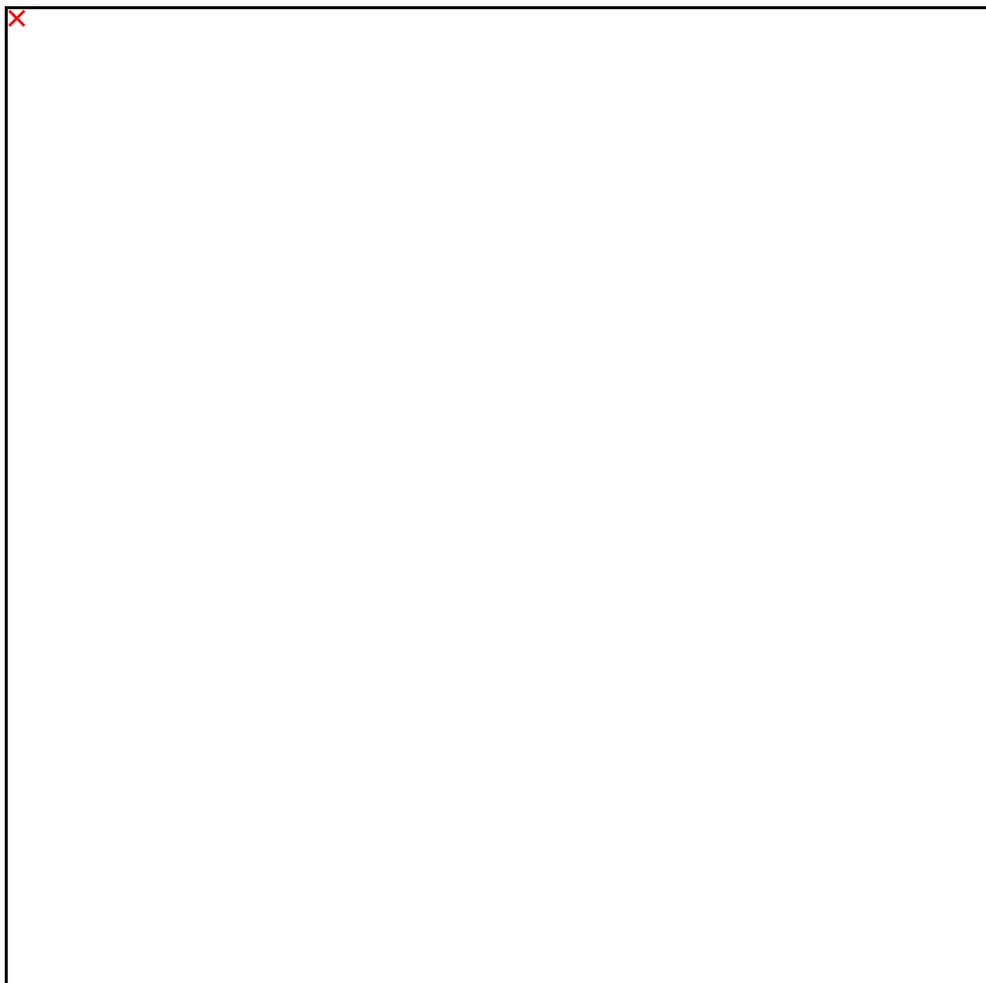


BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company, Announces the “Top Ten Meeting Trends for 2019”

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The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, January 2019 ... BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company, announces the "Top Meeting Trends for 2019" as observed by its diverse portfolio of properties. Benchmark is the leading U.S.-based global independent hospitality management company, operating 80 award-winning hotels, resorts, and conference centers within its Benchmark Resorts & Hotels, Gemstone Collection and etc. venues brands in locations coast to coast, off shore, and internationally. Benchmark's top meeting trends were announced by Ted Davis, Benchmark's chief sales and marketing officer.

“We learn a lot from our guests, often by observation in addition to their direct feedback,” says Ted Davis. “The speed of life and business is laser fast today, communication devices intrude constantly, and lifestyles have adjusted accordingly. This includes when in meeting environments. But we've also learned that moments of togetherness, where the pace slows a bit maybe over cocktails or dinner, are genuinely treasured and this is where successful relationships are forged and strengthened, lasting long after the conference comes to an end.”

Trend 1 Privacy is the #1 Technology Requirement of Planners today!

Yes, super-fast and reliable WiFi throughout a property is a must and every planner hammers hard at this in contract discussions as it can make or break a productive meeting. But it must be secure WiFi! Privacy and security of information for conference guests is paramount to planners. Not just the content of the meeting--the content of participants personal communications too. Privacy and security is at the top of every planners list!

Trend 2 Food for the Soul

Food brings people together, whether they know each other already or are just getting acquainted. It's about engaging and savoring the moment. Since conference guests tend to be curious and concerned with wellness, learning what food they are putting into their bodies is essential, and they come to the table well informed. Here's what they want in 2019: Food that is fresh and locally sourced, in-season when flavor is most robust, presented in small bites, and enjoyed interactively-family style. With informed consumers comes increased demand for growing dietary restrictions or preferences well beyond vegetarian and gluten free. Paleo, keto, pescetarian, vegan and religious dietary requests are just the beginning of specialized conference dining this year, and chefs have taken note!

