



# BEYOND THE BALLROOM: RETHINKING LUXURY EXPERIENCES IN MEETINGS

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Presented by

**Skift.**

+

**VENETIAN MEETINGS**  
— LAS VEGAS —

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## ABOUT SKIFT

Skift is a travel intelligence company that offers news, data, and services to professionals in travel and professional travelers, to help them make smart decisions about travel.

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# Enlighten Up



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# EXECUTIVE LETTER

## A Growing Appetite for Luxury Experiences

We are very excited about the trend Skift has chosen to focus on in this report: the introduction of luxury experiences into the meetings space. This trend is of particular interest to us because it aligns perfectly with our brand and our strategic focus.

Because The Venetian Resort Las Vegas is a luxury resort, we already offer many exceptional experiences to our guests. Therefore, it's natural for us to leverage and customize those experiences as part of our group offering. Experiences available to our meeting customers go beyond concerts and celebrity "meet and greets" – we are continually adding innovative experiences such as sushi-rolling classes, mixology sessions, and outdoor excursions. These experiences are a great way to energize conferences, encourage out-of-the-box thinking, and create connections among attendees.

We always work in partnership with meeting planners to understand their objectives, making sure that the experiences we design together have a positive impact and inspire them to return to The Venetian Resort year after year.

We hope the findings and conclusions in this report will inspire you to add luxury experiences to your event programs.



Chandra Allison  
Senior Vice President, Sales  
The Venetian Resort Las Vegas  
[Venetianmeetings.com](http://Venetianmeetings.com)

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chandra'.



# INTRODUCTION



Rosina at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas

In the world of group business, the term “luxury experiences” likely conjures up images of incentive programs rather than meetings. For the former type of event, where top performers receive rewards and recognition, planners strive to dazzle attendees and create unique experiences, ideally forging memories that will last a lifetime.

The latter type of events are usually all business and focused on learning, networking, and creating return on investment for an organization. Until now, those have been the only goals of the meeting host and the expectations of attendees, including board members, C-suite executives, and other VIPs.

But times have changed. People are busier than ever, making the competition for their time and dollars super stiff, especially at the upper reaches of organizations. In short, it’s become imperative to give folks from the corner office and other high-level attendees something special when they come to meetings.

"Luxury, in the form of experiences, has become a driver at all levels of face-to-face events," said Karen Kotowski, president and CEO, Events Industry Council. "More meetings are incorporating experiences as a way to help promote a destination, their other partners, and to enhance learning because it's how people are choosing to learn, network, and engage."

And 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, Professional Convention Management Association.

"Learning takes place from your peers and by getting other perspectives," she said. "There's more retention from experiential learning than when there's just a talking head. Experiential events achieve that 'wow factor' because they're more effective modes of learning than more traditional meetings."

Luxury experiences also can lead participants to think in new ways, suggested "The Luxury Evolution," a recent Skift report: "Today's high-earning consumer is interested in luxury experiences that set them apart from their peers, help them learn, facilitate their overall wellbeing, provide access to one-of-a-kind experiences, or enable them to achieve their dreams."

Considering the possibilities for such impactful events, meetings with luxury elements should include experiences that attendees likely wouldn't seek out on their own, either because of budget, fears, time constraints, or the logistics of arranging the activity.

"Our clients are seeking more unique solutions and 'bucket list' experiences," said Issa Jouaneh, senior vice president and general manager of AMEX Meetings & Events. "These high-level experiences are very valued by attendee and address the concept of 'money can't buy experiences.'"

That creates a challenge for meeting planners, as well as meeting host organizations, to create unusual, memorable experiences for top level participants that make an event buzz-worthy and likely to earn repeat attendees.

This report will examine the numerous consumer trends that are making unique, memorable, and even once-in-a-lifetime experiences during a meeting a must-have in order to lure top-tier attendees. It also will reveal the retail, wellness, culinary, and entertainment experiences available for that audience, and the ROI of such offerings.



# Q&A: CHANDRA ALLISON, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES, THE VENETIAN RESORT LAS VEGAS

The Venetian Resort Las Vegas, the Sands Expo convention center, connecting more than 7,000 suites, over 30 restaurants, and 2.25 million square feet of meeting and event space. The variety of business, social, and entertainment environments aligns well with the rise in demand for more creative event spaces catering to different group segments within the same conference.

