ONE THING THAT NEVER CHANGES IS CHANGE ITSELF.

We all get it—change is constant. Without question, our reaction to omni-present change can be used as an advantage, or it can become a personal and organizational liability. This year’s “What’s Trending” highlights changes and trends we see happening in our industry, details how each region is being affected and gives you clear suggestions for how to tackle them in your organization.

Please read on to learn how the attendee journey is no longer focused on just the event but true end-to-end experiences. Discover how commission reductions are challenging strategic meetings management programs. And, finally, learn why digitizing meeting and event services is shaping the strategies and investments of the future.

At BCD M&E, we’ve openly embraced change for years, determined to grow our family; offer our customers new, cost-effective solutions; and provide new opportunities for our employees. We hope the insight and clear takeaways throughout this report help you adjust and plan for the ever-present change in our collective M&E world.

From my perspective, you either truly embrace day-to-day change, or it will chew you up and spit you out! So, settle into your chair and read on find out “What’s Trending” in our world.

Scott Graf
Global President
BCD Meetings & Events

**NORTH AMERICA**

**AMANDA RAGAN** — Coordinator, Center for Operational & Resource Excellence
Sits in: Chicago
Focus: Employee development
Insights: We know employee engagement is key to building loyal brand ambassadors. We want to leverage the natural curiosity of each employee and continue to build their connection with our brand. Our employees are busy with day-to-day responsibilities, so we find creative ways to grow and develop their skillsets so they can surpass the needs of our customers. We offer learning experiences through in-person, virtual, micro-learning and self-administered training opportunities to help foster that connection and development. Additionally, connection and shared best practices between our senior leaders, new hires, existing employees and internal subject matter experts are tremendous assets that help drive our continuous improvement. Companies across industries continue nurturing connections between employees and their brand to drive business forward.

**LATIN AMERICA**

**JASIM GONZALEZ** — Manager, Operations
Sits in: Mexico City
Focus: Crisis management
Insights: We have seen a renewed focus on crisis management in Mexico. The 2017 Mexico City earthquake put preparation by corporate planners—as well as vendors such as hotels and transportation companies—in the spotlight. For us, communication between managers and those running programs on-site was key to our response. We had to take quick, defined action and coordinate efforts to ensure the safe status of all delegates. When you trust the strong process you have in place, you are more efficient. Crisis management will always be a focus, but I expect the high level of oversight to carry into 2019.

**ASIA PACIFIC**

**CAROL LUAN** — Director, Greater China
Sits in: Shanghai
Focus: China
Insights: Over the last 10 years, a booming economy has encouraged the Chinese government to re-invest in the country’s infrastructure; as such, we continue to see increased MICE (M&E) business both inside China and abroad. Hotels, venues, transportation and service-related industries are continuing to expand to meet international standards. With incentives from hotels for group bookings from abroad, we predict further growth. The unique contrast between centuries of history and civilization alongside bustling metro areas provide experiences that suit both incentive travelers and meetings. We are seeing a continued demand for bilingual professionals and, with costs for services being a fraction of what they are in the U.S. and across Europe, I think China’s MICE industry will enjoy growth in the coming year.

**EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA**

**TOM LAMBREGTS** — Marketing Manager, UK
Sits in: Putney, UK
Focus: Sustainability
Insights: There is a strong demand for sustainability from customers at the moment, especially around catering and reducing waste. It’s a direct reaction to increased awareness of ocean pollution, which is an issue that won’t go away. The avoidance of single-use plastics almost seems obvious now. Straws, single-use cups and other plastic crockery are all items we are conscious of eliminating from our customers’ events, and we need to work with suppliers to offer them alternative, sustainable solutions.
TOMORROW’S FORECAST IS...

CURRENT SITUATION

Supply of meeting space is growing fast in Asia—even faster than the healthy rise in demand. There are some exceptions where demand is rising faster: Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and most of India. But more generally, power is shifting back to buyers, allowing them to negotiate better rates and terms and some complimentary extras. Very short lead times remain a major challenge in China and India. Suppliers are accustomed to accepting reservations at short notice, but a short lead time increases the risk of disappointment in under-supplied cities like Singapore and Hong Kong.

