INSIGHTS DECK

STRATEGY GUIDE:
HOW HOTELS CAN BOOK
MORE MEETINGS &
EVENTS IN 2019

Presented by

Skift - cvent



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ABOUT SKIFT

Skift is the largest industry intelligence platform, providing media, insights, and marketing to key sectors of travel.

SkiftX is Skift's in-house content marketing studio, working collaboratively with partners on integrated projects including webinars, video, research, and live events.

Visit <u>skiftx.com</u> to learn more or email <u>skiftx@skift.com</u>.

ABOUT CVENT

Cvent is the global meeting and event management technology leader, with tens of thousands of customers worldwide.

Cvent Hospitality Cloud provides digital marketing tools and software solutions to its hotel and destination partners to help them grow their group and corporate travel business. For more information regarding the Cvent Hospitality Cloud, visit https://www.cvent.com/en/hospitality-cloud.

INTRODUCTION

It's a challenging time for the meetings and events business, as expectations among all stakeholders are on the rise.

For hotels, securing meetings and events remains an important revenue driver. Yet it's no longer enough to simply meet capacity requirements or provide a suitable location. To get the attention of today's planners, suppliers must understand their customers' thinking, provide unique meeting experiences, and communicate effectively and quickly.

For meeting planners, challenges include finding venues that can take meetings to the next level while staying within budget.

To better understand the current landscape, we interviewed 10 industry insiders — including meeting planners, events experts, and hotel executives — and compiled key insights from research across the industry.



HOW TO USE THIS STRATEGY GUIDE

For hoteliers, we offer creative solutions to the big challenges in winning meetings and events business.

We cover topics including making the most of your existing spaces, ways to incorporate virtual reality and augmented reality, and strategies for winning new business from planners.

We also consider how to improve relationships with existing partners, how to lock in repeat group customers, and specific ideas for making events more interesting, memorable, and creative, drawn from experts in the industry.

At the end, we've added a list of links to further reading and resources to dig deeper into some of the ideas presented.



EXECUTIVE LETTER

The meetings and events industry is not immune to today's most popular consumer trends, including mobile technology, social media, and more personalized experiences. Hotels and destinations not only need to get on board, they also must figure out how to differentiate themselves in order to capitalize on the rapidly expanding benefits of group business.

As an industry leader that provides a wide range of marketing and software solutions for both venues and planners, Cvent is uniquely positioned to track the trends and help hotels navigate the ever-evolving landscape of meetings and events. Our Hospitality Cloud sees the amazing opportunity created for hotels and destinations as demand for meeting space increases. We know event planner customers and what they want. We aggregate 82,000 planners on the Cvent Supplier Network, a world-leading database of over 225,000 venues, and see \$16 billion of business sourced through our Hospitality Cloud.

Most importantly, we offer the tools hotels need to set themselves apart, attract new leads and customers, and maximize profits from those customers. And — even better — we continue to evolve our offerings and find new ways to help hotels achieve group business success. To that end, we worked with Skift to create this Strategy Guide, which uncovers the latest trends in the event planner universe and makes this valuable information actionable for you.

Let Cvent be your partner, and let us share our perspective on the flourishing meetings and events market. Together, we can propel your business into 2019 and beyond.

Bharet Malhotra, senior vice president of Cvent Hospitality Cloud



Bharet Malhotra, senior vice president of Cvent Hospitality Cloud

WHO YOU'LL HEAR FROM IN THE INDUSTRY



MindTrek VR





















Sarah Shewey, CEO and founder, Happily



SELL THE O1 EXPERIENCE, **NOT THE SPACE**

Any hotel can offer well-designed guest rooms and a comfortable meeting space.

What gets a meeting planner to walk through a hotel's doors, and to actually book their business, is the experience offered by the property.

Properties that provide experiential environments that take meetings to the next level will impress attendees and make planners look like rock stars.

Let's explore some examples.