Looking ahead, the new MSG Sphere will be located behind The Venetian Resort, and is scheduled to open on New Year's Eve in 2020. The new spherical event venue will have the largest and highest-resolution LED screen in the world, spanning 170,000 square feet of display area wrapping around the inside of the building.

SkiftX spoke with Chandra Allison, senior vice president of sales at The Venetian Resort, about luxury experiences available to high-end meeting goers, and how attendees, planners, meeting host organizations, and the hotel all benefit from such offerings.



**SkiftX:** What kind of luxury entertainment experiences can be arranged for groups?

**Chandra Allison:** The Venetian Resort partners with meeting planners to create the most successful event through the lens of their customer. It's not only the meeting planners' goal to engage participants, create content for like-minded communities, and showcase their brands in compelling ways, but it's also our approach at The Venetian Resort when partnering with our group clients.

Luxury entertainment not only includes traditional concerts and meet and greets with top talent; but unique experiences such as sushi-rolling classes with noted chefs, mixology sessions, and even expanding outside the four walls of a meeting space to explore the outdoors.

**SkiftX:** Why do you think these types of experiences are valuable for a group?

**Chandra Allison:** Extraordinary experiences are valuable for groups to have because that's what attendees are seeking. Utilizing non-traditional meeting spaces and helping meeting planners create out-of-the-box alternatives puts us on the cutting edge of industry trends. These experiences are a great way to get attendees out of the traditional ballroom, breaking the routine of a conference, encouraging creativity, and connecting attendees in unique ways.

**SkiftX:** How do you think luxury experiences benefit VIP attendees, meeting sponsors, and planners?

**Chandra Allison:** It's always our intent to truly partner with meeting planners to ensure their needs are met. We want to know what important outcomes they are looking for, so we can cater our services in that regard. By doing so, we offer new and interesting ways for organizers and attendees to achieve their goals, impress their clients, network, and build relationships.

Attendees will experience a refreshed feeling of a conference by attending an event outside the traditional ballroom that touches the four senses and enhances their overall experience. For organizers, providing one-of-a-kind events helps affinity to their organization and build relationships that lead to retention in their attendance from year to year.

**SkiftX:** Why are you particularly suited to providing luxury experiences?

**Chandra Allison:** The Venetian Resort was built with meetings in mind. We're fully integrated with everything a meeting planner or attendee could need under one roof. This differentiating factor provides meeting planners with innovative options for engaging their attendees, including utilizing our retail partners for unique events.

With Grand Canal Shoppes on the second level of the resort and The Atrium at The Venetian and inside The Palazzo tower, there are a number of retail venues a meeting planner could use to attract attendees in an out-of-the-box way. We've seen groups incorporate a spouses program as well, where attendees' spouses are setup with a day of shopping and dining while their significant other is in meetings.

That's the great thing about being able to offer not only meeting space, but a myriad of other options in one place.



# HOW TO MAKE YOUR MEETINGS MEMORABLE



An Instagram-able moment created at The Venetian Resort during the 2018 Cvent CONNECT conference.

The rise of Instagram and other social media platforms, as well as the greater value being placed on gaining personal growth instead of possessions, has created a desire among high-level meeting attendees to get out of the meeting or banquet room and head toward an exciting and unique experience.

Previously, meeting planners may have been reluctant to provide top shelf experiences as they likely viewed luxury as a dirty word. This outlook stems in part from the “AIG Effect,” a chill that came over the industry in 2010 when the nation was in a recession and insurance giant American International Group spent \$440,000 on a luxury resort excursion, days after it received an \$85 billion cash infusion from Congress. The optics prompted planners to strip meetings down to their bare bones and reevaluate event needs.

“I think the term luxury may be interpreted as frivolous or excessive in the context of meetings and events,” said Jouaneh. “The focus has been on value, and not luxury experiences or resort hotels, venues, and destinations.”

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**Shared experiences give people something to talk about, versus standing around at a cocktail reception with no opportunity for engagement.**

- Karen Kotowski, president and CEO,  
Events Industry Council

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Now, as the economy continues to flourish and competition among events has increased, meeting sponsor organizations have loosened the purse strings and empowered planners to create more notable functions.

