Tips for ensuring a successful event
Event Planning: Menus, Tastings and More
By Germar Kelly

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By Jill Heymsfield

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With any event that includes a meal, the quality and type of food can make or break the event. Depending on the type and size of your event, planning for might be daunting, especially when presented with a wide scope and variety of menus from your selected venue. To add to this complexity, dietary restrictions are common and should be expected within any larger group. When several of your guests have different dietary restrictions, this may further complicate the selections of your meals and menu.

Once you have narrowed down the venues you are interested in, review the menus that you are interested in and discuss these with the property’s event coordinator or manager. While budget is always important, there are often other factors to consider. For example, be sure to check the menu to see what alternatives there may be for vegetarians, for people with allergies or for those who have religious dietary restrictions. It’s also a good idea to ensure that you ask for this information during registration so that it can be provided in advance.
Ask if there is the option to have a tasting of some of the dishes or items that you are considering. Often times there might be events already scheduled prior to yours that are already be serving these items and the venue may be able to arrange for a sampling of these items for you to taste. Some venues will also arrange a private tasting of selected items for certain types of occasions such as a complex wedding or large social event.

If a tasting cannot be arranged, keep in mind that you do have some other options. Often times one can also get a sense of the kitchen’s culinary prowess by coming in for a meal during lunch or dinner or both (be sure to check their menu and Chef’s specials before coming in.)
Checklist for Meeting Planners

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There are many things for a meeting planner to consider and think about when planning a conference as there are lots of details. Below is a quick checklist of things to think about when starting your planning.

- Have an agenda together, even if it's a rough draft, it will assist in the planning. Send this to your contact early.
- Do you need to get into the meeting room early to set up materials, signage, or audio visual equipment?
- Designate a location for Registration, does this need to be separate from the general session or can it be in the same room?
Checklist for Meeting Planners

- Confirm the set-up of the meeting rooms – tables, chairs, podium, head tables, poster boards, easels, etc.
- Pick out menus for your events – breaks, breakfast, lunch, dinner and receptions
- Let you contact know of any dietary restrictions
- Confirm your audio visual needs
- Review BEO’s – confirm that the times, set-up and food orders are accurate
- Let your contact know of any events that are happening outside of the venue or even at the venue but not in the meeting space. Will there be busses picking guests up? Will additional equipment/supplies be needed for these events
- Plan a meeting with your contact prior to the start of your event. This is a great time to meet the team and make any final adjustments to your conference as needed

Keep in mind this is a starting point, depending on your conference there will be many other details to consider and plan

Most of all start the process sooner rather than later, that way you have time to make adjustments as questions come up or if the program changes.
How to Improve Your Site Inspection: A Hoteliers Perspective

By Tim McGill
Planning a meeting? You’ll want to ensure an in-person site inspection and planning is essential to ensure your site inspection time is well spent. The old adage applies: if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Over the years, I have read many articles about this topic, and most have been written by seasoned meeting planning professionals. The majority of those ideas from my perspective have been very relevant. However, I wanted to provide input from the hotelier’s perspective to aid the meeting planner on what would be beneficial to help us, the hotelier, help you the meeting planner.

Come in Person

Come to the event venue personally to inspect the property. Only so much can be conveyed using the new communications technologies such as 360-degree videos. From the hotelier point of view, an on-site visit will give us good indications about your business style, key focus areas and will allow us to make a personal connection which certainly helps develop a collaborative spirit with all parties.

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**How to Improve Your Site Inspection: A Hoteliers Perspective**

**Scheduling** Ensure you are allotting sufficient time. Inquire with the hotel what the usual time frames are for a full inspection and keep in mind the size of the hotel footprint will also dictate time that would be needed. Do not schedule too many sites in a day. This will only create stress and inefficiencies for both you and the hotel.

**Surprise Inspection** What about a surprise site inspection? I do not recommend them. Granted, the prospective venue will plan to put their best foot forward in planning for your pre-scheduled site inspection, but sales managers have frenetic schedules as well and may not provide the quality time that you need if you “pop in” for a site inspection. Availability to show all the facilities may be problematic as well. Who would you like to participate in the site inspection? They may not be available. If your program is complex, it would be wise to have a seasoned conference services manager, an onsite audiovisual manager, and possibly the chef to discuss any unique culinary needs in attendance. In some cases, the General Manager would be available to make an introduction.

**Audio Visual** The meeting trades have attempted over the years to cover this topic. New AV technology that could enhance your programs is constantly being introduced into the marketplace. What are the expectations from your audience regarding presentation technologies? The younger age groups have higher demands on delivery. Is the on-site AV team up to the challenges? Best to drill down early with your stakeholders on their expectations before the site inspection. Is the appropriate physical space available to accommodate the AV needed? Is there sufficient Wi-Fi bandwidth, ceiling height, stage depth and adequate setup time? All this will determine proper meeting space commitments when you go to contract.

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**Planned Objectives**

What are your key critical components of the event? What is the objective of the gathering? How will you determine the overall success of the program? Considering all these questions will assist you in determining what you want to accomplish at the site inspection. Providing this insight to the hotelier will help you obtain suggestions and ideas from their perspective and past group successes.

**Sustainability**

The focus on environmental stewardship is a factor for your organization and attendees. What is the hotel doing to address their impact on the environment? How will they plan for your event regarding water usage, landfill, composting, food waste, and energy savings? Do they have a program that measure these factors? Many hotels give lip service to this issues but do they have a point person that drives oversight and implementation?

**Food and Beverage**

Does the property have the ability to produce meals for Vegans, Vegetarians, and can they accommodate gluten-free or religious requirements such as Kosher and Halal? Meet with the chef and Food and Beverage director to obtain evidence and examples of past efforts on the topic. From the hotel's standpoint, notice of special needs is a must. The properties will need time connecting with the purveyors earlier for special orders.

