

Incentive Travel Site Selection

An overview of the importance of thoughtful site selection.

By Rodger Stotz, CPIM, Maritz Inc., and Bruce Bolger, CPIM, Selling Communications, Inc.

It's A Branding Opportunity

Stories abound about the role of spouses in incentive travel decisions; it's often where the boss's spouse wants to go that determines the decision, some will say, or the boss's own taste in travel. If true, this is tantamount to advertisers running ads in their favorite magazines rather than in the ones their target audience is most likely to read.

With incentive travel, the destination and the venue are the medium through which the organization makes its brand statement with its most critical audience—top performers and customers. The location provides the focal point for related marketing and communications and personally touches each participant in a way no other marketing medium ever can: through all five senses.

Selection Criteria

Serious incentive travel users use the following criteria to select the most appropriate location:

Brand Compatibility. Does the location support your organization's image?

Is It Motivational? In an incentive program, is it an experience people dream of? In a marketing program, is it a place consumers want to be?

Many aspects of incentive travel distinguish it from conventional meetings and require expertise on the part of both planners and vendors.

Does The Budget Support It? Everything goes back to return-on-investment analysis.

What Is The Competition Doing? You want to stand out.

Motivational Expertise. Do your vendors know the difference between a motivational event and a meeting, and does their track record demonstrate that understanding?

To facilitate site selection, consider setting up a matrix that features the issues most important to your organization and assign weights accordingly.

Special Logistical Considerations

Incentive travel, like any other form of travel, has routine logistical considerations often handled by a destination management company or incentive travel and meetings company, including: air transportation, cruise lines, transfers, food and beverage, registration, etc.

What sets incentive travel apart is that each one of these routine circumstances becomes an opportunity for the host to shine and reinforce brand positioning in the most powerful way possible: one-to-one. A flight that is made a little more special, a transfer that adds a personal touch, the opportunities for special experiences common travelers rarely get all distinguish incentive travel from conventional meetings. This requires expertise on the part of both planners and vendors.

Business And Pleasure

Many organizations use subtle means to motivate people with travel. They offer the ability for employees or channel partners to create vacations out of business meetings in desirable locations, or invite participants to bring along significant others and sometimes even children. They hold business meetings in desirable locations and allow free time for participants to enjoy themselves. This uses motivational travel as a benefit rather than a strategic external and/or internal marketing tool, as is the case with most other applications.