“We have seen a change in perception as meetings and events have become more focused on the attendee experience,” said Jouaneh. “We are in a highly competitive environment today as meeting organizers and stakeholders understand that attendee engagement — and business objectives — can be realized by delivering on the attendee experience.”

In fact, providing more experiential events drives attendee engagement, Jouaneh said. “By truly learning attendee preferences and objectives, and tailoring experiences to them, meeting organizers can provide the value and long-term engagement that organizations are seeking. We’re seeing a longer tail of engagement with meeting and event content, which we track through our mobile apps, when there’s a higher degree of engagement at the meeting.”

New tools available to planners today make that engagement more attainable, and increased engagement also fosters stronger loyalty for brands or other meeting host organizations, said Almond.

“Being able to use data to customize messaging, content, and experiences makes the meeting more personal and meaningful to the participant, which makes it an experience worth talking about and sharing,” she said. “That means that with enough of those touch points, attendees become ambassadors of our brand.”

Also in the ‘benefits’ column for experiential learning over more traditional learning formats is the fact that engagement drives better networking.

“Shared experiences give people something to talk about, versus standing around at a cocktail reception with no opportunity for engagement,” said Kotowski. “Networking is the second most important reason to attend a conference and I do more business that way because I can sit down and realize I have something in common, business-wise, with someone sitting nearby.”

Providing unique luxury experiences can bolster a meeting planner’s reputation, providing recognition that often isn’t bestowed on event organizers.



"The industry has been talking about elevating the profession, and when you add this focus on experience, it allows planners to demonstrate their ability to work with the supplier community and deliver more bespoke meetings," said Jouaneh. "That broader know-how shows the value of a meeting professional."

Still, figuring out what luxury experience will suit a group and drive engagement is no easy task. But it may start with understanding attendees in order to create experiences aligned with their desires, rather than serving up lavish moments. That personalization is what impresses consumers today.

"Luxury now is about customization and the personalization of reaching your audience," said Almond. "We want to surprise and delight attendees so they say, 'Wow, this caught my attention,' and they talk about the experience."

The importance of delighting attendees, given the fact that they have all that they need at their fingertips, almost can't be overstated, she continued. "We're walking around with a computer in our pocket, so everyone is now anticipating, 'how is this event going to better me? I gave up my time — personally and professionally — so how will this be relevant?'"

Adding luxury experiences also goes a long way toward making attendees feel appreciated, a sentiment that can radically enhance a meeting planner's efforts to have a lasting impact on those high-level attendees.

"Participants are going to feel invigorated by these appeals to their individual self and identity, making them feel valued," said Alex Milinazzo, trends analyst at Mintel, a market intelligence agency. "Community is formed when people are engaged in these unique, exclusive events, making groups feel superior to those who will not get to experience that."

Such experiences also enhance the connection between a meeting attendee and the meeting host organization. "Community often breeds loyalty," Milinazzo said. "These tailored experiences feel thoughtful, energetic, and gain from a sense of anticipation. In our digitally connected world, consumer attention is hard to capture so a memorable experience is crucial when fostering relationships."

Younger attendees, in particular, demand that meetings have an experiential component. "The typical definition of luxury is that it is an indulgence rather than a necessity," said OgilvyRED Consulting - Asia Pacific president Lucy McCabe in the "Luxury Travel-But Not as We Know It" report for the International Luxury Travel Market.

However, she continued, "We must redefine luxury because this generation eschews the elaborate and ornate and looks for more personalized, intimate experiences that deliver social bragging rights, which allows travelers to express their individuality. It needs to be aspirational, enviable and, above all, Instagrammable."

# MINDFUL MEETINGS: WELLNESS ENHANCES MEETING AGENDAS



Yoga at the pool at Canyon Ranch Spa + Fitness

At one time, meeting attendees believed they'd experienced luxury after a spa treatment or a healthy meal. But longer life-spans; an explosion of study and focus on diet and exercise — prompting the creation of everything from smoothies to athleisure wear — and the maturation of the spa industry have dovetailed to create a hunger for wellness activities that encompass greater meaning.