Planning, planning and more planning will be the keystone to your successful site inspections. Take the time, considering your hectic schedule, to evaluate your needs and you'll be sure to succeed.
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**Water Conservation**

Water is a natural resource that is critical to the wellbeing of the environment. Not only does water promote ecological health, it is important from an economic standpoint as well. Many industries, including hospitality, depend upon this resource to be successful. Water is limited in supply however – especially in arid and drought-prone environments. That is why it is important to implement water conservation practices and always be on the lookout for water conserving technology. Some ideas include installing aerators for sink faucets, low flow shower heads, and water recycling systems. These small financial investments can end up saving money in the long term while also helping your property’s sustainability efforts.

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Controlling Energy  Energy use from gas or electric is a major source of harmful air pollution and contributor to greenhouse gases. In addition to the long term environmental consequences, energy use is often times a large financial expense for a business. Thankfully, there are several ways to reduce energy use that are easy and with minimal cost. Start out by assessing your current light fixtures and other energy intensive appliances. Make sure to upgrade to LED lighting, and, when it comes time, replace older equipment with the newer and more energy efficient models. Also make sure to inform your employees about the small things, like turning off lights and computers at the end of the work day. Just remember that little bit of effort can go a long way!

Food Sourcing  Local food sourcing is an excellent way to provide hotel guests with a unique and sustainable dining experience. By creating a menu that offers local produce and seafood, for example, you can showcase regional delicacies that might not be offered in other places. And by purchasing locally, you can reduce the amount of harmful carbon emissions that result from transportation of food supplies. It is a fantastic way to support local agriculture and other food related businesses in the area. To save on costs, request seasonal options and purchase in larger quantities.

ISO 14001  ISO 14001 is a rigorous standard and certification program that is used to assess the sustainability of a business. During the implementation process, environmental impacts are identified and control measures are put into place. ISO is based on the cycle of continuous improvement, which means that certified hotels are held to a very high level of sustainability.

In today's world, a business will need to incorporate environmental sustainability into their overall mission in order to be truly successful. As you can see from the above examples, this is not as farfetched as it seems. Start out small, and eventually you will create a culture of sustainability that is as remarkable as your location!
Teambuilding: Beyond Icebreakers and the Trust Fall

By Ashley Soria
Team Building Activities are a vital part of creating a successful, cooperative and creative staff. In this era of email, webinars, and social media, many people aren’t getting the face to face social interaction with their peers in person. For groups that are already planning offsite training sessions or conferences, incorporating an afternoon of team building will bring an added sense of adventure to the agenda.

Team building activities can include both competitive and collaborative team building activities. These and other experiences encourage team bonding and camaraderie. Volunteering as a company is also a team building activity that is on the rise, which has the added benefit of tying into the increased emphasis companies have on Corporate Social Responsibility.
Team building activities have come a long way from simple icebreakers and trust falls. Competitive activities like Beach Olympics allow teams to own their actions by producing meaningful results. Plus, prizes are always a great motivator for a team. Collaborative activities, such as Scavenger Hunts, can push teams to work together to produce results. They have to work together, talking and thinking, to continue to the next step. There are many companies that corporate groups can work with that will show how much fun it can be when employee engagement is encouraged. In the Monterey, California area, Adventures by the Sea creates all kinds of team building scenarios in on the beach, or even in the conference venue. Escape rooms are another new trend in team building. Monterey now features Exodus Escape Room, where the teams are put into “locked” rooms with themes like Sherlock’s Study or the Masquerade Room, and the team must work together to solve the clues to find the key to the door.

Team bonding experiences can vary by location. Some venues will have access for groups to ride bikes, rent surfboards or kayaks, and even play in a volleyball or billiards tournament. Many corporate groups headquartered in cubicle-style offices will find that it is a refreshing and invigorating experience to get out into nature and enjoy the sunshine. If the conference space does not promote these kinds of activity on grounds, the surrounding community can provide a wealth of ideas. Groups are often provided with free, or discounted, tours of places like State Parks, Museums or area attractions. In the Monterey Bay area, there are world-class attractions like the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Cannery Row, Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History, Asilomar State Beach and Point Lobos State Natural Reserve.

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Corporate Social Responsibility is a value that many companies are expanding on. In addition to making companywide choices to be more sustainable or reduce the carbon footprint, organizations can emphasize their CSR by encouraging employees to volunteer. In the Monterey Bay area, corporate groups can have a meeting with meaning when they connect with partners such as Save Our Shores, Elkhorn Slough Foundation or the Surfrider Foundation. These organizations can set up the beach, park, or slough cleanups that make a visible difference in the environment. Groups can set out in teams and record data through an app of all the debris and garbage they collect. This is how many non-profits can produce data on the billions of pounds of cigarette butts are collected each year and other types of environmentally damaging waste.

The most important part of any team building activity is for the group to disconnect from their comfort zone and everyday work and to connect with the other people that make up their team. Whether one chooses to arrange a competitive, collaborative or a volunteer activity, the team (and organization) will reap the rewards through better team communication and collaboration.
Tim McGill
Timothy McGill, Director of Sales and Marketing, holds a B.S. in Hotel and Restaurant Administration from Western Kentucky University. He has been a DOSM with Hilton Hotels, Wyndham, Starwood and independent hotels for over 40 years. He has a wide array of experience in all hotel markets inclusive of Associations, Incentive, Corporate, Business Travel and the Religious/Spiritual for properties located in resorts, urban and suburban locations. If you would like to connect with Timothy, please email him at mcgill-timothy@aramark.com

Ashley Soria
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