



# STRIP AWAY DISTRACTIONS

Retreat from Las Vegas Boulevard for more focused meetings. BY LISA PLUMMER

So you'd like to hold a meeting in Las Vegas. You're drawn by the wide selection of top-tier meeting spaces and world-class hotels, a hospitality culture that values and understands group business, as well as the city's plethora of dining and entertainment options. Yet as great as holding an event on the Las Vegas Strip may be for promoting attendance, you're worried about the myriad distractions that could steal your attendees' attention, if not bring into question their full participation.

The solution? For your next Vegas meeting, why not consider venturing away from the hustle and bustle of the Strip, where deeper into the desert you find several boutique hotels and resorts that might just be some of the best-

kept secrets in Sin City. Besides offering luxurious rooms, top-notch meeting spaces, excellent dining options, premium service levels and a host of indoor and outdoor amenities, these desert resorts are a great match for smaller- to mid-sized groups seeking a focused, self-contained environment coupled with a relaxed, retreat-like atmosphere.

## LAKESIDE RETREATS

Although you've probably heard of the city's famed Lake Mead National Recreation Area, you may not know about Lake Las Vegas. Located in Henderson, Nev., 17 miles east of the Strip, Lake Las Vegas is a 320-acre, man-made lake surrounded by a scenic 10-mile coastline bearing three hotel

resorts, a casino and retail promenade, two top-caliber golf courses and a high-end residential community. This private resort area is 25 minutes from the glitz and glamour of Las Vegas Boulevard, but feels like a world away.

Perched on the shores of the lake's shimmering waters, Ravella Lake Las Vegas is an elegant, Mediterranean-inspired resort with 349 guest rooms, 39,000 square feet of indoor meeting space, a spa, fitness center and pool, 15,000 square feet of outdoor space, and a host of dining and outdoor amenities. Originally a Ritz-Carlton property, it re-opened in February under Dolce Hotels and Resorts' management.

At Ravella, attendees stay focused in a meetings environment that fosters



Re-opened at the beginning of this year under the management of Dolce Hotels and Resorts, Ravella Lake Las Vegas has a private beach, multiple dining and meeting venues, and a host of outdoor activities on Lake Las Vegas and throughout the resort.

productivity, and have more than enough indoor and outdoor amenities and activities to keep them fully entertained outside of the meeting space, says Mario Mazzini, Ravella general manager. “You’ll have the full attention of your attendees staying here while enjoying the beautiful environment, including the lake, the excellent service and the full attention of hotel [staff],” says Mazzini. “It’s really a world away from what you’d find or experience on the Strip.”

When not convening in the elegant meeting space, which includes two ballrooms, attendees can take advantage of the spa, fitness center and outdoor pool, go for the greens at the 18-hole SouthShore Golf Club, take a respite at the lagoon, or try their hand at boating, fly fishing, kayaking and paddle boarding. As an added amenity, the resort is attached to Casino MonteLago, allowing guests to try their gaming luck. They can also stroll

through the charming MonteLago Village with its intimate collection of boutiques, galleries and eateries.

As the first corporate group to converge on the newly opened resort April 13-17, the 35-person Insurance and Risk Management Roundtable couldn’t have picked a more perfect location for its annual meeting, says Jim Butwin, co-president and CEO of Butwin Insurance Group. As a group that selects quieter, high-end destinations that promote business, socializing and group activities, Ravella more than met the organization’s criteria.

“We want quieter destinations because the purpose of the group is work and business and the other is the social aspect among the members,” Butwin says. “One of the unique features of this destination was—compared with the majority of destinations we go to where we have to leave the hotel because it’s

too monotonous—we were able to spend all four nights [at Ravella]. There was no reason to get in our car and go anywhere because we had so much diversity.”

Nearby, the Loews at Lake Las Vegas has 493 guest rooms, 45,000 square feet of meeting space, a spa, two pools and 55,000 square feet of outdoor event space. Re-branded from a Hyatt in 2006, the non-gaming, non-smoking boutique property prides itself on being a luxury destination that is a focused, responsible place to hold a meeting, says Jim Caul, Loews LLV director of sales and marketing.

“What’s very intriguing to our meeting planners is the fact they can come out here, be very focused for two to three nights and know they can give their attendees that [Strip] experience for one night, whether it’s a show, a dine-around or a free night to go do what they want,” Caul says. “That’s really nice because they feel as though they’re being very



Loews at Lake Las Vegas



responsible with their company monies and are doing the right thing because they're getting a very successful three days. The attention is there and people aren't dragging in from a 4 o'clock gambling binge on the Strip."

Besides taking advantage of the 20,000-sq.-ft. ballroom, five breakout spaces and outdoor event venues, attendees can enjoy free time at the resort's two pools, sports court and lakeside beach, as well as participating in a host of water sport activities. One of the hotel's greatest features is its ability to allow groups to completely "own" the hotel during their event, Caul says.

"One of the ways we distinguish ourselves is we can do hotel buy-outs where we can turn over the entire hotel to just one group," says Caul. "A lot of our clients are starting to find that's of great interest to them because they can take over the hotel and our staff is much more attentive because they're only dealing with one client in-house."