AMEX's 2018 Global Meetings and Events Forecast stated, "Several meeting professionals 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 attendee wellbeing throughout meetings and events."

Adds Yma Sherry, vice president, North America, AMEX Meetings & Events, "Wellness is huge and it is growing as a factor in meeting planning, partly driven by a broader consumer movement or mindset."



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**It's those personalized, customized experiences that make a difference for people because you're finding out what they need.**

- Deidre Strunk, Executive Spa Director

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Meetings with luxury wellness experiences can bring a great deal of enrichment to VIP attendees. “Wellness and work can create a mutually enhancing virtuous circle,” according to “The Future of Wellness at Work” report by the Global Wellness Institute. “When we feel healthy and balanced, we bring energy, focus, and motivation to work, and we are more productive.”

The report also noted the need for workers to be in tip-top shape to perform the tasks required by today's workforce. “As work tasks — blue, white, and gray collar — are increasingly borne by computers and machines, human beings add value by complementing and harnessing technologies and by being creative, innovative, perceptive, intuitive, empathetic, and adaptable. We need to be in a good state of physical, mental, and emotional wellness to be able to bring these qualities to work each day.”

At Canyon Ranch Spa + Fitness, which has long focused on wellness, customization for each group's needs is key to operations, according to Becky Martino, director, sales & marketing at the 134,000-square-foot outpost in Las Vegas, at the Venetian Resort. “We take the planers' desire and build a program for them, because wellness is so many different things to different people.”

Among the luxury wellness programs that have been offered at the property was the live creation of a unique bracelet for each attendee in a group of 80 VIPs. Through an outside program called MyIntent Project, participants each provided a word that was meaningful to them, such as ‘breathe,’ ‘love,’ ‘patience,’ or others — to specially trained Canyon Ranch staff and the term of choice was then etched into a charm on the bracelet.

“It's those personalized, customized experiences that make a difference for people because you're finding out what they need,” said Deidre Strunk, executive spa director. “And because it's about them and no two are the same, it's so much more meaningful.”

Another group program offered at Canyon Ranch Spa + Fitness is a “blending bar,” where staff members meet one-on-one with attendees and discuss their needs in order to create customized lotions shampoos or the like for each guest by combining such solutions with individually selected aromatherapy ingredients. Recently done for 100 VIPs, program participants often “are seen walking together after and talking about their lotions, what they means, etc.,” said Becky Martino, director, sales & marketing, Canyon Ranch Spa + Fitness.

Canyon Ranch Spa + Fitness also has its executive chef — “a bit of a celebrity in the health and wellness space,” according to Strunk — teach meeting attendees what to avoid eating and how to shop, or he has tastings as well as demonstrations.

“He shows them simple things that can be done at home, like if you mix turmeric with black pepper, the herb is 2,000 times stronger than normal,” Strunk said. “People can take the information away and go ‘wow, I didn’t know that.’”

Tons of other luxury group experiences can be arranged, including sunrise yoga, gait analysis for groups doing a great deal of walking, cooking classes, and more. The impact of such programs lies in their ability to bring attendees closer to one another.

“One thing we often hear from groups is ‘Thank You for making our time at Canyon Ranch special and unique, because it got all of the attendees to relate to one another on a different level,’” said Martino.

Added Strunk, “Any time you’re in a wellness place, your heart opens up more to talking with your co-workers [or any fellow meeting goers] differently and outside of the normal business realm. Your business relationships are quite differently from your personal relationships and I think these experiences blend the two so your partner at work has more insight into who you are.”

Some wellness aficionados are doing a different kind of blending, serving up “wellness drinks” at cocktail receptions. The Cocktail Architect CEO and founder Yusef Donovan Austin and creative director Nandini Natasha Austin — a husband and wife team — work with groups to provide mixology events with a wellness twist. While traditional cocktails are served, Ayurvedic [or alternative medicine] drinks can be provided, along with non-alcoholic ‘elixirs’ with healing spices, and cocktails mixed with herbs believed to have medicinal benefits.

“A freshly made mocktail is often welcomed as many folks are into not drinking,” said Nandini. “They feel like they finally are being catered to. Plus corporate groups like having a mix of beverage types at lunchtime events.”