Insufficient hotel supply is a major problem when planning a meeting in Sydney and across New Zealand. It means already high rates will increase sharply again in 2019.

New meetings space has opened in Auckland, and more is on the way, including the New Zealand International Convention Centre, which will open in 2020. The extra visitors that the convention center attracts will put even more pressure on the city’s overstretched bed supply.

In Australia, Sydney’s sky-high rates make other destinations well worth considering. Alternatives include Melbourne or, for even bigger savings, Perth or Hobart.

OUTLOOK FOR 2019

Demand will stay strong into 2019, but more meeting space will open too, so there will be little change in pricing. Look out for alternative destinations taking off, such as Mongolia. Both Marriott and AccorHotels have grown significantly in Asia through acquisition and organic expansion, and there could be opportunities for buyers as these two companies look to fill rooms across their Asian networks. Hotels are unlikely to follow the lead taken in the U.S. of reducing agency commission for meetings.

It’s worth watching closely to see how the 2019 Rugby World Cup affects Japan, as it will also host the 2020 Summer Olympics. At the moment, rates are sky-high in Japan, but if the hotels have over-estimated demand, lower prices may become available at short notice.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work with your meetings agency to enhance your events and make them memorable.
- Increase your production budget by selecting a destination closer to home and spending less on food and beverages.
- Consider multi-year deals with hotels to drive better deals.
TOMORROW’S FORECAST IS...

CURRENT SITUATION

Meetings demand is strong across Europe, especially in Germany, and prices are rising.

Lead times for bookings are getting shorter. For example, the typical lead time for larger events in the U.K. has reduced from 18-24 months to 12 months, while smaller meetings in France are now usually organized only four to six weeks ahead.

At the same time, customers are looking to introduce more creative meeting formats, which need additional time to plan and source. As a result, there can be challenges putting together a high-quality event at short notice.

Budget holders have become increasingly reluctant to disclose their budgets at the start of the sourcing process, because they fear the venue will simply match the budget they are given. But this means buyers often find that, once costed, their initial brief is way over budget. By the time a more realistic, scaled-back version has been finalized, the lead time has shortened even further.

Buyers also need to think about moving meetings out of hotels into stand-alone venues. Many new hotels in Europe are in lower tiers, and they offer little or no meeting space. Meetings organizers looking for something different are being attracted by a wide range of former industrial properties being converted into high-end corporate event venues.

The trend away from hotel-based meetings means more work for meetings planners, as they now have to source both the meeting venue and the accommodation. Companies do not always appreciate how much additional time is needed.

Creating more imaginative productions in alternative venues can also increase the cost of a meeting; another thing not always accounted for. Splitting the meeting venue and accommodation can also push up the final cost. However, companies are increasingly involving their procurement departments in contracting, especially for routine smaller meetings. Procurement is leading a move towards e-auctions with suppliers.

OUTLOOK FOR 2019

Prices are certain to increase in 2019, unless demand is derailed by Brexit, disruption to trade or some other crisis. Increased political uncertainty will drive customers to demand more flexible cancellation and attrition (the number of booked attendees who drop out) conditions – but venues might reject buyers who insist on too much flexibility.

Customers will respond to increased rates by asking for complimentary extras.

European hotels may follow the lead of the big chains in North America by cutting commission to agents. If this happens, expect even more of a shift to the growing portfolio of non-hotel venues.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Be more creative about your venue choices. There are more options every year.
- Allow more time to plan meetings so you can deliver a top-class production.
- Consider multi-year event deals where you use the same hotel chain but in a different property each year.
- Ask your meetings intermediary if it has negotiated any multi-location contracts you can participate in.
- Continue to explore new destinations, which can be excellent value. And, prepare to be flexible on date and location.

This information is from the 2019 BCD Travel Industry Forecast. Click here to read the full report.

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TOMORROW’S FORECAST IS...

