

BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company, and **Benchmark Resorts & Hotels** Announce the “Top Meeting Trends for 2017”

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The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, March 2017 ... Benchmark Resorts & Hotels, a signature portfolio of BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company, announces the "Top Meeting Trends for 2017" as observed by its properties. Benchmark is a leading U.S.-based hospitality management company, which operates 70 award-winning hotels, resorts, and conference centers within its Benchmark Resorts & Hotels and Gemstone Collection brands in locations coast to coast, off shore, and internationally. Ted Davis, Benchmark’s chief sales & marketing officer, made the announcement.

"We look forward to another stellar year," said Mr. Davis. "2016 was a year of dynamic growth for us as well as much of the meetings industry, and 2017 is looking even more promising. We particularly look forward to the increasing demand for creative destination-inspired experiences and outdoor adventure activities that encourage group participation, challenge individuals, and inspire collaborative efforts."

Trend #1 The Outlook is Promising

The good news is the national election is behind us and early indications are encouraging for a favorable business environment for 2017. The remainder of the year looks bright with renewed energy and prosperity in the meetings marketplace, growing confidence in job creation and resulting training demand, and a reinvigorated economy expected to provide a strong boost to corporate meetings. The meetings industry is back.

Trend #2 Authenticity Matters

Now more than ever, groups want authentic, interactive travel experiences to enrich their meetings. This is particularly so with younger meeting guests, the millennials. Planners seek to immerse their attendees within the local milieu, such as experiencing indigenous cultures like Hawaii's distinctive Polynesian heritage, or engage with social causes. Properties that provide opportunities to discover genuinely authentic destination experiences set themselves far apart from their competitors and leave their guests transformed. In 2017, it's not just about a local experience for groups, it's about an authentic experience.

Trend #3 Social Media Grows Up

Social Media in the meetings marketplace has achieved the status of Standard Operating Procedure. LinkedIn establishes communication with meeting planners. Facebook, Instagram and YouTube showcase a property to planners and highlight the venue's unique capabilities and that of the destination. Twitter is essential within a meeting for its concise, bite-size communications. Creative and relevant hashtags during meetings prove an ideal way to draw planners into the meeting experience and to share messages with fellow attendees.

Trend #4 Corporate Play Days

Blame it on the millennials. Teambuilding in 2017 is technology in bonding: GPS, virtual reality,

adrenaline-packed interaction utilizing multiple skills set to the workplace. Some even call it Corporate Play Days as "teambuilding" seems outdated to today's youthful meeting attendees. It's more than play though, it's serious high-tech corporate bonding.

Trend #5 I Need It Yesterday!

The #1 Planner request in 2017 is "as soon as possible, or sooner!" This lust for speed is driven by technology, so Planner requests and proposals are expected to be turned around by the afternoon or COB. Text messaging is replacing emailing and phone calls because it's quicker. Even on-property needs and requests have expectations of immediate response. Time is money, and never before has this meant more to Planners! Winning properties operate with anticipation and a sense of urgency, which is the new baseline for success.

Trend #6 Fast & Furious Technology

Smart phones are changing everything in meetings! Poken enables attendees to easily and quickly connect, network and share contact info. Click Share is becoming the norm allowing complete flexibility to presentation controls and to permit others in the room to share their laptop with the presenter screen at the push of a button ... Skype engages interaction with remote participants. Dedicated Apps drive registration and communication before, during and after a meeting. And as we said before, text messaging is often replacing email as it's swifter and more efficient

Trend #7 The Pace is Positive

From group size, to the number of meetings scheduled for 2017, to up-trending meeting rates, to strengthening demand for creative, customized meeting packages--it's all trending positively for 2017. Though the length of meetings remains 3 days and 2 nights, some properties are even starting to see week-long meetings back on the horizon.

Trend #8 All In the Crafting

For 2017, distilling trends are creating an increasing interest in the evolution of craft beers, craft cocktails and craft liquors, particularly whiskey. It's more than enjoying the taste of a locally inspired libation ... increasingly off property experiences and tutorials on how these beverages are created and how they pair with food are in high demand with meeting engagers and attendees. Many properties' bars are hosting happy hours featuring these tutorials. The big draw is the education element, as well as a unique post-meeting event, creating a wonderful environment for socializing and unwinding at the end of a long day.

Trend #9 Relationship Management

How do you build a solid relationship in life, whether personal or professional? Nurture it! Life in 2017 is hectic, moving at lightning speed, cluttered and even chaotic at times. But your relationship with meeting professionals shouldn't be. Good old fashioned phone calls, invitations to special events at your property or within your destination, meeting for coffee or cocktails after work, are all seen as critical in nurturing a relationship with those who can be so meaningful in delivering volume business to your hotel or resort. This has never been more important as significantly increased competition nationally attempts to erode your business. So pick up the phone, call home, and then call a planner and seriously inquire about their professional needs. You may generate a new piece of business, and rekindle a valuable friendship.

Trend #10 Train, Train, Train!

Hands down, nothing is more important for guests on property than experiencing a well-trained staff. A trained staff is responsive, participatory, solutions minded and continuously attentive to customers' needs. It starts with hiring the best and continues, daily in some cases, with effective training. We know this goes without saying, but it is one of the top issues and opportunities in hospitality today. Planners, hotel guests and meeting attendees all notice, and respond accordingly with reviews, and repeat business.

One More Trend Where the Demand Is

Healthcare, education, the financial industry, major Pharma, even coal & gas for certain regions of the country are all delivering strong demand in 2017. Incentive meetings are making a come-back and

properties are responding with destination packages that showcase the best and most unique features of a locale, enriching the experience for all attendees.

About BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company

BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company, is a trailblazer in the development, management, marketing and owner-advisory services of resorts, hotels, conference centers and exclusive private clubs. In addition to the company's iconic Benchmark Resorts & Hotels portfolio, the Gemstone Collection is a distinctive luxury portfolio of independent hotels & resorts in highly preferred destinations.

BENCHMARK'S distinguished and proven reputation is deeply-rooted in core values that are focused and aligned with exceeding ownership and stakeholder performance expectations. The combined portfolios feature nearly 70 unique and distinctive properties domestically and internationally. The company leadership and valued employees are passionately committed to delivering the industry's most authentic, enchanted, soulful, vibrant, unrivaled and memory-making experience. BENCHMARK'S progressive "Be The Difference" culture and values are a cornerstone to the company's nearly 40 years of extraordinary achievement and prosperity. Many properties have been recognized with the Benchmark Conference Centers® mark of meeting excellence. BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, is based in The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, and has regional offices in Park City, Utah; Miami, Florida; New Brunswick, New Jersey; Seattle Washington; and Tokyo, Japan.

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