Added Yusef, “The unique atmosphere brings people together and helps strike up conversation. People always want to be involved in the newest thing so they can be inspired by it and, in return, the meetings have an edge to them.”



# COOKING UP CULINARY EXPERIENCES AT MEETINGS



Smith & Wollensky Restaurant Group offers groups a theatrical presentation of a 44-ounce steak, which is torched by a chef.

Because of a greater emphasis on health, the popularity of food-focused television and films, the elevation of celebrity chefs, and a rise in the number of food-focused festivals around the country, people are paying much more attention to food than ever before. There's an increased interest in where our food comes from, how it's prepared, by which restaurant chef, how it's served, and more. In short, food has become sport.

"In the way people used to get together and talk about baseball scores, now you can easily strike up a conversation about food," said Doug Duda, director, strategic alliances and business development, International Association of Culinary Professionals. "Stories about where ingredients come from, and other elements of food, are much more a part of the general conversation now. So if you organize a food event, the audience has grown. Everyone likes to eat it, cook it, or talk about it."

Further, while smartphones and the Internet have captured a great deal of our attention, food is one of the few things that must be experienced live.



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**Do you remember that time I ate at Wolfgang Puck’s steakhouse?  
Or when I had that drink?’ Our attention to detail makes the meal  
into an experience.**

-Kimberly Gora, Director, Sales and Catering, Puck’s Restaurant

”

“You can’t eat the Internet,” stated Phil Colicchio, founder, Colicchio Consulting, a restaurant industry advisory firm. So top-tier attendees at meetings are having engaging, personalized food experiences of various types.

At the Wolfgang Puck Fine Dining Group’s restaurants, and the company’s off-site catering business, a wide range of events have been planned. If a staff member or a meeting planner customer can dream up an experience, and the right budget is available, it seems that the event can be done.

“We can be mild or wild, it just depends what the group and the meeting planner is seeking,” said Kimberly Gora, director, sales and catering. In Puck’s restaurants, there are private dining experiences centered around white or black truffles; a whiskey tasting paired with appropriate dishes; or a tasting in Las Vegas from all six of its eateries around town for groups dining in one spot, among other experiences.

On the catering front, Puck’s team has arranged a meal in the Valley of Fire — a Las Vegas park where the company had to make everything from scratch, including water and lighting. The team even air dropped food into the Grand Canyon for one group — though admittedly, that’s not a typical offering, Gora said.

Recently, an off-site, super high-end event that was held in the \$26 million clubhouse of a custom home community featured a \$155,000 boat dropped by crane into a pool, and concluded while guests were in front of \$3 and \$4 million Bugattis.

At such affairs, Gora said, food is themed accordingly. “Happiness comes through food, and we want guests to say, ‘Do you remember that time I ate at Cut [Puck’s luxury steakhouse]? Or when I had that drink?’ Our attention to detail makes the meal into an experience.”

Some groups go on shopping expeditions with chefs, often concluding with attendees taking part in or witnessing a meal’s preparation before they are served. Others experience cooking competitions or meet-and-greets with celebrity chefs.

“To have a chef be your guide at the local market in Venice is very different than walking around with a guidebook and figuring out what to order,” said Duda. “With a book, you can look for what you already plan to buy but when the chef is your guide, you learn to look for things you hadn’t planned to get and to shop like those who live in the area. You learn what they already know.”

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**In the end, the experience is about more than an enjoyable meal. Depending on the participant, it also can demonstrate the value of mentorship, coaching, and teamwork.**

-Doug Duda, director, strategic alliances and business development,  
International Association of Culinary Professionals

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In short, it creates a unique event, he continued. “It can be a different kind of experience in terms of meeting people and having done something together. When a group visits a cheese maker, participants might taste cheeses together, compare memories of cheeses, buy cheeses, and report back on them. That makes a much richer, more interactive, and more personal experience of getting to know one another. It’s access to an ongoing level of engagement and community, which people want more and more.”

As the head of a food industry association, Duda has witnessed proof of that desire.

“I see a decreased number of attendees in food conferences for panel discussions, and an increased demand for hands-on experiences.”