CURRENT SITUATION

Demand for meetings is increasing across Latin America. But in some cases, meeting organizers are having to manage with smaller budgets and are trading down to lower-tier accommodation.

The U.S. has become less popular as a meetings destination, with events increasingly remaining in Latin America. São Paulo has some of the best conference facilities in the region and will continue to attract more business in 2019. Also growing in popularity are all-inclusive resorts in Caribbean destinations such as the Dominican Republic, Cancun and Cartagena.

Average lead times for meetings planned in countries like Argentina are even shorter than in other parts of the world. One month’s notice or less is typical, mainly because budget-holders wait to the last minute to see whether they have enough money to fund the meeting. Meeting prices are climbing sharply in Argentina because of the devaluation of the local currency.

In Mexico, bookings started to improve in 2018 after slipping in 2017 because of weaker demand from the U.S., its biggest source market. However, uncertainty around the Mexican presidential election and the future of NAFTA have also seen companies put some meeting plans on hold. Mexican companies have been switching their business to local or regional brands to avoid paying in U.S. dollars because of the weakness of the peso.

OUTLOOK FOR 2019

For Mexico, what happens in 2019 will depend greatly on how business-friendly new president Andrés Manuel López Obrador proves to be. But early signs are promising, and underlying demand is strong, so bookings, and therefore rates, are likely to rise.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work with your corporate planning company to drive the best deals in an increasingly complex travel market and look for alternative airports if using airlines flying expensive monopoly routes.
- Ensure your online hotel booking platform includes all the independent hotel properties your attendees are looking for; tech-savvy millennial travelers in particular will accept nothing less.
- Be sure to follow up with attendees throughout the registration process and automate your pre and on-site communications.
- Take advantage of the new lower fares for air coming into the marketplace, but only if the restrictions don’t conflict with your attendee’s needs.
- Leverage your M&E partner to navigate short lead times and negotiations, as budget-holders wait until the last minute to confirm funding.
TOMORROW’S FORECAST IS...

CURRENT SITUATION

Booming meetings demand shows no sign of ending. Fewer bookings from outside the U.S. have been more than offset by an increase in domestic business. Availability has become a major challenge, especially as fewer newly built hotels include substantial meeting space.

Rising demand with little new meeting space supply is a serious structural problem that’s driving changes in buyer behavior. Meetings are becoming shorter, often for one day only. Non-hotel meeting venues are more popular, while hotels are converting lobbies and other areas into alternative event spaces to capitalize on the new trends.

The availability problem can be exacerbated by ineffective communication between hoteliers and buyers, making it difficult to coordinate dates, space and value to the mutual benefit of both parties, especially for meetings required at short notice. As hotel revenue management becomes more sophisticated, buyers have also found it difficult to book larger meetings in convention cities like Las Vegas. Venues are delaying booking confirmation until they are confident the meeting will deliver the level of profitability they are looking for.

Meeting costs have increased by 2% to 5% percent in 2018. Room rates have risen steadily, while food and beverage prices have climbed even faster. Hotels have also moved service charges and fees up from 20% to 23% to around 23% to 26% and are introducing more ancillary fees. Some venues also charge “resort fees,” covering items like pool service, gym access and parking. Normally, buyers negotiate a waiver for these fees, but that’s becoming harder.

Canada has successfully attracted overseas bookings away from the U.S. by promoting itself as a more welcoming destination. Domestic demand is also strong. There has been some new meeting supply in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Rates have risen but the favorable exchange rate has ensured prices remain reasonable for international customers.

OUTLOOK FOR 2019

Irrepressible domestic demand will continue to make up for a continuing fall in bookings from outside the U.S. There won’t be any great improvement in the supply of large meeting spaces, but new properties will help in a number of markets, including Atlanta, GA; Austin, Dallas and Houston, TX; Boston, MA; Cleveland, OH; Denver, CO; Kansas City and St. Louis, MO; Los Angeles, CA; Louisville, KY; Nashville, TN; and New York City.

