint Kitts and Nevis, especially during our high season," said Kelly Fontanelle, CEO of the **St. Kitts Tourism Authority**. Look to resorts like **Park Hyatt St. Kitts Christophe Harbour** for island events with stunning views. "We get more charters coming in—groups—than the regular transient travelers." On Nevis, the largest hotel is the **Four Seasons Resort Nevis** with 230 guest rooms and 12,725 sf of

meeting space for groups of up to 300. Most properties on Nevis are boutique-size; however, the island's intimate guest room count is "a feature, not a limitation" for executive retreats and VIP incentive programs, says Andia Ravariere, CEO of the **Nevis Tourism Authority**.

INFRASTRUCTURE GROWTH

Turks and Caicos now offers more than 4,000 guest rooms, including new luxury properties such as the **Andaz, St. Regis** and **Hotel Indigo**, with Anantara's first Caribbean resort on the way. Expanded air service from **British Airways** and **Air Canada**, alongside upgrades at **Providenciales International Airport**—biometric E-gates, a 40,000-sf arrivals hall and extended runways—enhance delegate convenience. Marinas at Blue Haven and South Bank accommodate executive yacht functions, while culinary events like the **Caribbean Food and Wine Festival** add value for incentive travelers.

BRINGING BUSINESS BACK

The U.S. Virgin Islands is rebuilding its meetings profile. **The Westin St. Thomas Beach Resort & Spa**, sister property to **Buoy Haus Beach Resort St. Thomas**,





Above (l-r): Princess Grand Jamaica Resort's pool deck; Central Garden Terrace at Paradisus Los Cabos Adults Only

Autograph Collection on Frenchman's Reef, is back at full capacity with 400 guest rooms; **Hotel 1829** is set to reopen late 2026 after a historic renovation; **The Saint Resort** on St. John debuts this summer; and **Club Med** has acquired the former **Carambola Beach Resort** in St. Croix, where a \$50-million rebuild is underway. **Breeze Airways** launches nonstop Tampa–St. Thomas service in December 2026; **Southwest Airlines** is adding nonstop routes from Orlando and Baltimore. "Now that the Westin is up and running, we're reaching out to as many people in the market to bring the business back," said Alani Henneman, Assistant Commissioner of Marketing and Communications for the **U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism**.

INCREASED OPTIONS

"Mexico continues to be one of the most dynamic destinations for meetings and incentive travel, and we are evolving our portfolio to meet the changing needs of planners," says Carmelina Iannarone, CMP, CMM, Head of MICE Sales Mexico & Canada, **Melia Hotels International**. Key properties include the transformed **Paradisus Cancun**, **INNSIDE Roma Norte** with expanded event capabilities and the upcoming **ZEL Cozumel**. Beyond Cancun, planners can draw from **Paradisus Playa del Carmen**, **Paradisus La Perla Adults Only** and **Paradisus Los Cabos Adults Only**. "Our goal is to deliver

seamless and rewarding experiences that create lasting value for both organizers and attendees," says Iannarone.

EXPERIENTIAL MEETINGS

"We're seeing a clear shift among planners toward programs that feel more experiential, flexible and destination-driven, where the hotel or resort becomes an active part of the experience," says Enrique Calderon, VP of Operations at **Grupo Posadas**. **Grand Fiesta Americana Coral Beach Cancun** added an adults-only area for incentive groups; **Grand Fiesta Americana Los Cabos** features the new **Amaya Garden** for small gatherings; **Fiesta Americana Condesa Cancun** offers refreshed event spaces; and **Fiesta Americana Funeeq Punta Cana** will bring a purpose-built MICE approach to the Caribbean. Posadas has also launched **Devossion by Live Aqua Playa del Carmen** and **Fiesta Americana Riviera Nayarit** with immersive design and curated group experiences.

"Ultimately, our focus is on giving planners the tools to create programs that feel truly extraordinary," he says.

DESIGNING EXPERIENCES

"We're no longer just hosting meetings—we're helping design experiences people actually remember," says Fernando Luis, VP and Commercial Director for **Hilton CALA**. At **Conrad Punta de Mita**, planners can build connection through temazcal ceremonies, agave expert sessions and

wellness programming. **Waldorf Astoria Los Cabos Pedregal** offers "privacy, exclusivity and a level of detail that allows for truly tailored programs," with full buyouts available so "planners can truly take over the experience and make it their own." Hilton's **World's Most Welcoming Events** platform spans everything from large gatherings at **Hilton Cancun** to intimate events at **Hilton Tulum**.

ALL-INCLUSIVE ADVANTAGE

"**Palladium Hotel Group's** key selling points for meeting planners are centered around its all-inclusive model, modern event infrastructure, resort destinations and personalized service," says Janek Rattinger Bielsa, Regional Groups Director, America. The portfolio ranges from **Grand Palladium Hotels & Resorts** to elevated **TRS Hotels** stays, with versatile facilities including beachfront venues and garden settings across Mexico and the Caribbean. The all-inclusive model simplifies budgeting by folding accommodations, dining and activities into one package, while high-speed WiFi and dedicated guest room workspaces address hybrid and remote work needs.

NEW OFFER

"Our goal is to deliver seamless, high-impact experiences that go far beyond the traditional meeting," says Brad Cirino, Regional VP, Group & MICE Sales, Americas, for **Hyatt Inclusive Collection**. "The all-inclusive

Continued on p52

Aruba

When you love Aruba, it loves you back.



Aruba is redefining the future of travel with a renewed vision centered on meaningful connections, sustainability and shared experiences. Through its new brand platform, "When you love Aruba, it loves you back," the island invites guests to engage more consciously, fostering a deeper relationship between guests, the destination and its community.

This approach goes beyond traditional tourism by encouraging authentic,

transformative experiences rooted in respect, reciprocity and purpose. It positions itself not only as a leisure destination, but as a place where travel creates a lasting impact.

A New Way to Experience Aruba

Built on the pillars of responsible tourism, transformative travel and reciprocity, Aruba's vision reflects the evolving expectations of today's traveler.

Visitors are encouraged to connect with the island in a more intentional way, supporting local communities, respecting natural environments and embracing experiences that go beyond the surface.

Ideal for Groups & Incentives

Aligned with this vision, Aruba stands out as an exceptional destination for group and incentive travel. Programs are designed to go beyond traditional itineraries by incorporating community engagement, sustainability initiatives and purpose-driven activities. Through team-building, CSR and cultural encounters, groups find an inspiring environment to connect and create lasting impact.

Shared Impact & Lasting Connection

In Aruba, group travel becomes an opportunity to create

meaningful, shared impact. Experiences are designed to foster authentic connections, not only among participants, but also with the island's community and natural environment.

Through mindful travel initiatives, groups leave with strengthened relationships, a sense of purpose and a deeper connection to the destination, turning every gathering into an experience that resonates long after the trip ends.

CONTACT

Aruba Convention Bureau

E: d.pederson@aruba.com &

h.davis@aruba.com

W: arubaconventionbureau.com



ARUBACONVENTIONBUREAU.COM

Casa de Campo

Beyond the standard group resort experience.



Casa de Campo Resort & Villas, located in La Romana, Dominican Republic was built in the seventies as a lavish island retreat. The property offers 7,000 acres of Caribbean living in guestrooms, Premier Suites and luxury villas, outstanding restaurants, three world-renowned golf courses, an immaculate beach, marina, shooting course and equestrian center. With 24,000+ square feet of meeting and event space in three conference centers and unique outdoor venues, Casa de Campo is ideal for programs of any size.

Unique Facilities

Following a one-year restoration project, the property's famous Teeth of the

Dog golf course reopened to rave reviews. The Pete Dye-designed masterpiece has long been considered the No. 1 course in the Caribbean and consistently rated as one of the best on the planet. Two additional Dye-designed layouts—Dye Fore and The Links—combine with Teeth of the Dog to make Casa de Campo one of the world's most coveted golf destinations.

The 4-Star Spa Casa de Campo is a destination spa and wellness center with 18,000+ square feet of indoor and outdoor facilities. The Racquet Center is the largest in the Caribbean and consists of tennis, padel and pickleball courts. Altos de Chavon is a place like no other. Handcrafted by local artisans, the village is a cultural center for working artists from all over the world.

