



How Luxury Meeting Trends Affect DMO Sales Teams

Source: Skift's Report "Beyond the Ballroom: Rethinking Luxury Experiences in the Meetings Industry"

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With 10 years of DMO experience as an Interim President & CEO, Deputy Director and Vice President of Marketing for various DMOs, Mya uses her expertise to shape marketing strategies & solutions for the agency's roster of clients. Oh and by the way, she likes to share those meetings marketing strategies while presenting at industry conferences.

Look her up!

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Luxury meetings and experiences (and, moreover, customized experiences for groups) are growing in popularity and being used to differentiate meetings and events from one another. Skift recently published a report on luxury experiences in the meetings industry, which really shows how all events are moving to become more experiential, customized and unique to show attendees relevance and to capture their engagement. Creating these types of unique experiences is even more of a necessity when planners are trying to reach and engage the C-suite.

While luxury experiences typically conjure up images of incentive programs rather than meetings, times have changed. It's more and more imperative for all events to offer high-level attendees something special when they attend meetings.

“When it comes to imparting adult education, experiential applications are much more effective than more traditional meeting strategies,” said Tonya Almond, Vice President Knowledge and Experience for Professional Convention Management Association in the Skift report.

The challenge for meeting planners and host organizations is to create unusual, memorable experiences for top-level participants that make the event buzzworthy and likely to earn repeat attendance.

Read along as we break down this industry report and show you how it applies to destination marketing organizations. By knowing and understanding the trends that affect planners, group sales teams can serve planners better and showcase how they are destination experts that they need.

How to Help Planners Make Their Meetings Memorable!

More and more attendees are looking to get out of the standard ballroom and enjoy unique and exciting experiences during the meeting. Providing more experiential events drives attendee engagement. This is the cornerstone of all meetings, and DMOs can help planners achieve this goal.

Experiential learning also drives better engagement and networking. Skift states, “Networking is the second most important reason people attend a conference, and shared experiences give people something to talk about.”



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So what can DMOs do to *help planners create experiential learning and activities?*

- Start discussing with your hotel sales teams what experiential offerings they have and catalog the options.
- When possible, ask your hotel partners to take photos from previous events to use when marketing your destination.
- Reach out to your local attractions and unique venues to identify what experiential offerings they have and make a note of the options.
- Have your partnership team members get involved as they may know of cool offerings that have occurred in the past and can help work with the attractions to create ideas and opportunities.
- Most likely, your partnership team will have a list of unique destination products such as locally made items. These locally made items are great opportunities for experiential activities for groups. Create a catalog of these options and include photos and videos as much as possible.
- Once you have noted the offerings, develop a marketing and sales plan for getting the experiential offerings in front of planners. Make sure your sales team is armed with these offerings and that your marketing team communicates these options to planners effectively.

“Shared experiences give people something to talk about versus standing around at a cocktail reception with no opportunity for engagement,”
said Karen Kotowski, President and CEO of the Events Industry Council in the report.



“The luxury of today is more about ***personalized, intimate experiences*** that deliver on ***social bragging rights.***”

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Luxury is being redefined today, as the younger generations don't identify with the ornate and elaborate. The luxury of today is more about personalized, intimate experiences that deliver on social bragging rights. Think about how your destination can help planners events be Instagrammable.

Here are some examples of experiential offerings by destinations:

- Experience Grand Rapids offers cooking classes with Local Epicurean and the Secchia Institute for Culinary Education to give attendees a taste of the city.
- Visit Park City offers custom experiences at Utah Olympic Park where attendees can feel like an Olympian for the day.
- Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau offers food walks with private culinary tours and City Hunt scavenger tours.
- Tahoe South offers wilderness survival courses with Tahoe Jack's Adventure Authority.

Keep in mind every destination has something unique and special to offer. Identify yours and get the word out to planners! Group sales today is truly going beyond the conversations of space, dates and rates.





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"The whitepaper has been downloaded by planners around the country so many times, it has quickly become one of the most popular meeting planning tools the organization has ever issued."

– Visit Park City press release issued in April 2019



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Wellness Is Key to Meeting Agendas Today

AMEX's 2018 Global Meetings and Event Forecast stated, "Several meeting professional and suppliers indicate that wellness is an emerging trend to watch. Enhancing the attendee experience includes contributing to attendee wellness, and increasing numbers of companies and their meeting owners are looking to appeal to attendees wellbeing throughout meetings and events."

