

Build a Sense of Place Into Your Meeting

prevue
Visionary
summit

CWT
Meetings&Events





The trend toward immersive, hyperlocal experiences is transforming meetings and incentive programs.

Driven by the trend among consumers valuing experiences over material things, meetings and incentive programs are undergoing a profound transformation.

Eva Aimable-Kolosko, CWT Meetings & Events Operations Manager says, “Experiential travel is tantamount to the success of the industry. Attendees are looking for memorable experiences where the culture, food and people of the destination are an integral part of their time there.”

“Our clients realize that their employees want to be exposed to things that they haven’t seen or done before,” adds Shauna Whitehead, Sr. Director, North America Operations, CWT Meetings & Events. “Taking the time to understand who the audience is and looking for the connections between the individual, the company values

and the local culture is key. Those kinds of insights provide a foundation that we can use to design programs and activities that resonate on multiple levels and provide impactful experiences.”

This ideology is reflected in every aspect of meetings and incentive programs: group activities, hotel choices, CSR, F&B and even amenities.

Immersive Activities

Prevue magazine focuses its coverage on experiential activities for attendees. Its editors cull ideas from every corner of the world. Here are a few examples from the magazine and CWT Meetings & Events of new takes on the traditional group tour or activity, where attendees are involved and engaged participants:

- In San Antonio, guests can experience

a real working Texas ranch at the Knibbe Ranch in nearby Springbranch, Tex. Here guests can immerse themselves in trail rides, action rodeos, skeet shooting, nature hikes, armadillo races and possibly learn the Texas Two-Step or line-dancing to live Western music. They can also experience an up close and personal interaction with a Texas longhorn steer by taking photos astride the magnificent animal. The ranch dates back to 1852 and is run by Chuck and Sharon Knibbe, who are descendants of the original owners.

- In Tuscany, at the 41-room Castello di Carole estate, activities focus on the region’s wealth of gastronomic treasures. Groups can take culinary workshops in everything from charcuterie to gelato making, tour

the local vineyards on bikes or horseback, or, in the fall, try their hand at truffle hunting, with the end result being a truffle cooking class.

- In locations such as Cancun, Maui, Puerto Vallarta and Los Cabos, many hotels are offering guests to take part in their sea turtle conservation efforts. Their efforts are protecting the Loggerhead, Leatherback and Ridley seas turtles. Guests can watch from afar as the sea turtles come ashore to lay upwards of 60 eggs in the sand. After the sea turtles hatch, the guests can help the baby sea turtles make their way safely to the sea by protecting them from predators, such as seagulls.
- On Hawaii's Big Island, the Ka'upulehu Cultural Center at the Four Seasons Hualalai provides a built-in schedule of daily classes in everything from ukulele playing to traditional crafts to natural history, all which planners can integrate into their programs. There are naturalists and historians on staff, even a cultural ambassador named "Uncle Earl," who will come to meetings and speak about the history and legends of the island, then offer a traditional conch shell blessing.
- The Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau's "People First Tourism" program features activities such as a walkabout of Mordacai, the oldest neighborhood in Raleigh. Attendees visit backyard gardens, community gardens and various

restaurants that source their food locally. A Muscadine wine-making workshop at Adams Vineyards and Winery introduces visitors to this native grape, letting them pick their own grapes and finishing with a tasting of a few of the vineyard's award-winning wines. Planners can also work with the CVB to tap experts from the Raleigh region's dozens of colleges and universities, plus The Research Triangle Park and North Carolina State University's Centennial Campus, for speakers, sponsors or exhibitors.

Hotels Get Into the Action

The major hotel chains are responding with brands whose mission is to foster a uniquely local and personalized experience. CWT Meetings & Events preferred hotel supplier Loews has introduced a variety of local amenities to their over 25 locations across North America.

Loews Atlanta's lobby features an art program that is updated seasonally and highlights all local artists for guests to enjoy upon their arrival. Their on-site restaurant Saltwood focuses on locally sourced ingredients to create salted, cured meats in a classically rustic presentation. The restaurant also participates in many local festivals and culinary events that will make guests feel like they are one of the locals.

At the Loews Ventana Canyon in Tucson, Ariz., guests can join the hotel's chef in an excursion into the desert to gather ingredients, which they then bring back and cook in the gourmet





kitchen on-site. Guests leave the experience with a new understanding of desert cuisine.