Although it had initial reservations about

hosting a meeting off-Strip, the Public Relations Society of America received nothing but glowing feedback from its 131 attendees at its annual Counselors Academy, held at the Loews May 12-15. According to Don Bill, PRSA senior manager of special events and programs, the group loved the ambiance of the property and that it offered a completely different experience from what they'd expected in Las Vegas.

"They loved the pool space, the spa and the overall beauty of sitting on the terrace and watching the sunsets," says Bill. "Folks were able to concentrate, and there was not a pull of easy distractions or other outside influences to make them want to skip the conference meetings and do other things. They were in a calm environment and it made them think about learning and growth for their businesses."

#### A WEST SIDE OASIS

Located in the upscale community of Summerlin, the regal JW Marriott Las

Vegas Resort and Spa has 548 rooms and suites, a 40,000-sq.-ft. spa and fitness center, a 50,000-sq.-ft. casino, and 109,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space. Besides its spacious 14,626-sq.-ft. grand ballroom and 28 breakout spaces, the 54-acre resort offers a unique variety of event venues, dining outlets and recreational options, including access to nine golf courses, day trips to Red Rock Canyon and desert jeep tours. Since attendees can access meetings spaces without going through the casino, gaming is an added amenity that can be avoided if preferred.

Athene Garfield, JW Marriott Las Vegas' director of sales and marketing, says some of the resort's biggest selling points are its wide variety of top-tier amenities coupled with a 15-minute proximity to the Strip, and that meeting guests get the full attention they deserve in an intimate, personable environment.

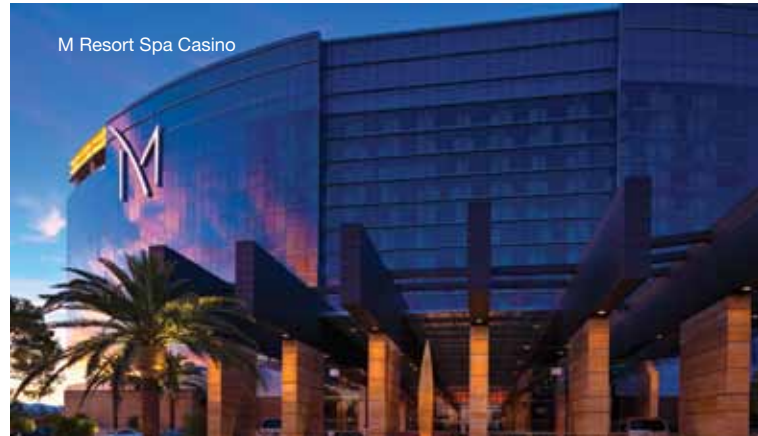
"What I hear a lot from meeting planners is they get lost in the shuffle down at the Strip," says Garfield. "They



JW Marriott Las Vegas Resort and Spa



M Resort Spa Casino



M Resort Spa Casino



want to come to Las Vegas, but they're concerned that they'll be the small fish in the big, huge ocean. We know there are lots of choices [in this city], but what we say is how productive do you want to be because this area is very conducive to getting things done, giving people space and not feeling rushed around."

Teresa Tessers, president of TCN International, a full-service meetings and event management company, says the JW Marriott was a great match for the Miracle-Ear National Meeting, which took place at the resort June 21-26 to great acclaim from its 410 attendees. "I do feel being away from the Strip gives more attention to the meeting side of things and we don't lose the people with the temptations of the Strip and losing track of time, Tessers says. "As [attendees] left on Sunday, they told us it was the best meeting they had been to."

### A LONE JEWEL

For groups that want to be close to the Strip but far enough away to stay

focused, the M Resort Spa Casino offers both. Located at the southernmost end of Las Vegas Boulevard, about 10 minutes from the Strip, the ultra-modern, inviting resort features 390 guest rooms, a spa, casino, 60,000 square feet of indoor meeting space, 15,000 square feet of outdoor space, and is close to some of the city's top golf courses.

Due to the boutique nature of the property, many groups have the ability to treat it as a blank canvas while commanding the full attention of the resort, says Drew Varga, M Resort vice president of sales. "We offer groups an exclusivity that they will not find in the larger resorts," he says. "[Groups can] buy out our property at 385 rooms, come in and take over the property and have the sole attention of every team member focused on them."

Situated on a separate floor with easy access to guest rooms, M's state-of-the-art conference center includes a 17,640-sq.-ft. grand ballroom, four junior ballrooms and multiple breakout areas.

Planners seeking premium service, accommodations and spaces at the best value possible, return to resorts that are willing to be flexible. That's why Billy Ford, vice president of sales and technical applications of Kemira Chemicals Inc., picked M Resort for the company's national meeting April 18-22.

"The facilities themselves are top quality and they were so flexible and willing to work with us," says Ford. "[With] 175 people, we knew we were going to be the center of their attention and they made that clear from the first visit with their sales team."

The Strip was a bonus for guests to enjoy on the meeting's free night, but once the meeting began Ford says it was easy for the group to stay focused and connected at the resort.

"When we do another national sales meeting, we'll go back to the M for sure," says Ford. "They met my expectations at the beginning, but the meeting exceeded my expectations. We owned the place."