More Celebrations than Ever in 2026

June 2026 saw the official launch of Casa de Campo Fashion Week, a premier international event for fashion, art and wellness within the luxury industry. Featuring Dayanara Torres, Miss Universe, as brand ambassador and one of many celebrity personalities that will be part of this historic event.

The Resort also hosts the first Cigars' in Paradise Festival, June 25-29. Bringing together the world's best cigar and rum aficionados from around the globe, with exclusive opportunities to meet master blenders, renowned cigar makers, celebrated rum producers and more.

The 4th Annual Casa de Campo Food & Wine Festival featuring renowned

What's happening at Casa de Campo

The 4th Annual Casa de Campo Food & Wine Festival taking place October 9-10 will feature renowned culinary talents, with returning headlining chefs and TV personalities such as:

- Chef Hubert Keller, star of the cooking series 'Hubert Keller: Secrets of A Chef.'
- Chef & author Michael Mina, with over 30 award-winning restaurants nationwide.
- Chef Joe Isidori, restaurateur and author, the creative force behind Black Tap Craft Burgers & Beers.

chefs Michael Mina, Joe Isidori and Hubert Keller is set for October 9-10, 2026. This world-class event has become the Caribbean's most anticipated culinary celebration. Experience exquisite cuisine, live music, exclusive tastings, fine wines and masterful mixology—set in the beautiful Grand Tasting Pavilion at the Marina Riverside Center. Delight in live cooking demonstrations as you stroll among more than 30 exhibitors of food, wine, beers, liquors, spirits and more.

CONTACT

Vielka Deguidi, CMP, HMCC
 T: 800-336-5520 / 773-620-4884
 E: vdeguidi@ccampo.com
 W: casadecampo.com.do

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The most.

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Since it opened as the first resort in the Dominican Republic, Casa de Campo® Resort & Villas has been a favorite luxury destination for discerning travelers the world over. Offering unparalleled experiences for incentives and programs of any kind. Featuring three Pete Dye-designed golf courses, including the newly refreshed Teeth of the Dog, the #1 course in the Caribbean, breathtaking accommodations, world-class restaurants, the four-star Spa Casa de Campo, a marina, racquet center, equestrian center, Altos de Chavon village, and pristine beaches.

Discover more at casadecampo.com.do

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Paradisus by Meliá

Exceptional destinations designed for memorable meetings and incentives.



Fast Facts

- **Destinations:** Cancún, Riviera Maya, Los Cabos, Punta Cana, Canary Islands, Bali.
- **Key Attributes:** Elevated all-inclusive dining, state-of-the-art tech setups, dedicated on-site event coordinators, customized group team-building and tailored experiences.
- **Ideal For:** Conferences, executive retreats, incentive groups and multigenerational programs.
- **Planner Benefits:** Seamless planning, dedicated support and exclusive rewards.



PARADISUS
BY MELIÁ

Luxury all-inclusive resorts across Mexico, the Dominican Republic and beyond, combining sophisticated event venues, oceanfront settings, elevated gastronomy and personalized service, transforms gatherings into memorable experiences in some of the world's most desirable destinations.

Expansive Infrastructure

Paradisus elevates meetings and events with sophisticated convention centers and versatile venues designed to accommodate everything from large-scale conferences to executive retreats. Thoughtfully designed spaces, seamless service and flexible setups allow planners to create impactful programs with ease.

Oceanfront Venues

Beyond the meeting room, stunning oceanfront venues and elegant outdoor spaces provide extraordinary settings

for networking receptions, beachfront cocktail hours and gala dinners under the stars. Every event is enhanced by the natural beauty and relaxed sophistication of each destination.

Premium VIP Experiences

Elevate attendee experiences through The Reserve and Family Concierge, offering premium accommodations, exclusive lounges, private areas and personalized concierge service. Whether hosting senior executives, key clients or top-performing incentive qualifiers, these elevated offerings create a greater sense of privacy, comfort and exclusivity while enhancing the overall group experience.

Elevated Experiences & Service

From exceptional dining and tailored group activities to

personalized planning through Meliá PRO Meetings & Events, every detail is designed to enhance the attendee experience. Dedicated teams support planners throughout the journey, delivering customized programs that bring people together through meaningful moments and seamless execution. Wellness experiences, destination-inspired activities and curated culinary events further enrich each program, creating memorable experiences both inside and beyond the meeting room.

CONTACT

Carmelina Iannarone, CMP, CMM
E: meetings@melia.com
W: meliapro.melia.com/en/meetings-events



PARADISUS
BY MELIÁ

Elevated Meetings. Exceptional Destinations.

Luxury all-inclusive resorts designed for elevated meetings, incentives and group experiences.

Where oceanfront settings and elevated service transform meetings into meaningful connections.



Expansive convention centers



Oceanfront venues & versatile event settings



The Reserve & Family Concierge elevated experiences



Wellness, gastronomy & immersive group experiences



Seamless planning with Meliá PRO Meetings & Events



DESTINATIONS

Riviera Maya

| Cancun

| Los Cabos

| Punta Cana

| Canary Islands

| Bali



Plan your Next Event with Paradisus by Meliá



Book through Meliá PRO Meetings & Events and enjoy seamless planning, dedicated support, and exclusive rewards.

model removes a great deal of complexity from the planning process by providing transparent value and allowing organizers to focus on what really matters: achieving their objectives and creating meaningful attendee engagement.”

The collection spans 11 brands and more than 150 resorts across 11 countries. A new off-season offer will include enhanced concessions, commissions and client rebates. “The program will help planners stretch their budgets further while continuing to deliver memorable experiences for their attendees,” Cirino says.

PARADISE FOR MEETING PLANNERS

“**Xcaret** is like a paradise for meeting planners,” says Akis Neoclaus, Chief Hotels Officer, **Xcaret Group**. “You can have almost any setup,” he says. “**The Gran Tlachco Theater** can host 6,000 people in one location, and we have our biggest meeting room for 3,000, which is mostly what meeting planners sometimes struggle to find.” Thirty-five restaurants offer flexibility for group dining and event builds. For VIP incentive programs, **La Casa de la Playa** delivers 63 suites, Michelin-star dining and a private marina with yachts and catamarans.

“I think that’s the fit for C-level clients,” Neoclaus points out.

LUXURY BLEISURE

Iberostar Hotels & Resorts blends “luxury leisure and professional events with a steadfast commitment to responsible tourism,” according to Shannon Crowther, Director of Meetings & Events, across beachfront resorts in Cancun, Riviera Maya, Playa del Carmen, Cozumel and Riviera Nayarit. Expert event teams provide tailored support “from custom gala dinners to teambuilding activities.” Groups booking 10 or more guest rooms receive room upgrades and private welcome cocktails. Sustainability is central through the *Wave of Change* initiative, with zero-waste practices and energy-efficient spaces. Renovations at the **Playa del Carmen Complex** will add 700 redesigned guest rooms and spa upgrades.

CHOICES, CHOICES

“Whether it’s a large-scale conference at **JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa** or **San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino**, an incentive trip at **W Punta Cana, Adult All-Inclusive**, or an executive retreat at **The St. Regis Punta Mita Resort**, we have the ability to match the right destination, brand

and experience to the objectives of the event,” says Martin Castaño, Regional VP of Sales & Distribution, Caribbean & Latin America, **Marriott International**. Mexico remains Marriott’s largest CALA market with 294 properties and 43,348 rooms. **The Westin Playa Vallarta** recently emerged from a major renovation; **The St. Regis Costa Mujeres**, Cancun recently opened with 163 guest rooms; and **Casa Nizuc, a Tribute Portfolio Resort**, opens in Q3 2026.

visitantiguabarbuda.com; stlucia.org/en/business-travel; bahamas.com/groups-meetings-incentive-travel; visitbarbados.org/about-us; experience-dominica.com; visitjamaica.com/groups-incentives; visittkitts.kn/meetings-events; nevisisland.com; turksandcaicostourism.com; visitusvi.com/meetings-and-group; melia.com/en; fiestamericanatravelty.com/en; hilton.com/en/events/cala; palladiumhotelgroup.com/en/meetings-and-events; hyattinclusivecollection.com/en/meetings; hotelxcaret.com/en/meetings-events; iberostar.com/en; marriott.com/meeting-event-hotels/meeting-planning.mi

Below (l-r): Conference space at TRS Coral Hotel, Costa Mujeres; oceanfront terrace at Dreams Natura Resort & Spa, Quintana Roo



The Disney Difference



Return on experience—land and sea.