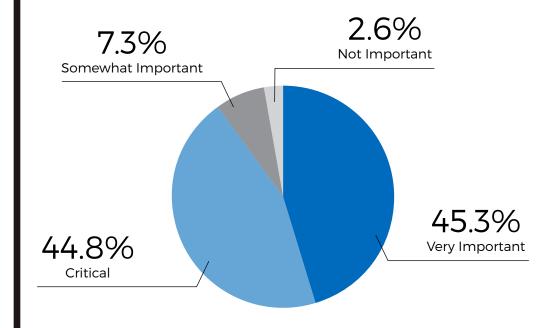
With more event choices than ever, the attendee experience has become an important differentiator and a key driver in achieving the meeting or event objectives.

> Issa Jouaneh, senior vice president & general manager, American Express Meetings & Events.



MORE THAN 90 PERCENT OF PLANNERS THINK IT'S CRITICAL OR VERY IMPORTANT TO INTEGRATE EXPERIENCES

How important is it to integrate "experiences" into the meetings you arrange?



Source: Skift's 2017 survey of meeting planners subscribed to Skift's Meetings Innovation Report newsletter





Customers tell us it's all about the experience.

People collaborate, learn, and interact differently so they're not looking for the ordinary, they're looking for inspiration.

Frank Passanante, senior vice president, Hilton Worldwide Sales - Americas

OFFER ACCESS TO DIFFERENT LOCATIONS ON PROPERTY

There is a rising preference, particularly among millennial meeting planners, for independent, quirky, unique venues. That doesn't mean hotels need to overhaul ballrooms or add features that are expensive to create. In many cases, it's just about rethinking the space.

What would you do if your funding increased by 10 percent?

1 response from meeting planners: Improve the on-site experience

Source: AMEX 2019 Global Meetings and Events Forecast





Presidential suites or even the lobby can be great. Someone in a hotel for several days won't want to be just in one wing.

Sarah Shewey, CEO and founder, Happily

USE YOUR EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

One way for hotels to do that is to offer more out-of-the-box options.

"We want to have lunch by the pool, breakouts on a lawn, and wine by a fire pit. That's an exciting 'daycation' with your peers — not a forced meeting with your bosses. When you remove a stage or a table, everyone is on the same physical level, which encourages participation," said Sarah Shewey, CEO and founder of Happily, a network of meeting planners.

Hotels with limited outdoor space can consider turning an indoor meeting room into a game room, music room, or media room. Depending on size, meeting groups may also be interested in booking spa environments to integrate wellness into their event.

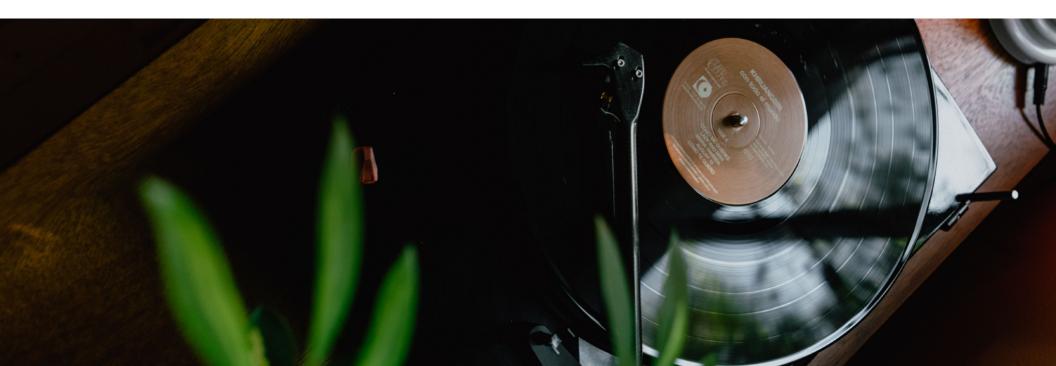
Think about how guests want to interact with the environment and with each other – then build in opportunities for meeting attendees to interact with your spaces in the same ways.



OFFER UNCONVENTIONAL ACTIVITIES: SPOTLIGHT ON KIMPTON HOTELS & RESTAURANTS

Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants has a director of music who will help planners create a custom playlist to spice up their welcome events. The playlist can represent the company brand and meeting theme — or simply consist of meeting attendees' favorite songs. "Meeting planners can even go outside the box and organize a welcome jam session with local songwriters and musicians, letting groups compose their own original material," according to Kimpton.