Hotels are also re-investing in existing properties, upgrading them to accommodate new meetings trends. Some chains are diversifying into sports and wellness, or offering unique venues, as AccorHotels is now doing after acquiring 21C Museum.

Some corporate customers may hold more meetings for shorter periods of time. Rates will rise at a similar level to 2018: 2% to 5%.

Canada will continue to see strong domestic demand, augmented by overseas bookings. This will ensure that rates keep increasing during 2019.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work with stakeholders in your organization to better understand their meeting plans in order to leverage spend.
- Don’t delay your decision or contract signing, as space is often allocated on a first come, first served basis.
- If booking at short notice, be flexible on location, dates and pattern. It will enable you to take advantage of short-term opportunities.
- Book multiple events with the same hotel or chain to drive better savings.
- Keep an eye on hotels inserting extra costs and fees into contracts.

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WHAT’S TRENDING?

DIGITIZATION
ACCELERATING VALUE

Technology can and should be driving business decisions and attendee behavior. That’s something that has been resonating for quite some time, yet no one is using technology to its full potential—yet.

An evolution is happening in meetings and events. Attendee behaviors are being tracked, and user activity is becoming key to understanding the true value of a single program or overarching management of programs long term. There are many aspects of technology that can simplify and streamline programs; however, it’s important for meeting managers to hone in on focus areas that will drive the most value for their organization.

Data is a major component, because data answers questions. The more insight you have as it relates to your program, the more successful you will be in accomplishing the program’s objectives. Having a firm grasp on your end goal helps you determine what information you should be collecting.

Digitization also liberates planning teams from tactical management tasks so there’s more time to focus on creative content creation. The bottom line: Digitizing across an event or program allows you to elevate your thinking and your position in the company, and to start seeing ways to connect the dots on progressing the business.

Sourcing Made Simple
Need help digitizing site selection? Simple Meetings is a new self-service tool for companies allowing any end user to plan an event that falls within set parameters (number of attendees, spend, type of space, etc.)—and makes tracking a cinch.

Automating Expenses
If you’ve been wishing for a solution to the headache of reimbursing non-employee expenses, look no further. MeetingSource Expense simplifies the process, automating non-employee expenses and saving you precious time.

Transforming Data Privacy
The more you digitize services, the more you must be aware of the personal data you’re collecting. Learn how GDPR affects you and consider its implications as you map out your digitization strategy.
WHAT YOU CAN DO

Before digitizing any part of your event, ask yourself these questions:

• What business objectives do I want to focus on?
• At what level do I want to tackle this (single event, or enterprise program)?
• What behaviors am I trying to change and/or better understand?
• What data points do I need to track to do so?
• Who is my user group and what are their needs?

DIGITIZATION
REGIONAL INSIGHTS

ASIA PACIFIC

With digital initiatives growing rapidly throughout the region, Asia Pacific is very receptive to digitizing meetings as well. Teams are discovering the opportunity that data offers to transform their products, services and strategies, and are implementing tools to automate processes, boost productivity, reduce costs, and roll out new products and services. However, the sheer size, diversity and complexity of this region imply there is no one-size-fits-all solution for digitizing meetings here. Companies in some markets have begun testing tools for attendee management (online registration, RFID tracking) to meeting management (apps, polling).

Concerns over data privacy and security remain high in light of multiple high-profile data breaches. The region also faces challenges with a lack of cohesive regulation among markets and a general weakness (or absence, in some markets) of regional cybersecurity infrastructures.

NORTH AMERICA

Interest in digitizing services is high, with a focus on automating as much as possible within the planning process. Sophisticated on-site engagement products that delight attendees and create an overall fantastic experience are becoming more in demand (think apps, live surveys and augmented virtual reality); yet meeting managers must take care to implement the right tool set. You don’t want to incorporate eight different technologies for one event, cross-pollinating what could have been handled in two or three, for example. Meeting managers are focused on using technology as a bridge to balance positive user experience with the objectives of their organizations.

EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA

Digitization has become an expectation, and therefore, a necessity for strategic planners in this region. As such, unprecedented interest in digital solutions extends to real-time networking and engagement tools, like social media wall projections, audience voting on what happens next and live donations to charitable causes. Interest in mapping and using data to influence trends and future events is increasing, as is focus on digital networking—think smart LED wearables that allow for truer attendee interaction. Tactical tasks like ticketing are being digitized, yet above all, the focus here is on building real connections, tracking results and using them to shape future events.

LATIN AMERICA

While the region is receptive to digitization as part of meetings strategy, it faces challenges like a technology gap and language and pricing barriers, so the adoption process has been slower. One area that’s been picking up speed, however, is automated pre and on-site communication with attendees. Planner activity processes going online, digital document signage, attendee and luggage tracking, and attendee feedback tracking are also on the rise. From a data security standpoint, Latin America has struggled to integrate global and national compliance, but the region is making progress.
WHAT’S TRENDING?

THE ATTENDEE JOURNEY
CONNECT EARLY, CONNECT CREATIVELY

Event experience design is about intentionally addressing every element of your event and aligning those experiences with your attendees. When we reframe the event design process by keeping the audience top of mind, the results can have myriad benefits—not only for a specific event, but for your overarching program and organization.

Rather than breaking an event into independent steps—registration, education, celebration, general sessions, networking, etc.—solution designers and meeting managers must first take a bird’s-eye view of the overall experience they want to create for attendees. That means kicking off a multi-phased process. Start by assessing business goals, determining your key messaging and identifying the story you want to tell. From there, begin to tell that story and curate that communication to your audience. Deliver content in ways your audience prefers to consume information. An event—be it an incentive, a meeting, conference or trade show—should never start at the door; it begins in the hallway. Kick off the experience with a comprehensive pre-event engagement strategy. By beginning a conversation with each potential attendee early in the process, you earn the opportunity to shape your programs based on their needs and desires, and to take your attendees on a journey that will resonate with them and shape their behavior.

Thanks to technology, we can now track what event participants are paying attention to, and engaging (or not engaging) with, at every step along the attendee journey. Data is key to understanding the pain points and motivators of an audience on various levels. No longer is it solely about getting attendees to your event; it’s about understanding their “why” for being there and delivering on the outcomes they’re looking for in advance of the event itself.

If the lead-up is inspiring, creative and thought provoking, imagine the anticipation you can build and deliver on at the actual event, and beyond.

To learn how each region is maximizing the attendee journey, read on.

Sourcing for Success

The first steps in sourcing—whether it be for the destination, venues, activities, technology, gifts, transportation or something else—are to determine your business objectives and understand your audience. These two fundamental considerations should drive your sourcing process (rather than the other way around) to maximize their impact on your attendee journey.
WHAT YOU CAN DO

As you look to drive greater engagement through the attendee journey, ask yourself these questions in your planning process:

- Who is my audience?
- How do they consume information?
- What drives their decision making?
- What outcomes do they want to get from this event experience?
- How can I incentivize them to become part of the process?
- What moments of epiphany can I incorporate into the journey?
- Where are the opportunities to stay connected post-program?
WHAT’S TRENDING?

FUTURE FUNDING FOR SMM
DIVERSIFICATION IS THE KEY

Containing costs, driving savings, mitigating risk, ensuring compliance with industry regulations and, most recently, a renewed focus on producing quality events are essential elements of a strategic meetings management (SMM) program. Meeting managers must be able to drive high attendee engagement and satisfaction and, in turn, measure those items to demonstrate event-specific return on investment.

At an enterprise level, funding a SMM program requires thoughtful deliberation, planning and buy-in from finance and key stakeholders to be successful. However, increasingly, shifts in funding resources are drawing concern from both meeting managers and program owners, particularly in regions where funding has been affected by commission cuts.

Stakeholder Engagement
Support from senior leaders and executive sponsors is critical in ensuring the success of an SMM program. Additionally, look to engage your organization’s legal, finance and security teams to become program advocates—SMM brings inherent benefits to each of those departments as well.