[ON LOCATION: SOUTHEAST U.S./CRUISE] LAUREL HERMAN

It was during a taste of **Walt Disney World Resort** in Orlando, Florida, and a sailing aboard **Disney Wish** from Port Canaveral that **Prevue** experienced some of the many ways **Disney Meetings and Events** creates successful events and lasting memories for groups in a way that only Disney can deliver.

“We focus on transformational experiences that bring a client’s vision to life,” says Tina Jones, Marketing Strategy Manager for Disney Meetings & Events. “It is our core values of imagination, collaboration plus our vast choice of venues and people that can make special memories happen. And it’s the return on experience across all MICE sectors that we focus on.”

A WORLD OF CHOICE

One thing planners can count on is a wide variety of resorts and experiences to choose from at Walt Disney World Resort (WDW). They’ll find 40 sq. miles that are home to five convention resorts and four theme parks plus **Disney Springs**, a 180-dining and -shopping entertainment venue, and **ESPN Wild World of Sports**, for general sessions and concerts.

Our visit was headquartered at the newly renovated **Disney’s Grand Floridian Resort & Spa** with 668 keys and a recently updated 40,000-sf convention center, offering access to the Magic Kingdom either on foot, via the complimentary ferry or monorail. During our stay, the resort’s culinary team gave us a sampling of how they roll with artful food displays and palate-pleasing flavors—think lobster rolls and a salad of heirloom tomatoes with burrata

served in champagne glasses to start. The culinary presentations were complemented by stunning floral displays, showcasing the team’s creativity and attention to detail. During our stay we also enjoyed a private breakfast at **Citricos**, a new upscale dining venue inspired by the film “Mary Poppins Returns.” Trust me when I tell you the spread was diverse and the food out of this world.

During our “showcase adventure,” we also toured the boutique-like 370-room **BoardWalk Inn** with 20,000 sf of meeting space and adjacent to **EPCOT**. If overflow is necessary for a group here, it can be arranged at **Disney’s Yacht and Beach Club Resorts** across the lake. WDW’s culinary creativity was paramount here when we feasted on a “Toy Story”-themed breakfast buffet. The other three convention resorts planners can consider are **Disney’s Coronado Springs Resort** with 2,416 rooms and 226,000 sf of meeting space, the aforementioned Disney’s Yacht & Beach Club Resorts with a combined 1,190 rooms and 100,000 sf of meeting space that have been recently renovated and **Disney’s Contemporary Resort** with 650 keys and 115,000 sf of meeting space.

We had the opportunity to explore two of the four theme parks, both offering exceptional areas that groups can privatize, as well as the benefit of *Lightning Lane* passes, which planners can arrange for attendees to expedite access to select attractions and rides.

At the **Magic Kingdom**, we were ushered into a private area on the West Lawn to watch “The Happily Ever After” nighttime fireworks display with a laser show over **Cinderella Castle**, while



Previous page: Disney Cruise Line at Castaway Cay
 Above (clockwise from top left): Mickey Mouse gets ready for photo-ops with guests on board *Disney Wish* (photo credit: Laurel Herman); Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa features monorail transportation, one of the multiple transportation options available at WDW; friendly staff on board *Disney Wish* (photo credit: Laurel Herman)

listening to some of Disney's most memorable songs. It was truly an inspiring experience. We also had exclusive access to a private seating area to witness the dazzling and heartfelt "Disney Starlight: Dream the Night Away," a parade of illuminated floats celebrating Disney's stories from Peter Pan, Frozen, Encanto and more.

At EPCOT, we enjoyed the annual springtime **International Flower & Garden Festival** that features 60 Disney character topiaries. We also had a private lunch at the **Living Seas Salon** while viewing underwater sea life through a wall of large panoramic windows, and oh my, scrumptious and artfully presented dishes—from Koji-cured beef striploin to kombu-steamed halibut. In the evening, overlooking **World Showcase Lagoon**, groups can watch "Luminous: The Symphony of Us" fireworks display within a private area while enjoying a dessert party featuring decadent pastries, coffees, teas and open bar. This is, of course, after having dinner from a multitude of global dining options, including Italy, Japan, Germany, France and more.

ONE-STOP SHOP

Disney's philosophy was further explained when Prevue visited the **Creative Studio**, where groups will start their planning process with Disney Event Architects.

"We do not plan events; we create transformational experiences. We collaborate with clients by really trying to understand who they are, and we then deliver, by using all of our resources at Disney to spark creativity," says Robby Briley, Sr. Event Consultant, Disney Creative Studio.

The Creative Studio facility allows planners to benefit from over 200 personnel focused on delivering creativity, coordinating

everything from a room block to transportation, entertainment and F&B. At Walt Disney World Resort, all the necessary resources are accessible under one roof.

Disney Meetings and Events uses the same "Imagineering" design process that its founder Walt Disney used, applying them to meeting and incentive group events. "Clients come to us year after year because they get that return on experience in the moment and attendees walk away with something new that they have learned," says Briley.

Planners, take note: When it comes to land experiences, Disney Meetings and Events offers resorts and parks at **Disneyland Resort** in California, **Aulani, A Disney Resort & Spa** in Oahu, Hawaii, and internationally in China, Hong Kong, Japan and Paris, as well as **Disney Cruise Line** at sea, with opportunities for multi-year, multi-location contracts.

FAMILY INCENTIVES AT SEA

A popular option for groups is to combine the Walt Disney World Resort experience with a Disney cruise. Incentive groups with families will find this option especially appealing, as we discovered during the FAM.

After an easy 1-hour bus transfer from WDW to Port Canaveral, we hopped on board the **Disney Wish**, one of Disney Cruise Line's eight ships and the first of the *Wish* class. *Disney Wish* offers groups 3- and 4-day sailings, making it an ideal extension to a WDW program or a compelling standalone option for groups.

With a total of 1,254 staterooms holding up to 4,000 passengers, "the sweet spot for a group size on this ship is 150 cabins or a charter," says Tai Burgess, Sr. Sales Manager for Disney

Below (clockwise from top left): Encanto float during the “Disney Starlight: Dream the Night Away” parade at Magic Kingdom; a Kermit the Frog topiary at EPCOT’s International Flower & Garden Festival; delectable starters presented in Champagne glasses at Disney’s Grand Floridian Resort & Spa’s convention center (photo credits: Laurel Herman)

Cruise Line. Burgess also notes that there are plenty of spaces for groups to have private events, including the **Marceline Market** (which serves breakfast and lunch), **Luna**, an entertainment venue with a stage, the **Walt Disney Theatre**, where attendees and their families will delight in several Disney shows during the cruise, and two smaller cinema theaters that can be booked for private presentations/showings. *Disney Wish* also hosts the lively “Pirate’s Rockin’ Parlay Party” and “Mickey & Minnie’s Pirates in the Caribbean” deck parties. Throughout the cruise, families will find plenty of photo-ops with Disney characters, including Mickey Mouse himself. For adults, *Senses Spa* offers a variety of treatments plus a fitness center as well as the Rainforest Room.

Culinary options abound on *Disney Wish*—your attendees will never go hungry. From the aforementioned Marceline Market and **Arendelle: A Frozen Dining Adventure** to my favorite, **1923**, which serves California-inspired cuisine, there is something for every palate. My meal at the latter included a four-cheese tri-color tortellini appetizer followed by an Italian flat parsley- and rosemary-crust rack of lamb. Additionally, **Palo Steakhouse**, the sophisticated adults-only dining experience, features a private dining room for 12 that’s perfect for the VIPs in the group. Think

everything from flat breads to wagyu steak paired with fine wines at this authentic Italian-inspired restaurant. Another standout on board *Disney Wish* is the service. The staff is friendly and attentive—from attendants at F&B outlets to my stateroom’s fantastic steward.