Once those experiences are delivered, they significantly boost attendee satisfaction, he added. “On post-event reviews, these small group experiences are attendees’ favorite part of larger conferences. And that’s not just because of the learning, it’s about the opportunity to network and build longer-term relationships via a shared experience.”

He has experienced this first hand. “I have kept in touch with my ‘foxhole buddies’ from cooking classes. I continue to ask for advice on where to buy items online from food cultures around the world from a woman I met in my first cooking class in France who was very knowledgeable about serving platters and tableware.”

But Duda has gained more than recipes or serving dishes from such communal experiences. “In the end, the experience is about more than an enjoyable meal,” he said. “Depending on the participant, it also can demonstrate the value of mentorship, coaching, and teamwork.”

At establishments of the Smith & Wollensky Restaurant Group, during private dinners, groups can take in a presentation on the dry aging process of steak, a rare experience as Smith & Wollensky is one of the few steakhouses in the United States that dry ages its beef in-house, according to Danielle McNally, national marketing manager.

Additionally, the company’s restaurants provide elaborate presentations of beef to the group, including one with a “swinging Tomahawk ribeye.” Made from America Wagyu beef, she explained, the jaw-droppingly massive, 44-ounce cut is swung around on a rack in an “ode to the way butchers swing beef.” It’s then brought over to the group, torched, and sliced table-side.

"It's an amazing visual as well as tasting experience," said McNally. "It provides great community building and it helps with client and employee engagement. This is something unique and interesting that gives groups the corporate steakhouse experience but at another level."

The restaurants also offer cocktail or wine tastings, and "chefs love to give one-off experiences," McNally said.

"Chefs are creative hospitality professionals at heart and they love interacting with guests. They love nothing more than coming out of the kitchen and talking about what they do because they don't usually get to do that during the day. To see guests enjoying the restaurant, hear them make comments or ask interesting questions is incredibly rewarding for our chefs."

Unique food experiences can be had outside of restaurants too. During the New York International Auto Show, Colicchio has arranged private dinners for corporate clients at one of the three restaurants in town owned by his cousin, celebrity chef (and *Top Chef* head judge) Tom Colicchio, along with a Q&A session, or signed cookbooks.

Making someone of that caliber accessible, particularly in a group setting, can be transformative for event attendees, Phil Colicchio said. "When human connection is made in an intimate manner, a sense of 'authentic specialness' is achieved. The thoughtful curation of that experience with an expert, like a chef, literally flips the script of life's daily disappointments and it tells the attendee that he or she is special, someone thought about that person and provided them with an experience that would bring him or her happiness."

He added, "It creates a lasting, tangible experience that — with the Instagramming of a photo or video, or just sharing the moment with a colleague — becomes indelible, and the experience provider has created community."





# LIVE ENTERTAINMENT AND LEARNING: GIVING ATTENDEES A STORY TO REMEMBER



Juilliard musicians performing at the American Friends of the Open University of Israel Gala at the Pierre Hotel in New York City

"Music also is a powerful tool for meeting hosts and brands looking to create experience," said event organizer Jessica Abel, senior director, growth and development, C7 Entertainment Marketing.

The company arranged a performance by Imagine Dragons during a recent event in Las Vegas for Workday Rising, a software company. Before the band took the stage, it met with 50 guests, and two participants were chosen to have their photos blown up and printed onsite, which the band autographed for them with a personal message.

"These types of opportunities allow the attendees to develop a personal connection with the band or artist and have the photo as a keepsake they can show their friends and family," said Abel. "Layering in an artists' performance allows people to leave an event feeling that they had a once-in-a-lifetime experience they'll want to share on social media."

“**Music creates a connection. When you incorporate a live performance, it provides an opportunity for an organization to connect to employees, members, or other attendees on more of an emotional level than if they had officials speaking on stage.**

-Jessica Abel, Senior Director, Growth and Development,  
G7 Entertainment Marketing.

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Further, she said, it enhances the relationship between a meeting’s sponsor organization and attendees. “Music creates a connection. When you incorporate a live performance, it provides an opportunity for an organization to connect to employees, members, or other attendees on more of an emotional level than if they had officials speaking on stage.”