This is truly driven by the consumer wellness trends that make athleisure and wellness activities huge businesses. According to the Skift report, "We need to be in a good state of physical, mental and emotional wellness to bring creativity, innovation, perception, intuitiveness and adaptability today's work requires."

Visit Park City, a Digital Edge client for four years, recognizes the importance of wellness offerings on its meetings and events. To showcase this to planners, the CVB engaged Digital Edge to develop a **whitepaper** to highlight the importance of wellness offerings to meetings and showcase how the destination achieves the right balance of offerings for planners. The whitepaper is downloadable on the CVB's site and has a marketing plan to drive reach and engagement with the content across devices, platforms and touchpoints.

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“Any time you’re in a wellness place, your heart opens up more to talking with your co-workers [or fellow meeting goers] differently and outside the normal business realm,”

said Deidre Strunk, Executive Spa Director for Canyon Ranch Spa in the Skift report.



TIP:

Most likely, your destination can appeal to wellness offerings for planners too. This may require bringing wellness providers and your hoteliers together to develop relationships, business practices and identify opportunities to grow this segment for groups. **This can be as simple as offering wellness drinks at cocktail receptions** or meditation moments before sessions begin and helping planners create better menu options.

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Cooking Up Culinary Experiences at Meetings

Buh-bye, banquet chicken. Attendees want better food options at meetings and events. With the increased popularity of food-focused television and films and the rise of celebrity chefs, there's an increased interest in where our food comes from, how it's prepared, how it's served and by which celebrity chef, cited Skift. Food is definitely a key make-or-break item for meetings.

Some groups go on shopping expeditions with chefs, concluding with attendees taking part or witnessing the meal preparation. Others experience cooking competitions or meet-and-greets with celebrity chefs.

Creating memorable food experiences that lead to social moments drives attendees' engagement and helps create repeat attendance. DMOs can help showcase to planners that the culinary offerings will meet expectations and become an engagement opportunity.



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Some Tips for DMOs to Create Awareness Around Culinary Offerings:

- Catalog options the hotels allow for engagement with celebrity chefs, local chefs and/or culinary experiences.
- Identify food-oriented festivals planners can host meetings before/during/after.
- Work with celebrity chefs and local, well-known chefs to create group offerings that are truly unique to your destination for groups.
- Showcase your culinary offerings at client events, FAMs and/or sponsored events.
- Ensure you have a marketing plan for your culinary offerings to reach and engage planners at a deeper level.

A large crowd of people is shown at a night event, with many string lights visible in the background. The crowd is diverse in age and appearance, and many people have their arms raised, suggesting a lively atmosphere. The background is dark, with the string lights providing a warm, bokeh effect.

“Music is Also a Powerful Tool for Meeting Hosts and Brands Looking to Create an Experience,”

said event organizer Jessica Abel, Senior Director, Growth & Development for G7 Entertainment Marketing in the Skift report.

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Live Entertainment & Learning: **Giving Attendees a Story to Remember**

Live events create more emotionally engaged attendees that are open to new ideas, according to a Live Nation white paper entitled “The Power of Live.” Every destination has access to some type of live music or entertainment option for groups to utilize.

TIP:

DMOs often pull together entertainment options for groups by showcasing how close the options are to the convention package. But, another opportunity to help groups engage live entertainment options would be to develop partnerships with entertainment venues, producers and musicians.

Skift’s report points out how some DMOs create relationships with universities and performing arts programs to develop affordable entertainment options for meeting planners. Tying the meeting to local cultural organizations helps drive more engagement with the attendees and gives them a feeling that they truly engaged with the destination beyond the ballroom.

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How DMOs Can Engage Cultural Organizations for Groups:

- Many cultural organizations in destinations want to be engaged with tourism to help grow their brand and revenue opportunities. Educating your organizations on how to work with groups will help support them and drive more value for planners.
- Cultural organizations can do more than host performances for groups. Training them on how to create unique offerings for groups to choose from such as artist talks, behind the scenes tours and invitations to rehearsals with the opportunity to engage with groups.

As Skift's report details in further examples, meeting planners are looking for more ways to include luxury experiences that will offer attendees "once in a lifetime" and "money can't buy them" moments. This is a great opportunity for DMOs to prepare ways to address these needs and provide planners with the resources to pull off these types of experiences for their groups fluidly and easily.

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