The *Wish* sailing includes a stop at **Castaway Cay**, Disney’s exclusive island with dock (no tender needed) in The Bahamas. There is a family beach for groups to gather, or planners can opt for the area where there are private cabanas with beverages, snacks and beach chairs. There are also plenty of bicycles to explore the island as well as snorkeling gear and floating devices to enjoy a day in the water. And when it comes to lunch, no need to go back to the ship as there is an island barbecue offering at several locations.

Disney Cruise Line plans to have 13 ships in total by 2031, with the fourth in the *Wish* class, **Disney Believe**, debuting in 2027. Currently, Disney’s cruises sail year-round primarily from U.S. homeports, with Port Canaveral and Port Everglades in Florida offering 3-, 4-, 5- and 7-day sailings. The eighth ship in the fleet, **Disney Adventure**, just premiered offering 3- and 4-day year-round sailings out of Singapore, for yet another destination experience.

disneymeetingsandevents.com



World Equestrian Center Strengthens MICE Offering



This Central Florida destination welcomes The Equestrian Manor.

[ON LOCATION: SOUTHEAST U.S.] PALOMA VILLAVERDE DE RICO

As the pink-hued evening sky framed our rooftop terrace dinner at **The White Willow**, one of four restaurants within the newly opened **The Equestrian Manor**, I couldn't help but think what an unforgettable setting this would be for an event. Indeed, over the course of a 4-day FAM to **World Equestrian Center-Ocala (WEC)** to experience its newest meetings venue, our group was presented with myriad reasons planners should put this 2,000-acre destination on their radar.

"WEC occupies a distinct position in the Florida meetings market, particularly in Central Florida, as we offer something this area has not seen before: A self-contained, experience-driven campus with a world-class culinary program, purpose-built event space and a setting that has its own identity and energy," Jeremy Gow, Sr. Director of Hospitality Operations, World Equestrian Center-Ocala, tells **Prevue**.

WELCOME TO THE MANOR

The Equestrian Manor is unequivocally a stunning addition to the WEC campus. Its exterior is striking and then you step into the grand lobby—with its elegant custom-designed chandelier and a staircase reminiscent of Gilded Age mansions—and you're blown away.

This venue was made to impress, upping WEC's meetings capacity by 300,000 sf, with purpose-built indoor and outdoor spaces, including four eateries that are as memorable for their decor as they are for their cuisine.

"The addition of more than 300,000 sf at The Equestrian Manor represents a significant expansion of our overall event footprint and a meaningful evolution in what we can offer the meetings market," says Gow. "While WEC has always had a wide

range of event spaces across the property, The Manor allows us to host larger-scale meetings while continuing to accommodate smaller, more intimate gatherings—often simultaneously.

"This expanded capacity means we can now serve groups across the full lifecycle of a meeting—from general sessions and breakouts to networking receptions, dinners and evening programming—leveraging both The Manor and our existing venues across campus," continues Gow. "The ability to keep everything integrated on one property, with multiple venue options, creates a strong operational advantage for planners and opens the door to a broader range of events than ever before.

"The Equestrian Manor was the missing piece that allows us to fully compete in the meetings market," he adds.

The Manor features lovingly designed grand and junior ballrooms for groups of varying sizes, private meeting suites ideal for breakouts and executive sessions, pre-function areas that wow and expansive indoor-outdoor spaces, including two rooftop venues that will make your attendees feel extra special.

As Gow notes, "It was designed from the ground up for high-impact events, not adapted from existing space. For planners, that distinction matters enormously in terms of flow, flexibility and the overall quality of the experience."

CUISINE, COCKTAILS & CHIC VIBES

The four new dining concepts at The Equestrian Manor further elevate WEC's F&B program. Our group dined on the terrace at the aforementioned The White Willow and were wowed by its pan-Asia menu featuring exquisite dim sum plates, sashimi and sushi rolls, among other delights. Planners, be sure to include the standout

Previous page: The Equestrian Manor (photo credit: Maven Photo and Film)

Below (clockwise from top left): Fortune cookie dessert at The White Willow (photo credit: Paloma Villaverde de Rico); lobby at The Equestrian Manor (photo credit: Maven Photo and Film); dressage competition at World Equestrian Center (photo credit: Andrew Ryback Photography)

“fortune cookie” dessert on your programming menu. Cocktails, too, are an important highlight, with Gow mentioning over dinner that WEC has its own mixology lab where they’re perfecting both cocktails and mocktails, including the zero-proof “Hibiscus & Pearls” that I found quite tasty.

For a lunchtime gathering, **The Polo Pony**, with its elegant tavern ambiance, offers a private dining room that seats up to 50—think intimate networking lunch. Its menu includes everything from a blackened grouper sandwich to chicken & waffles, coupled with cocktails that pay homage to the equestrian world such as the gin-based “Horse’s Pajamas” and tequila-based “Palomino.”

The Wine Room at Genieville’s, which sits 10, is the perfect setting for a VIP dinner. The room showcases bottles from nearly all 20 Italian wine regions, which is impressive enough, but the food is certain to be a talking point long after the event concludes. Every bite offers an explosion of flavor.

WEC’s second, expanded location of **Emma’s Patisserie** is another showstopper. There’s a joyful energy to the space, where vibrant hues and whimsical touches create an atmosphere that feels both playful and aesthetically refined. Its European-inspired selections are sinfully delicious (the macarons and bonbons are perfect take-home gifts for attendees).

“When you have four distinctive concepts within a single venue, each with its own identity and setting, it becomes easy to give a 3-day conference a different feel every evening,” says Gow. “We have worked closely with our culinary team to design F&B programs that feel intentional and curated—because that’s what elevates an event from good to genuinely memorable.”

THE EQUESTRIAN EDGE

WEC is home to two hotels, the four-diamond, 248-room **Equestrian Hotel** and the pet-friendly 390-studio/suite **Riding Academy**. Both are lovely properties that can easily accommodate groups, with The Riding Academy adjacent to The Equestrian Manor. The properties pay homage to the equestrian world through their decor, with The Equestrian Hotel overlooking the complex’s competition arena, where, during our stay, we watched dressage events. It was one of the FAM’s highlights and demonstrated what makes the destination unlike a traditional meetings resort: Planners can incorporate world-class equestrian events into the attendee experience.

As Gow tells us, “WEC is genuinely in its own category. The equestrian programming alone is something no urban convention center can replicate. The opportunity to experience world-class equestrian events has become a major selling point. Beyond that, the scale of the property allows for outdoor programming and group experiences that require real space and a real sense of place. We can host events that use the competition arenas, the grounds and the surrounding landscape in ways that become the defining memory of the entire event. When your venue is built on a property that hosts the world’s most prestigious equestrian competitions, the experiential possibilities are genuinely different.”

Check out the full conversation with Gow on [prevuemeetings.com](https://www.prevuemeetings.com).

[worldequestriancenter.com/ocala-fl/host/meeting](https://www.worldequestriancenter.com/ocala-fl/host/meeting)



Royal Caribbean Delivers on the Value Proposition



Inside the cruise line's meetings-at-sea program.

[ON LOCATION: CRUISE] PALOMA VILLAVERDE DE RICO

Value. Captive audience. Turnkey. Those are just three of the reasons meetings at sea continue to gain momentum, as I discovered while joining a *Seminar at Sea* for meeting planners aboard **Royal Caribbean's Freedom of the Seas**. I was there to observe firsthand what planners can create when hosting a corporate meeting, incentive or event at sea. From built-in dining and entertainment to flexible meeting spaces and the natural networking that comes from keeping attendees together, the advantages quickly became clear. Cruise meetings with Royal Caribbean aren't simply about replacing a ballroom with a ship—they're about rethinking the meeting experience.

Royal Caribbean's meetings program offers a cost-savings alternative to traditional land-based meetings, Shane Ulrich, Royal Caribbean's Corporate Sales Manager, tells **Prevue**. "A meeting at sea allows clients to deliver a high-quality experience while optimizing their budget. Even for smaller programs, it creates an accessible entry point to the product, often exceeding expectations and proving comparable to land-based events, all while driving meaningful cost savings. Over time, this becomes a compelling, repeatable solution that supports long-term budget efficiency."