At the Loews Don CeSar in St. Pete Beach, Fla., guests are welcomed into a pink palace along Florida's Gulf Coast, which opened at the height of the Gatsby Era in 1928. The hotel offers beach side Yoga and a sunset gong experience to celebrate the end of the day by ringing the gong at the beginning of the sunset. Guests can also participate in one of the St. Pete's Sea Life Tours, which guides guests along on a local sea life, flora and fauna adventure. End the day at their Spa Oceana that utilizes all locally made skincare products.

Travel to the Loews Vanderbilt Hotel in Nashville, Tenn., to experience a local activity that makes a difference. The hotel has partnered with Second Harvest on an initiative called Farm to Family. Guests go to a local farm and help harvest, plant and tend to the crops. Everything that is harvested is then donated to local families in need.

Even the cruise lines are on board. Carnival Corporation's new social impact travel cruise line, fathom, alternate between the Dominican Republic and Cuba aboard the 710-passenger Adonia. Fathom's onboard cultural and educational programming will trickle into three different Cuban ports—with eight more in the works—with the goal of fostering meaningful exchanges and personal transformation. The 7-day cruise from Miami includes an orientation to the country's history, customs and culture, including basic Spanish lessons and culinary immersion.

Meaningful CSR

For planners who want to integrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities into their programs, authenticity is the rule. Attendees are not interested in token efforts; they want to be a part of an activity or fundraising event that truly makes a sustained difference in the community they travel to and is aligned with their values.

CWT Meetings & Events did this for one of their communications clients, where as part of an African safari guests traveled to local school in rural South Africa. While there each guest was matched with a student to whom they gave a pair of shoes. The client and their guests were so moved by the experience that they set up a fund for the children where all employee donations were matched by the client to give to the school. One of the guests shared this experience with CWT M&E, "I had the privilege of giving a new pair of shoes... to my friend whose name, appropriately enough, is Appreciate... Beyond those smiles and thumbs up, we had no ability to communicate, but I left with her spirit embedded in my heart."

"Especially younger employees want to feel that they're making a direct impact on someone's life," says Alan Ranzer, managing partner of Impact 4 Good and a leading voice in the CSR movement.

They're also more interested in getting out into the community than in building bikes in a ballroom. His company's "NeighborGOOD" program allows participants to see and learn about a city via an interactive urban challenge run through their

cell phones. When the hunt leads to a give-back experience, everybody wins. Another, called “Takin’ it to the Streets,” gets people out into the community to see an organization firsthand, “getting their hands dirty and making a difference,” he says. Partner charities vary by destination.

F&B

At the Prevue Visionary Summit on Global Meeting Planning in New York City, Dino Michael, global brand development, Luxury & Lifestyle, Hilton Worldwide, shared some of the top trends he is seeing at his company’s properties around the world. High on his list were local sourcing and interactive experiences centered on F&B. Among them:

- A popular request is to bring in the local butcher or meat producer to do a roast. “Attendees want to learn the best techniques for roast their meats. There’s an expectation by people that they can acquire knowledge and get their questions answered.”
- Using locally sourced ingredients. One Australian company creates simple syrups, elixirs and bitters from local ingredients using a vintage Victorian press. Lemons, oranges and limes are run through the press, creating zests for the elixirs used in cocktails.
- Bringing in local coffees, iced or cold-pressed—even in the evenings. Attendees don’t necessarily want to drink alcohol every night.

CWT Meetings & Events has seen their clients embracing this trend

through the hosting of friendly cooking competitions to garner team spirit. Attendees are placed into teams where they are tasked with creating culinary dishes using only fresh local ingredients.

Hyperlocal Amenities

“Something Millennials and Boomers have in common is the quest for authenticity when they travel, says Regina Baraban, Editor of www.GenerationsGo.com. They look for meaningful local experiences as opposed to generic luxury in every aspect of a hotel stay, including amenities.”

Smart hoteliers are addressing this expectation in a variety of ways:

- At Rosewood San Miguel de Allende, the luxury boutique hotel located in a historic artists’ village in central Mexico, guests are welcomed with an easel in their room, complete with paints and tools so that they can create their own works to take home. (For families, the kit even includes kid-sized easels.)
- Upon arrival at The Lodge at Glendorn, the Relais & Chateaux property located on 1,500 acres in Bradford, Penn., guests are given a welcome amenity of fish food that they can use to use to feed the fish at Glendorn’s onsite hatchery. The property also stocks guest cabins with fly rods fully rigged with flies and gear for fly-fishing excursions.
- At Miraval Resort & Spa, the luxury destination spa in Tucson, Ariz., guests receive a ‘seed bomb,’ a compressed bundle of soil containing seeds which they are encouraged to plant during their stay to create a flowering landscape and help them shift into a more mindful state.