Learn how this trend is impacting each region on the next page.
Latin America

Most companies in this region have typically either paid a management fee that is a percentage of the total event cost for meetings services, or a fee per participant. While this is still generally true, meeting managers are now looking for more creative ways to offset costs from their own budgets. In parts of Latin America, commissions are common and range from 7% to 15% percent, though some hotels have begun to quote net rates more often. Major changes in the funding structure for SMM programs in Latin America are likely a few years away—and that's good news, as it provides emerging SMM funding options while stakeholders are still learning the benefits a SMM can offer.

Asia Pacific

There is no standard approach to commissions across this region. Additionally, most meetings are managed very locally (as an expansion to an existing program). With a high proportion of meetings with no accommodations, Asia Pacific has reduced commission opportunities compared to the rest of the world; therefore, centralized funding methods have been more traditional. As managed programs develop and visibility into behaviors and spend transparency improve, there could be an opportunity for commissions to play a larger role in higher use of commission for funding in the future. However, this is likely a longer-term development a long way off and utilizing hybrid funding models could prove to be the better option in the long run.

Europe, Middle East, Africa

Payment models vary here, and it is important to consider the markets involved as well as local sensitivities when determining which is best for your organization. Some organizations prefer to work with a pay-as-you-go model, primarily in situations where volume and commitment to fund a program are not clear; others with a heavy travel program rely on a transactional fee structure; in programs with little travel, hourly fees can be more successful. In the region, funding models tend to be highly customized with few organizations opting for a dedicated model when it comes to funding SMM programs.

Commission funded models have come into the picture in the last several years (though they have been used for many years in the UK), particularly for venue sourcing only programs. However, organizations adopting this model have faced roadblocks due to adherence along with volumes and size/scale of meetings. One of the struggles in moving toward a point-of-sale fee has been resistance from stakeholders, who have been accustomed to not paying a fee with models using commission.

Overall, challenges exist as well with blended funding models, which take time to realize their full benefit. Meeting managers may find greater success adopting local pricing methodologies in their local market such as implementing smaller dedicated teams with scalable resources to flex up or down as necessary. On a positive note, commission cuts affecting North America are not expected to be implemented in this region in the immediate future.

North America

In North America, Marriott International was the first to reduce commissions from 10% to 7% percent in spring 2018, with Hilton Worldwide and InterContinental Hotels Group following shortly thereafter. These announcements will impact SMM programs going forward, as the cost of such programs has long been offset by hotel room night commissions (though for more mature SMM programs, commissions usually are not the only funding source).

Historically, U.S.-managed programs have seen a mix of centralized funding, business unit or department charge-backs and commission-based funding (at least for sourcing services). Diversification is a trend that will continue as commissions become less dependable.

To get ahead, consider dynamic, diversified funding streams that allow for flexibility and scaling with regard to a program’s size, geography, complexity and scope of services. Additionally, determine where your services provide value and where you can incorporate enhanced solutions to reduce cost while maintaining governance, control and strategy for your SMM program.

Future Funding for SMM: Regional Insights

What You Can Do

As you look towards the future of your SMM program, consider these points:

- Take a close look at your own program’s funding model and rate the vulnerability of its funding sources. Consider your options to diversify funding sources and models, should the need arise.
- Continue to engage stakeholders at all levels. Understand their needs and be open to flexibility when it comes to local market service models.
- Garner advocacy through results. Various internal departments benefit from the work performed by a SMM. Those benefits usually extend beyond the financials. Look to measure and promote those benefits in a manner that resonates with your corporate culture.
INSPIRE ME

TRY THIS

Every event planner, meeting owner and sales or marketing team leader wants their attendees to walk away with an experience they’ll never forget. Connectivity should be at the core of this experience, so why not weave the emotionally charged world of sports into the equation? Here are five ideas to inspire you.

Family Affair
Change up how you attract customers by planning a weekend around a bucket-list sporting event, such as the Kentucky Derby, and allow them to invite their spouse.