Meeting Planner Eileen Hankin, Account Director at **Maritz**, who plans small meetings for the automotive industry—about 20 to 50 staterooms—says that she is interested in meetings at sea because of "the price factor and everything's all-inclusive. We're also trying to give them something they haven't done before." Mark Williamson, VP of Sales for **Eagle Eye Sales & Marketing**, adds that his company has an incentive group with 250 staterooms, 500 people, and says the reason they chose

Royal Caribbean was because they "thought the value was there. Our client also wants the group to have flexibility to do whatever they want for a couple of days."

A CUSTOMIZABLE EXPERIENCE

Beyond the value proposition, the *Seminar at Sea* highlighted the flexibility of Royal Caribbean's meetings program. Ulrich explained to the group that a cruise program can save organizations up to 30 percent compared to a land-based destination while benefitting from an array of inclusions at no additional cost—from diverse culinary experiences across the ship's dining venues to Broadway-caliber entertainment, unique gatherings, one-of-a-kind meeting and venue spaces and standard A/V equipment. Plus, planners can integrate customized shore excursions and teambuilding activities, offering additional value for the group.

And because meetings and events aren't one size fits all, Ulrich emphasized the seven different ship classes that Royal Caribbean offers—from more intimate vessels such as the Freedom Class vessel we were sailing on, where guest capacity tops at 3,864, to the *Icon Class*, which offers the largest ships at sea with guest capacity at 7,600.

Asked about the sweet spot for groups, Ulrich says, "Because our ships can accommodate groups of all sizes—from as small as 16 guests to full-ship charters—the sweet spot for group size varies, with our larger ships offering greater venue capacities. It also depends on what the group wants. For example, a client with 100+ rooms may choose to split their

Previous page: Event setup at Lime & Coconut space (photo credit: A Hendel)
Below (clockwise from top left): Cocktail gathering at the Solarium (photo credit: B. Velazquez);
post-shore excursion treats for attendees (photo credit: Paloma Villaverde de Rico);
overwater cabanas at Perfect Day CocoCay's Coco Beach Club (photo credit: C. Trimble)

program into smaller groups, like multiple back-to-back sailings, as opposed to booking one large group. With a fleet of over 30 ships to choose from, there's a lot of flexibility when it comes to group customization."

Royal Caribbean's global deployment also gives planners a broad range of itinerary options, with sailings throughout the Caribbean, Europe, Alaska, the U.S. West Coast and Northeast, Australia and Asia.

PARADISE FOUND

For planners sailing the Caribbean, Royal Caribbean's private destination, **Perfect Day CocoCay**, extends the meeting experience ashore with options that can be tailored to different groups. Whether attendees prefer high-energy activities or a more laid-back experience, the island offers planners flexibility in designing a day that fits their program. **Hideaway Beach**, for example, delivers a lively, adults-only atmosphere, while **Thrill Waterpark** caters to groups seeking more adventurous experiences. There is also a wide range of cabanas throughout the island, which can be reserved for groups and VIPs.

Beyond recreation, the island also lends itself well to corporate programming. Groups can organize teambuilding activities such as Beach Olympics, gather over multiple dining venues or simply give attendees time to unwind along the shoreline after a day of meetings.

My favorite slice of heaven on the island? **Coco Beach Club**. Planners, consider this your executive retreat venue as it's home to a string of 675-sf overwater cabanas featuring concierge service, an overwater hammock, a wet bar and even an ocean slide.

WHAT ATTENDEES CAN EXPECT

The week-long *Seminar at Sea* blended education with experience, meaning we got a taste of what attendees can expect—and they won't be disappointed. After a seamless check-in at **PortMiami**, I arrived at my stateroom to find elevated welcome amenities, a fitting introduction to the hospitality that would define the week ahead. The stateroom proved equally well suited for business and relaxation, with ample storage, a desk for catching up on work and a comfortable bed to unwind after a day of meetings and activities. The stateroom's balcony was my go-to spot for an early morning coffee accompanied by those soothing ocean views.

The week kicked off with a welcome reception at *Freedom of the Seas'* glass-enclosed **Olive or Twist Lounge**, where an elaborate spread of small bites and fanciful fruit carvings showcased the ship's culinary offerings. That attention to detail continued throughout the sailing, whether during breakfast or dinner in the **Main Dining Room** or at one of the specialty restaurants, including one of my faves, **Chops Grille**.

What attendees will appreciate most about Royal Caribbean's meetings at sea is how easy it is to balance business with downtime. When not attending sessions or exploring ashore, I fit in workouts at the well-equipped fitness center, grabbed a slice at **Sorrento's Pizza** or joined one of the ship's onboard activities. Evenings were spent taking in the ship's theater productions or gathering with the group in one of its lively lounges. All without ever leaving the ship—a reminder of what makes meetings at sea such a turnkey experience.

royalcaribbeanincentives.com



Say 'Si' to Success



A MICE insider's guide to Puerto Rico.

[ON LOCATION: CARIBBEAN] LYDIA GREGORY

Puerto Rico's legendary warmth and Boricua spirit are helping redefine Caribbean meetings through a blend of culture, cuisine and connections. But there's much more that sets it apart from other island nations.

"It's the options we have, starting with the [hotel] infrastructure...and what we complement around the hotel experience: **Distrito T-Mobile**, Old San Juan...and all the activities people can do after 3 or 4 p.m.," says Jorge Perez, CEO of **Discover Puerto Rico**. "There's our gastronomy, of course—there's nowhere you can eat better than Puerto Rico.... But, at the end of the day, it's our people and the way we treat our groups."

Big plus? No passport needed for this entirely international experience. To see all this firsthand, we recently joined a curated FAM that showcased just how easily groups can mix work and play across the island's Metro area.

STAY. MEET. PLAY.

In the heart of swanky Condado, the recently renovated (2025) **La Concha Resort, Puerto Rico, Autograph Collection**, is the epitome of modern Caribbean style. All of its 238 guest rooms and suites overlook the Atlantic, including my *One-Bedroom Deluxe Suite* in the **Suite Tower**, which featured a living area and a European-style kitchenette that attendees will fight over. Planners will appreciate the more than 35,000 sf of indoor/outdoor event areas, from the pool deck to the **Las Nereidas Ballroom**.

Then there's the extraordinary **Levant** restaurant, inside the hotel's namesake shell rooftop (circa 1958) with its ocean views and elevated menu by five-time Michelin-starred Chef Michael White. Groups of up to 150 can dine privately with curated menus from

White's global culinary repertoire—a perfect setting for executive networking or elevated closing-night celebrations.

Since opening its doors in 1949, the **Caribe Hilton** has been the grand dame of the San Juan hotel scene. Today, it has 652 guest rooms and suites with ocean views, with a sweet spot for groups at 400 rooms. Of note: The entire **Garden Wing** has 109 rooms and is ideal for group takeovers.

With more than 65,000 sf of indoor/outdoor event space, including four ballrooms and 24 dedicated meeting rooms, the resort handles everything from intimate board sessions to large-scale general sessions. And while the ocean views are notable, it also has a terrace that overlooks the Fortín de San Geronimo, a historic 18th-century fort. Beyond the meeting room, planners can build memorable team experiences into the agenda, including a piña colada tasting in honor of it being created here in 1954, mofongo making with Chef Hector, or, as we enjoyed, a short lesson on the local bomba dance.

Just steps from the **Puerto Rico Convention Center** and Distrito T-Mobile, the **Sheraton Puerto Rico Resort & Casino** offers planners 503 guest rooms and more than 41,000 sf of event space. The property's rooftop deck with infinity pool begs for cocktail parties, and its full-service spa, multiple dining outlets and a 24/7 casino just add to the attendee hit list.

Once a Carmelite convent, Old San Juan's **Hotel El Convento** (member of **Small Luxury Hotels of the World**) is living history with modern conveniences. This 81-room luxury boutique property—excellent for intimate VIP incentives—offers four distinctive meeting spaces, plus a boardroom. Best for events up to 200 attendees.