Millennials, as well as both younger and older age cohorts, agree. In a global survey by Live Nation on the impact of musical performances, which generated a white paper entitled “The Power of Live,” 71 percent of Generations X, Y, and Z said, “The moments that give me the most life are live experiences.”

“The study reinforces the idea that fans are more receptive to brands when they attend a live event,” said Abel. “It found that for 67 percent of global audiences, the more emotionally engaged they are, the more open they are to new ideas.”

The white paper goes on to state, “By aligning with live experiences, brands have an opportunity to create deep meaning and engagement with their consumers in moments when they feel the most alive and present.”

For groups perhaps with a more restricted budget, or who are looking to bring in undiscovered talent, The Juilliard School makes its undergraduate and graduate students in music, drama, and dance — as well as alumni — available to perform at events through its aptly named program, “Hire Juilliard Performers,” or HJP.

The school makes over 1,300 performers available to travel to events nationwide, or even overseas, in some cases, and it carefully selects those who are able to talk to a crowd about what they’re performing, what they do more generally, etc.

“HJP adds an extra level of vetting — we make sure we send the cream of the crop,” said Barrett Hipes, associate dean, student development. People may fear that student performers aren’t up to snuff, but “most of our musicians have been performing since before they could talk, and Juilliard is one of the most selective colleges in the country.”

Students and alumni can perform a wide variety of entertainment types, Hipes said. “We run the gamut of every type of performance in classical and jazz realms, and we have opportunities for actors and dancers too.” Artists also can offer question-and-answer sessions with meeting attendees, he said.

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**Whether it’s a cooking experience with Halsey or a spa day with Colbie Caillat, an experience like this winds up being one of the most memorable things they’ve ever done.**

-Dominic Sandifer, President,  
Greenlight Media & Marketing, A Division of Live Nation

”

The enthusiasm among meeting attendees when such entertainment is booked for a group is rather high, Hipes added. “When clients see Juilliard students perform, they are witnessing artists of the highest caliber, and are often excited to have the opportunity to invite Juilliard students to their event. They are also often inspired and proud to be supporting our artists at a relatively early phase in their career development.”

Performances by students and alumni of the school run the gamut of group’s needs, and “it’s also a conversation starter,” Hipes said. “Many event attendees are not regular concert-goers or have not developed an ear or appreciation for classical or jazz music. To have that exposure in a non-traditional setting is a great thing.”

Dominic Sandifer, president, Greenlight Media & Marketing, a division of Live Nation, has arranged large scale musical performances during meetings, but for smaller, high-end groups of meeting attendees, he is a fan of more intimate functions where guests can get up close and personal with celebrities.

He’s even arranged programs, or what he calls “artists experiences,” that don’t involve a performance and where musicians interact with groups on a personal level that is a complete departure from their talent.

“These could be a cooking experience with Halsey with eight to 12 VIP guests, or a much smaller group of two to four people might go for a spa day with Colbie Caillat,” Sandifer said. “For everyone who attends, it winds up being one of the most memorable things they’ve done in their lives. They didn’t think they’d ever be in a room with someone with such star power, and it’s something they say they’ll never forget. It energizes and motivates them.”

Additionally, country singer Tim McGraw has offered small groups who are sponsors of his tours a private pre-show performance of three or four acoustic songs, according to Sandifer. “He wanted to do this instead of just a meet-and-greet with a step-and-repeat and pictures. More and more artists are doing this. It’s a great example of an artist providing extreme added value that no other program can deliver. It’s a once in a lifetime experience.”

Of course, music isn’t the only form of entertainment that can be provided to high-level meeting goers. For the next Certified Meeting Professional conclave, set to take place in Birmingham, Alabama in November, host organization EIC is providing a post-conference visit to spots around town that were integral to the Civil Rights Movement.



"People might want to experience that while in town but we keep them busy during the conference," acknowledged Kotowski. With the post-conference tour, she said, "We're expanding attendees' knowledge about Birmingham and its role in the Civil Right movement, whether for personal knowledge or as a potential site for a future meeting."

The event also gives the EIC an opportunity to showcase its meeting host destination while giving attendees a value-add to their meeting, she added. "There are several James Beard restaurants so we're having a dine around to showcase our partners."