Trend 3 Don't Facebook me. Don't Tweet me!

It's not that professional meetings planners aren't sociable. They are. It's just that email by far continues to be the most preferred method of communication-it's their preferred choice! What's new, though, is that they don't want to be contacted for business by social media, period! So, don't Facebook them, or tweet, or Instagram. Be respectful of a planner's time and aware of how they prefer to communicate, including those who may or may not welcome a personal phone call. A simple and personal hand-written note will go a long way in making a memorable impression too!

Trend 4 Preference for Independents

Flexibility, customization, authentic and unscripted experiences all rank high in the minds of planners today, as does the feeling that independent properties excel in providing these for groups needing to create memorable and highly productive meetings. Another issue is also at hand with planning professionals relating to independent properties: Commissions, which are generally higher with independents. As more meetings involve 3rd-party planners, this is of significant importance to meeting planners going forward.

Trend 5 What Millennials Want from Meeting Venues.

State of the art technology, multiple plug-ins and USB ports for their myriad of devices in the meeting room, public spaces and in their guest room, entertaining and fun activities on property and outside, non-traditional seating and meeting arrangements to enhance engagement in meetings during the day - this is what millennials are demanding today. It's a sharing economy and this extends to millennials sharing guest rooms, resulting in fewer single room requests. The big reveal, though, is millennials want Privacy Rooms for personal conversions, sensitive phone calls and for personal needs.

Trend 6 Curated Travel

Curated travel for groups (and their spouses/partners) on or off property is of very high importance. Even corporate executive leadership is weighing in with a growing desire for a trained and diverse workforce, and at the same time their younger work force is valuing unique experiences. So even though groups may want to huddle on property after a day of intense meetings, companies are urging their employees to get out into the destination for a broader experience. Cabaret show in town anyone? Groups are requesting activities just like this.

Trend 7 Millennials Team Build Differently!

Culinary teambuilding just gets hotter every year! Whether in the kitchen with the chefs learning about flavor balancing and fermentation, at the bar with mixologists, in the dining room at table, or outside for a picnic-like experience. Bringing groups together interactively and family-style as a culinary team is red hot. But planners are also looking for entertainment to be included in teambuilding so learning is not only instructive and flavorful but great fun to enhance learning. Examples are lip sync battles, live interactive dinner shows, wildlife tours, hiking excursions, skiing, mountain biking, petting zoos and go-cart races on property ... anything that in an entertaining way teaches new life skills that can be used at the office and home. Planners today increasingly desire to enhance the lives -- and life skills -- of the "whole" person.

Trend 8 Cocktails, S'mores and Barges

Believe it or not, the most popular after-hours meetings group scene is gathering around an outdoor fire pit on property, kicking back and relaxing with colleagues over cocktails and s'mores. Absent fire pits, doing something - anything - outdoors and nearby is how today's meeting participants want to ease into

their evening. River and lake barges anyone? Groups love the relaxed pace on a body of water. So whether chilling at the venue or out for the evening, the key thing for groups is relaxing together and getting the know colleagues as people and not just as co-workers.

Trend 9 Speedy Response and Pay Commissions Promptly

Lightning fast response to RFPs is essential to winning business with planners today. A request that comes in in the morning better be responded to by early afternoon or the venue may lose that business opportunity to a competitor. Want to gain an edge over the competition, beyond rapid response? Pay commissions promptly, maybe immediately. Today many more meetings are being managed by 3rd party planners with accompanying commission demands. Respond swiftly and generously and win!

Trend 10 Work/Life Balance

Wellness is huge with professional meeting planners today. Diet and healthy menu planning remain an active focus in negotiations. But wellness today is so much more than a proper diet - it's about work/life balance. Planners believe a healthy mind and body helps enable productive participants. So yoga, meditation and breathing classes for meeting breaks are in growing demand, as is spiritual exploration.

About BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company.

BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company, is a leader in the development, management, and marketing of independent, soft branded, and experiential hard branded resorts, hotels, and conference centers. In addition to the company's award-winning full service Benchmark Resorts & Hotels, its lifestyle and luxury Gemstone Collection, and its industry-leading Benchmark Conference Center division, etc.venues is a leading provider of contemporary city centre venues for meetings, signature events, and conferences. BENCHMARK's combined portfolio features more than 80 unique projects across three continents. The company is passionately committed to delivering personal, inspiring, and memory-making experiences, driving total revenue and profitability, and cultivating an award winning, "Be The Difference" culture for all its employees. BENCHMARK, is based in The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, with offices in London, England; Miami, Florida; Park City, Utah; Scottsdale, Arizona; New Brunswick, New Jersey; Seattle, Washington; and Tokyo, Japan.www.benchmarkglobalhospitality.com To become a fan on Facebook, visit www.facebook.com/BenchmarkResortsandHotels, www.facebook.com/GemstoneHotelCollection. Follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/BenchmarkHotels, www.twitter.com/GemstoneHotels , on Instagram at www.instagram.com/benchmarkresortsandhotels, www.instagram.com/gemstonehotels, and on Pinterest at www.pinterest.com/benchmarkhotels/gemstone-hotels. At LinkedIn, <https://www.linkedin.com/company/benchmark-a-global-hospitality-company/>

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