The **Palacio Provincial Curio Collection by Hilton** is a little colonial gem in Old San Juan made for C-suite incentives,

Previous page: Bird's-eye view of Caribe Hilton

Below (clockwise from top left): Hotel El Convento (photo credit: Cristina Sean Martorell); pansotti pasta at Levant, La Concha Resort, Puerto Rico, Autograph Collection; Puerto Rico Convention Center

with only 43 well-appointed guest rooms and intimate venues. The **Calligraphy Boardroom**, for example, offers 750 sf of natural light, historic character and modern A/V, while the fountain-centered **West Terrace** accommodates up to 80 attendees for evening receptions. The **Atelier Rooftop Terrace** serves views of the San Juan Bay with a side of craft cocktails and local bites.

Fresh off a \$60-million transformation (December 2025), the **Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Puerto Rico Golf & Beach Resort** sprawls across 600 acres with five pools and 400 redesigned guest rooms and suites that offer elevated details. The property features 48,000 sf of indoor meeting space across 24 rooms, anchored by a ballroom seating up to 2,300, plus the 15,000-sf **Marbella Garden**, the **Beach Deck**, the **Ocean Terrace** and more, making it ideal for medium groups including buyouts. Dining options include the exquisite **Amaya** by Chef Daniel Lugo and his menu of classic Spanish dishes with a definitive twist.

EAT WELL

For authentic Boricua dining experiences, **Bartolo** in Santurce celebrates local 'sazon' with passion. The family-run restaurant's open kitchen and handmade cocktails make it ideal for intimate lunches and dinners.

Teambuilding meets kitchen chemistry at **Culinary U**, a customizable cooking experience held at **Casa Ariel** in Miramar. Small groups can collaborate on Puerto Rican specialties under the guidance of Chef Ariel Rodriguez and mixologist Gabo Matos before dining together on their creations.

It isn't Puerto Rico without rum, and **Casa Artesano** delivers the upscale rum tasting, mixology class and cigar experience

C-suite executives are craving. Located in the historic **Cuartel del Ballaja** in Old San Juan across from El Morro castle, owner Jose Muñoz has crafted experiences with his small-batch Ron Artesano that immerse attendees in the island's rich history.

VENUES: CONVENTIONAL AND NOT

Known locally as "El Choli," the **Coliseo Jose Miguel Agrelot** is Puerto Rico's premier indoor arena (think Bad Bunny's residency). It can host groups with theater setups of 2,400 to 3,500 seats for award ceremonies or general sessions but can hold up to 19,500.

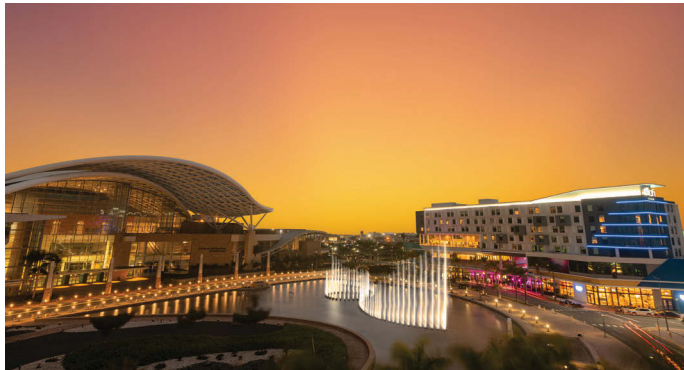
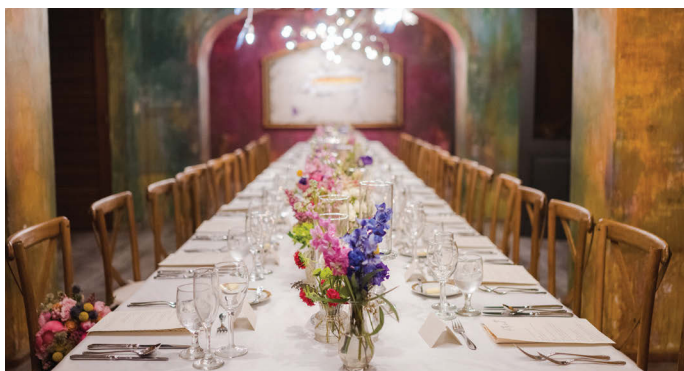
The sleek convention center, meanwhile, is the Caribbean's largest and most technologically advanced venue, with 600,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including a 152,700-sf exhibit hall, 39 breakout rooms and an unbeatable location.

Steps away, planners looking to energize attendees will find everything they're looking for in the 476,000-sf Distrito T-Mobile entertainment district, with restaurants, performance stages, interactive attractions, retail and even zipline rides. Meanwhile, the historic "Pink House" that houses the **Museo de Arte y Diseño de Miramar (MADMi)** merges fine art and innovation with a rentable gallery and a terrace that can welcome up to 200 attendees.

ISLAND CONNECTIONS

Look to the knowledgeable (and fun) Laura Ortiz, owner of **Sofrito Tours**, for cultural and gastronomic tours. Throughout the FAM, we enjoyed seamless transfers in upscale vehicles by **Bespoke Transportation**.

discoverpuertorico.com/meetings



Toronto Takes the Table



Serving up global cuisine for groups.

[ON LOCATION: CANADA] LISA SIMUNDSON

Toronto's culinary scene has evolved into one of the world's most compelling dining destinations for meeting and incentive travel, blending Michelin-level dining, neighborhood character and a growing reputation for "quiet luxury."

As **Prevue** discovered on a recent FAM, the city is positioning itself as more than a convention destination—it's a full-scale lifestyle experience built around food, culture and hospitality.

With more than 15,000 restaurants and food establishments representing cuisine and culture from across the globe, Toronto offers planners extraordinary range, from high-end omakase counters to vibrant neighborhood food halls.

Unveiling its fourth edition last September, the **Michelin Guide Toronto & Region** has become a major benchmark for the city's dining credibility, evaluating restaurants based on product quality, mastery of techniques, harmony of flavors, personality and consistency.

"[It] amplifies that story globally, drawing culinary travelers while inspiring local chefs, teams and investors to expand the city's offerings," says Andrew Weir, President and CEO of **Destination Toronto**. "In doing so, it strengthens neighborhoods economies, supports jobs and fuels Toronto's growing visitor economy."

Beyond Michelin Stars, planners can also look to Bib Gourmand distinctions for value-driven excellence, Green Stars for sustainability-focused experiences and Recommended restaurants for standout dining experiences.

Destination leaders in Toronto say the city's food scene is now central to its broader tourism strategy. According to recent figures from **Destination Ontario**, food and beverage

spending accounted for nearly one-third of total visitor spending, underscoring the economic importance of culinary tourism.

NEIGHBORHOOD DEEP-DIVE

Downtown Toronto's distinct neighborhoods provide planners with highly curated experiences tailored to different group personalities and program goals. In upscale Yorkville, travelers can explore designer boutiques and acclaimed restaurants like **Sushi Masaki Saito**, **Enigma Yorkville** and **Osteria Giulia**, while staying at premier properties including the **Four Seasons Hotel Toronto** or the **Hazelton Hotel**.

Meanwhile, West Queen West and Ossington offer a more creative, arts-driven energy, anchored by iconic properties like the **Drake Hotel** and **Gladstone House**. Restaurants such as **Prime Seafood Palace**, **La Banane** and **Linnys** reflect the district's contemporary, chef-driven personality.

In the Entertainment District and King West, Toronto's "quiet luxury" movement is redefining upscale hospitality. The new **Nobu Hotel & Residences Toronto** has been described as a "sanctuary in the sky," offering understated sophistication and skyline views of the CN Tower and Lake Ontario, not to mention the signature restaurant that launched the brand to worldwide prominence in the first place.

"If you book 50 percent of the rooms, you can use the restaurant as a meeting space," says Katy Elliott, the hotel's Director of Sales. "Groups can have everything from private dining to Bento Box events."

Our group sampled elevated takes on classic dishes at **Honey Chinese**—King West's only Chinese restaurant—set in Portland Square, a heritage building that also includes private event space.