That hands-on exposure beats a brochure or other source of information on Birmingham that EIC's meeting industry professional attendees might seek out. "There is nothing like seeing, touching, and hearing to facilitate learning," said Kotowski. "It is much more enlightening than reading a history book."

Even corporate social responsibility programs can serve as experiences, and they could be called luxurious when they are unique and memorable. Such was the case for Kotowski during a board meeting.

A pop-up shop set up at the meeting site featured crafts created by female survivors of human trafficking, and funds raised by the group's shopping supported charities fighting the same cause.

"It was customized because you selected your amenity by shopping, and it was memorable because of the women and the cause," Kotowski said. "That experience was very different than if someone had said 'here's an amenity in your room,' which could have even had the same value. I would have rather had that experience than have received a notebook with a logo."

Singer Bruno Mars was the headline performer at Las Vegas' T-Mobile Arena during Cisco Live 2017, a customer appreciation event.



# CONCLUSION



Electra Cocktail Club at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas

Luxury experiences are rising to the level of “once in a lifetime” and “money can’t buy them” moments. “Travelers are being presented with increasingly personalized travel experiences created with the sole aim of guiding them on their journey toward personal fulfillment,” said Skift’s 2018 Megatrends report.

Such offerings must be made available to organization’s board members, C-suite executives, or others at the top of the workers’ pyramid, just as they are for leisure travel, or else those high-value board members, sponsors, and other VIPs will choose to attend another meeting or, maybe even worse, be bored at yours.

Whether that means adding high-end, unique dining experiences, transformational moments designed to boost wellness or customized entertainment, it’s incumbent on today’s meeting organizers to dazzle top-tier guests.

# FURTHER READING

Five Trends that Will Shape Experiential Travel in 2019

<https://skift.com/2018/11/06/five-trends-that-will-shape-experiential-travel-in-2019>

The State of Luxury Hospitality Today

<https://www.northstarm meetingsgroup.com/Where-To/Site-Selection/hotels-destinations-luxury-experiential-travel-hospitality>

Loyalty Beyond Points and Miles: Creating Rewarding Experiences for the Experiential and Millennial Traveler

<https://skift.com/2018/09/21/loyalty-beyond-points-and-miles-creating-rewarding-experiences-for-the-experiential-and-millennial-traveler/>

Luxury Hotels Bring in More Celebrity Chefs in Guest Gigs

<https://skift.com/2018/10/30/luxury-hotels-bring-in-more-celebrity-chefs-in-guest-gigs/>

Four Ways Music Strengthens Social Bonds

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/four\\_ways\\_music\\_strengthens\\_social\\_bonds](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/four_ways_music_strengthens_social_bonds)

Experiential Meetings: Best Practices for Creating Travel Experiences with Lasting Impact

[https://interactive.northstarm meetingsgroup.com/Global/FileLib/NMG/Resource\\_Experiential-Meetings.pdf](https://interactive.northstarm meetingsgroup.com/Global/FileLib/NMG/Resource_Experiential-Meetings.pdf)

IMEX America 2018: Four Things Shaping Today's Meeting Industry

<https://www.bizbash.com/imex-america-2018-4-things-shaping-todays-meeting-industry/las-vegas/story/36375/>

3 Ways to Make F&B More Experiential

<https://www.northstarm meetingsgroup.com/How-To/Event-Planning/Food-and-Beverage/how-to-create-experiential-food-and-beverage-for-meetings>



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The Venetian Resort Las Vegas and Sands Expo® is on the forefront of meeting innovation, continually introducing unique experiences and non-traditional meeting venues. The Venetian is the ideal choice for everything from large trade shows to small meetings, with unique services and spaces to serve every need. The fully-integrated, luxury resort was built with the needs of business in mind: meeting space is easily accessible and highly configurable, and attendees can avail themselves of countless dining, shopping, entertainment, and spa options. The resort is also a recipient of many hospitality industry awards, including Forbes 4-Star ratings for over ten consecutive years, Cvent's top five meeting hotels in the U.S., and over a decades' worth of Meetings & Conventions' Gold Key Elite and Gold Platter Elite awards. The resort has also long been recognized for sustainability leadership. For more information, please visit [venetianmeetings.com](http://venetianmeetings.com).

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