Take a Swing
Opt for a course correction by switching up the typical golf outing experience. Consider incorporating new formats (experienced golfers hit drives; amateurs putt) and players (invite a local celebrity or divide company executives up among teams) to make it enjoyable for all skill levels.

Less is More
Keeping your attendee list smaller and more exclusive creates a better environment for connectivity; think 10 or 20 guests.

Speaking Out
Invite a sports-related speaker who can offer relatable perspective on overcoming adversity.

Rethink Meetings
Rather than taking a client to dinner, take them to a game. The vibrant, lively atmosphere helps foster a different, deeper connection than sitting at a table in a fancy restaurant.

DIGITIZATION

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FUTURE FUNDING FOR SMM

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• Take a close look at your own program’s funding model and rate the vulnerability of its funding sources. Consider your options to diversify funding sources and models, should the need arise.
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• Garner advocacy through results. Various internal departments benefit from the work performed by a SMM. Those benefits usually extend beyond the financials. Look to measure and promote those benefits in a manner that resonates with your corporate culture.

Print this page as a reminder and for inspiration as you plan your 2019 programs.
Canada offers exceptional destination value alongside chic, safe and easy-to-access cities from coast to coast. The country’s cohesive, supportive hospitality networks are pioneering a new era of tourism. The most eclectic of Canada’s cities, Montreal, is an island metropolis boasting global diversity. Known for its French influence and charm, Montreal has developed a distinguished cultural presence in the world, offering a vibrant arts-and-culture scene, excellent cuisine, an active nightlife, world-class museums and bustling marketplaces year-round. Although highly walkable, Montreal has an expansive public transportation system that is convenient and easy to navigate, even during the winter months. RÉSO—an underground, climate-controlled network of interconnected hotels, shopping centers, convention halls and universities—is a particularly useful way to avoid walking in the cold.

Brazil is a country with stunning natural scenery, an eclectic culture and multiple cities that attract groups for meetings and events. A perfect example is Rio de Janeiro. Located within the city of Rio, Barra da Tijuca is considered one of the most economically significant regions of the city. The trendy neighborhood was part of Brazil that hosted the 2016 Olympic Games, which accelerated its growth in infrastructure and further modernized the area—including connecting it with the rest of the city via subway. With a wide range of hotels, restaurants, bars, shopping malls, entertainment space and natural resources where beach, lagoons and mountains meet, it is a perfect meeting or event destination. Riocentro, considered one of the best convention centers in the world, is more than 500,000 square meters in size and contains four pavilions and a convention center, along with a hotel and amphitheater.

In Japan, ancient tradition and modern lifestyle blend together in a way few other places in the world can offer. Culture, food, architecture and nature will inspire visitors, and with nearly all major airlines and airports offering flights to Japan, it’s an easily accessible destination. Once there, the speed rail provides a unique and fast way to get from city to city, allowing groups to travel within the country easily. In the world-renowned city of Tokyo, find a beautiful mix of tradition and nature. Make your way through diverse neighborhoods of Shibuya or Harakuju; take a stroll to the Imperial Palace and walk through the many city gardens; and stick around until nightfall to experience the vibrant street life. With the 2020 Olympics and 2019 Rugby World Cup coming to Tokyo, the city is seeing a surge of preparations in traffic movement, supplementary accommodation and opportunities to make the city even more of an accessible destination. The island of Hakkaido is a great add-on to a visit to Tokyo. Offering hot springs, fruit farms and canal cruises, it’s a relaxing respite from the bustling city.

Located in an often-overlooked corner of Europe, Slovenia boasts a picturesque landscape, a rich history and a beautiful coastline, in addition to modern infrastructure and a prospering economy. Its landscape is dotted with flower-filled meadows, crystal-clear lakes and rivers, caves and fairytale castles—without the hordes of tourists found in other European destinations. The capital, Ljubljana, is relaxed and attractive, with minimal traffic, abundant culture and welcoming locals. The sunny coast of the Adriatic Sea provides a pristine background for an incentive program, with high-end hotels such as the Kempinski Palace Portoroz and new thermal baths for luxury and relaxation.
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