Previous page: St. Lawrence Market (photo credit: Destination Toronto)

Below (clockwise from top left): Elm Tavern at the Chelsea Hotel; steak at The Hamptons (photo credit: Lisa Simundson); restaurants and shops in the city's King Street West entertainment district (photo credit: Destination Toronto)

In neighboring West Queen West, **Lyla's** offers an incredible brunch, with a menu featuring braised short rib hash, smoked salmon Benedict, avocado toast and pancakes with fresh berries.

Meanwhile, Prevue's host, the **Chelsea Hotel**—which at 1,588 rooms is Canada's largest property—just welcomed the new **Elm Tavern**, designed as a fresh take on the British classic pub, reimagined through a distinctively Canadian lens.

In addition to comfort food that feels nostalgic yet fresh and, from the bar, small-batch spirits from a family-run micro-distillery, Elm Tavern offers a variety of event spaces including **The Parlour**, complete with billiards and dart boards; and **The Canopy**, a lush, greenery-filled dining environment ideal for seated dinners, cocktail receptions and elegant events. Just off the restaurant, **The Terrace** outdoor patio can host up to 100.

Outside Toronto's downtown core, Greater Toronto expands into a culinary landscape of flavors and styles, from Koreatown to Little Jamaica, Greektown to Little India and across its many Chinatowns.

INTERACTIVE DINING EXPERIENCES

Further enhancing group and incentive dining, the city also offers flexible culinary venues and experiential food-focused concepts.

Waterworks Food Hall, for one, combines international food kiosks with dedicated event areas, allowing groups to enjoy the energy of a dine-around experience alongside centralized gathering space for receptions, networking or private functions.

"We offer full buyouts for up to 1,300 and by the end of the year it will be 2,000," says Alisa Civiero, Sr. Event Sales Manager.

"We have 15-plus live stations, so you get to see people making food and drink."

Besides the cavernous main space and breakout function rooms, Waterworks offers a VIP room with its own entrance and staircase, accommodating 100 people cocktail-style.

Toronto's celebrated **St. Lawrence Market** remains a favorite for immersive culinary programming, with tasting tours and group experiences that showcase the city's multicultural identity. Together with the newer **North Market** across the street, St. Lawrence boasts 150+ vendors showcasing everything from the **Carousel Bakery's** famed Peameal Bacon sandwiches to sweet baked goods, fresh produce and even fresher oysters.

Your group could easily wander the market on its own, but we got the complete experience with **Culinary Adventure Co.**, whose founder Kevin Durkee took us on a foodie's dream excursion through artisan cheeses, berries and maple syrup, Arctic char and smoked salmon and even monkfish caviar, eaten in the "caviar bump" style—slurping a spoonful off the fist between the thumb and index finger.

Our final night was spent at **The Hamptons**, which is located in Toronto's Little Italy neighborhood but projects an eclectic, New Age vibe with a menu of hyper-seasonal, innovative dishes and wine pairings. Enscenced in a private dining room downstairs, we savored Salt Spring Island mussels, Savoy cabbage with stinging nettle pesto, aged Alberta steak and wild mushroom cavatelli finished with lime mousse and olive oil carrot cake.

destinationtoronto.com/meetings



Harrah's Resort Atlantic City



A property built for meetings.

[ON LOCATION: NORTHEAST U.S.] LISA SIMUNDSON

Known as the largest hotel conference complex between Baltimore and Boston, **Harrah's Resort Atlantic City** raises the bar for meetings and conventions with a massive **Waterfront Conference Center**, where 125,000 sf of versatile meeting space includes two 50,000-sf pillarless ballrooms that can be configured in 30 different ways.

Meanwhile, 63 individual meeting rooms provide ample space for any size group. With 2,589 onsite guest rooms and suites, 16 restaurants and entertainment venues, prompt and professional catering and AV teams and copious amenities, Harrah's is a self-contained center for business and leisure.

Like all meetings held at **Caesars Entertainment** properties, events here begin and end with standout dining experiences, from signature restaurants to expansive buffets. Harrah's onsite **Rum Point Restaurant** is available for buyouts and features a full bar alongside a lavish buffet complete with a carving station, savory paella, abundant salads and plentiful side dishes.

Award-winning Chef and TV personality Gordon Ramsay also has staked a claim at Harrah's, where guests can indulge in prime beef, caviar and the restaurant's famed Beef Wellington. **Gordon Ramsay Steak** can accommodate both seated dinners and buffet-style events.

In fact, Caesars properties are known for their immense variety of restaurants and eateries and Harrah's Atlantic City is no exception. Whether attendees are gathering as a group or grabbing a quick meal between sessions, they'll find everything from **Bobby's Burgers by Bobby Flay** and **Coastal Craft Kitchen & Bar** to **La Strada at the Shore** and **Buddy's Boardwalk Empire** by Buddy Valastro, among many others.

MEETINGS WITH A VIEW

Set near the famous Atlantic City Boardwalk, with spectacular views of surrounding wetlands and the Marina District, Harrah's has its relaxing side, which attendees will discover at *The Spa at Harrah's*, offering luxe esthetic treatments and customized body treatments. Meanwhile, a fully stocked fitness center is open 24/7.

Another landmark feature of Harrah's is its glass-domed pool oasis, where the water is kept at a constant 82 degrees and visitors relax in lounge chairs, cocktails in hand. The group can chill on daybeds or escape into cabanas; or fit the whole crew under one roof in a poolside bungalow—a great choice for VIPs.

By night, Harrah's comes alive with its casino and nightlife venues, including the **VooDoo Lounge**, where groups can sip handcrafted cocktails, catch live entertainment or take the stage for karaoke. For a livelier experience, the resort's popular "Pool After Dark" events combine DJs, dancing and VIP bottle service beneath the glass dome.

For sports fans, **Harrah's Caesars Sportsbook** offers a comfortable place to catch the action, with betting available on pro and college football, basketball, baseball, hockey and more.

Attendees looking to explore Atlantic City can arrange shuttle service to the Boardwalk, one of the destination's most enduring attractions. Once there, visitors can hop aboard a tram tour or simply stroll past the shops, arcades and classic seaside kiosks that define this stretch of Americana.

After sunset, Boardwalk shows include tribute bands and comedians performing at the spectacularly restored **Warner Theater**.

caesars.com/meetings/properties/harrahs-atlantic-city

The Future of Meetings

Prevue's Event Intelligence Summit: Harnessing AI to Plan Smarter, Faster, Better. *By Lisa Simundson*



When 30+ attendees, including planners and suppliers, gathered for **Prevue's Event Intelligence Summit** at **Harrah's Resort Atlantic City** from May 12-14, it was a gathering to remember—and Conference & Event Wellness Specialist Megan Nolan helped make sure of that. In her keynote presentation, *Keeping Attendees Engaged in a Tech-Heavy Agenda*, Nolan demonstrated how to hold audience attention in a world where the average attendee checks their phone 144 times a day. Through micro-interventions, which she referred to as “power pauses,” Nolan got attendees on their feet for guided breathing, movement exercises and engagement with each other.

IS AI (IN) YOUR FUTURE?

“If you're not using AI and your competition is, you're in trouble,” James Feldman, CEO of **Shift Happens**, declared during his keynote, *How AI is Transforming the Landscape of Events*. Feldman described the major AI tools to planners—among them, ChatGPT,

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Many thanks to the sponsors who met one-on-one with our meeting planner attendees over the 2-day event: **ATL Airport District**; **Visit Atlantic City**; **St. Augustine Ponte Vedra & The Beaches**; **Crystal Cruises**; **Explore Asheville**; **A&K Travel Group**; **Korea Tourism Organization**; **Harrah's Resort Atlantic City**; **Caesars Entertainment**; **Tumi**; **Next Wave**, **MPI New Jersey**.

A huge thank you to **Harrah's Resort Atlantic City** for their incredible buffets that had people going back for seconds (and thirds?), their prompt attention to our every request, an expert AV group that made our sessions so special and the entire **Harrah's/Caesars Entertainment** team, including Steve Van Der Molen, Christine Stuart, Dennis Vrba, Jim Marota. Special thanks to Anthony Molino, VP Sales, **Visit Atlantic City**.

Claude, Perplexity and NotebookLM, which is “a closed system. It does not go out to the Internet,” he noted.

Among the tasks that can be delegated to AI, Feldman said, are things like predicting attendee needs before registration, real-time event optimization and the “15-minute ROI report.”

“Think of AI as your assistant,” he said.

“WILL AI TAKE YOUR JOB?”

That was the first question posed by keynote speaker Nick Borelli, Marketing Director at **Zenus, Inc.**, an industry leader in ethical AI, who said people reluctant to use the technology might think their skills will atrophy.

They won't, he assured the room.

“You don't need to use AI just to do things faster; you need to aim for excellence,” he said. “If you're only using AI to do things twice as fast, that means by next year, half of you will be gone.”

Instead, Borelli told the group, “I want you to go twice as far.”

“AI can take all the work you've ever done and replicate it forever. That is not leadership,” he said. “Getting more done in less time is great, but if you don't put that time back into excellence, you're just doing what you've always been doing. Only faster.”

CONTROL PANEL

A lunchtime panel took the AI discussion further, as the Summit welcomed **MPI New Jersey's NextWave**, the chapter's community for emerging meeting and event professionals, whose presentation—*Tech-Enabled, Human-Led: How the Industry's NextWave is Working with AI*—offered a candid conversation on how the next generation of event professionals is navigating the intersection of AI and human insight.

The panel included moderator Tricia Valerio, Sr. Account Manager, **Virgo Health (an Omnicom Company)**, who is Co-Chair of the MPI NJ Chapter NextWave along with panelist Jordan Lacey, Project Manager, CEO and Founder of **Light the Candle**; Itai Joseph, Principal & Creative Director of the production company **Fondu**; and Julie Rice, Director, Convention Sales, Eastern Region for **Visit Anaheim**.





Eric Rosenthal
Director, Corporate
Sales, Buy the Sea

Prevue: What role does food play in shaping the overall attendee experience, particularly for meetings and incentive programs?

Rosenthal: We talk a lot about food as an "experience" but rarely ask what that actually means for attendees. Here is what I have observed: people forget the agenda within a week. They remember the meal where a conversation changed something. Food is one of the only moments in a structured program where the organizer's control gives way to something organic, and that is precisely where the most valuable connections happen.

For incentive programs specifically, food carries weight that goes beyond hospitality. These are your top performers. The culinary experience you design for them is a signal. It tells them how much they are valued, how much thought went into their recognition, and whether the organization sees them as people or as producers. A predictable banquet menu is not neutral. It communicates

something, and often not what the organizer intended.

What trends are you seeing in how groups want to engage with food?

The most significant shift is not about what groups are eating. It is about what they are doing. The demand for participation over presentation has fundamentally changed how the best programs are designed. Cooking alongside a local chef, sourcing ingredients at a market before a meal, assembling a dish from scratch at the table. These formats work not because they are novel but because they dissolve the social formality that structured networking never quite manages. When people are focused on a shared task, conversation happens without effort.

The wellness conversation has also matured past dietary accommodations, which are now simply table stakes. Planners are engineering menus around cognitive performance. What attendees eat early morning before a full day of sessions, and what they eat at a closing dinner, should not be the same conversation. The programs that understand that distinction

produce noticeably different results in the room.

What should organizers keep in mind when building a food-forward program?

The most common mistake I see is treating the culinary team as executors rather than collaborators. A standard F&B proposal reflects what a venue sells. It does not reflect what your group needs. The planners who get the most out of their culinary programming are those who show up to that conversation with real information: who these attendees are, what they have already experienced, what the program is trying to accomplish, and what success looks like. That context transforms the relationship from transactional to creative, and the output reflects it.

The second thing worth saying plainly: dietary inclusivity is no longer a courtesy. With restrictions and preferences affecting a significant portion of most groups, an afterthought approach to that part of the menu creates a two-tier experience. The attendees who feel accommodated and the ones who feel tolerated. That distinction does not go unnoticed.





Chef Jerome Ducrocq
Executive Director,
Culinary Operations –
Catering & Banquets,
The Venetian Resort
Las Vegas

Prevue: What role does food play in shaping the overall attendee experience, particularly for meetings and incentive programs?

Ducrocq: Food plays a critical role in shaping the attendee experience and is often its most memorable aspect. While guests attend for speakers or networking, thoughtfully crafted dining experiences build connections, elevate engagement and leave a lasting impression long after the event concludes.

Our responsibility is to support the event’s objectives and enhance its atmosphere. That requires understanding our audience, demographics, expectations and context. Food is just one element of a larger puzzle, but missing the mark can undermine the program.

A successful program becomes the place clients and attendees are most excited to return to. The greatest compliment we can receive

is hearing, “We love coming here; you always make us feel like part of the family.”

How is your destination balancing local culinary identity with the need to accommodate diverse group preferences and dietary needs?

Our destination is built on adaptability. Like a high-end fashion designer creating a bespoke piece for a client, we customize our programs with intense focus and intention, ensuring clients know they are the priority. This philosophy extends to every detail, including thoughtful dietary accommodations, with refined vegan and vegetarian offerings, clear identification of the seven major allergens, and largely gluten-free and nut-free menus.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach. We listen carefully, adapt with purpose and deliver precisely what each client requires. This flexibility allows us to support diverse audiences while consistently delivering a seamless, high-quality program.

From a planning perspective, what should organizers keep in mind when building a strong, food-forward program for meetings or events?

Organizers should approach food like any meaningful experience. When dining at a restaurant, guests expect a story told through the chef’s vision. In a meetings-and-events environment, that role is reversed: our responsibility is to tell the story the client wants attendees to experience.

The client provides the script. Our culinary and service teams become the producers and actors who bring that story to life. The objective is never to impose our own narrative, but to faithfully deliver theirs.

That alignment requires intention and preparation. For large programs, planning begins eight months in advance with menu development, tastings and refinement. This process is essential. Without it, delivering a successful, food-forward program becomes nearly impossible.



The Venetian Resort Las Vegas



Hotel Polaris Brings New Meaning to Sense of Place

My first morning at **Hotel Polaris**, located at the entrance of the **U.S. Air Force Academy** in Colorado Springs, I struck up a conversation with the woman behind me in line at **Lovie's Market** (the hotel's grab-n-go), and soon learned she was Janine Sijan-Rozina, sister of Capt. Lance P. Sijan, Air Force Academy Class of 1965. He was shot down over Laos, died in captivity and was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor in 1976. Sijan Hall, a cadet dormitory on Academy grounds, bears his name. Janine, a documentary filmmaker, made a film about Lance titled "SIJAN," which will eventually be shown at the **Hosmer Visitor Center**, adjacent to the hotel.

I share this because this chance conversation felt like the story of Hotel Polaris in a nutshell. GM Curtis Bova, who escorted our group for a private walkthrough of the hotel's Academy connections, put it plainly: "We're deeply connected to the academy, but not in a way that feels like a museum. It's very immersive."

That immersion runs throughout the 375-room property. References to service, honor and legacy are woven into every space without feeling heavy-handed. "Heart first, being part of something bigger and inspiring awe—those aren't words on paper," Bova told us. "It's actually the promise that we're making to the guests and to meeting planners...."

For meeting professionals, Hotel Polaris delivers even more. Two large ballrooms and flexible meeting space all on one floor make it purpose-built for groups. Bova anticipates that 60 to 65 percent of the hotel's business will be groups and events, with a strike zone of 75 to 300 peak-night attendees. Complete buyouts are available.

And the destination is an extension of that. A morning hike through Garden of the Gods offered dramatic red sandstone formations against a Rocky Mountain backdrop—a natural for teambuilding. Day two brought a 9-mile climb on the **Manitou & Pikes Peak Cog Railway** to the 14,115-ft summit of Pikes Peak, known as America's Mountain, an ideal shared experience for groups.

Back at the property, the 45-minute F-16 flight simulator at the hotel (one of three, including a 747) generated more post-activity excitement for me than anything else on the program. *Ascend Spa & Wellness*, **The Aviator** lounge, off-property dining at **Four by Brother Luck** and a farewell dinner at **Pamela's** rounded out our program and gave us a peek at what planners can expect for their clients.

—Lydia Gregory [ON LOCATION: WESTERN U.S.]

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