Food and beverage can also be a key source of inspiration. At the Kimpton Hotel Vintage, in Portland, Oregon, groups can try a custom wine blending experience and learn about varietals from the hotel's resident wine expert, with each attendee receiving a custom labeled bottle at the end of the event.



BAKE IN EXPERIENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS: SPOTLIGHT ON OMNI HOTELS & RESORTS

Omni Hotels & Resorts has prioritized offering experiential options for both meeting planners and hotel guests.

For example, the recently opened 612-room Omni Louisville Hotel features a unique speakeasy — complete with a bowling alley with a vintage design. The company has also built hotels attached to the stadiums of both the Dallas Cowboys and Atlanta Braves, giving guests close proximity to major live events.

"Everybody is into experiences today," Omni's Peter Strebel, chief marketing officer and senior vice president of sales, told Skift in a 2016 interview. "When you look at Facebook, no one writes, 'I bought a new car,' but they post their experiences, whether it be eating, drinking, dining, or cultural activities. So instead of throwing a complimentary cocktail reception [into a meeting], maybe we'll throw in a local experience. We're really in the experience business."



REWARD ATTENDEES WITH EXCLUSIVE EXPERIENCES: SPOTLIGHT ON SINGAPORE TOURISM BOARD

In some cases, hotels don't always have to do the heavy lifting, and it's possible to partner with a destination marketing organization to source engaging activities. For example, the In Singapore Incentives & Rewards (INSPIRE) program assists hotels by developing off-property programming for guests. Through this offering, small corporate meetings and incentive programs from all over the world can use experiential rewards from a dozen activities, according to a Cvent blog post.

Among the offerings are six tours focused on the destination's many interesting facets, everything from urban planning and infrastructure to its up-and-coming mixologists, who host cocktail experiences in historic venues. These packages are not available for sale commercially, creating a sense of exclusivity.

"We owe it to ourselves to always push the envelope because we're all in an industry that thrives on experiences," according to the blog post. "Our expertise gets truly maximized when meetings get optimized. Part of that optimization is the experience that our attendees have."



USE VIRTUAL REALITY TO ENGAGE ATTENDEES

Hotels and destinations are already using virtual reality to showcase their space to meeting planners, but this technology can also be leveraged to elevate the meeting attendee experience.

Groups can work together to battle zombies or play other games at MindTrek VR, a virtual reality gaming arena, which has two venues in Massachusetts.



You get to see what Karen from accounting is really like. She may be quiet and reserved in the office, but once an adult size zombie is charging at her, she's a warrior.

Brett Bovio, regional manager, MindTrek VR







Corporate meetings aren't usually places for delight, but VR elicits fun, powerful emotions. When you sit next to a colleague who's smiling, it's hard not to smile. That can be impactful, especially in a competitive company. There can be something lovely about people sharing these moments together.

Yoni Koenig, co-founder and chairman, Exit Reality

VR IS TRANSFORMING HOW PEOPLE TAKE PART IN EVENTS, EXHIBITS, AND EXPERIENCES

According to global brand experience agency FreemanXP, virtual reality can offer:

- Demos that let audiences and attendees learn, interact, manipulate, and engage with products
- Engaging content that transports attendees
- Live streaming to amplify must-see events
- Immersion in interactive worlds

VIRTUAL REALITY IS PREDICTED TO HAVE 1 BILLION USERS BY 2020

Source: https://www.newgenapps.com

VIRTUAL REALITY ELEVATES THE EXPERIENCE: SPOTLIGHT ON VICEROY HOTEL GROUP

Viceroy Hotel Group provides virtual reality experiences for guests at Hotel Zetta in San Francisco.

The hotel group also creates private, portable events for groups in partnership with Exit Reality, a company that offers virtual reality pop-ups and distributes Oculus headsets during meeting breaks.

"Many event planners see these experiences as game changing, and it definitely differentiates us from every other hotel in the city," said Aaron Feeney, area director of sales and marketing for Viceroy.



USE AUGMENTED REALITY TO ADD ANOTHER LAYER TO THE ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE



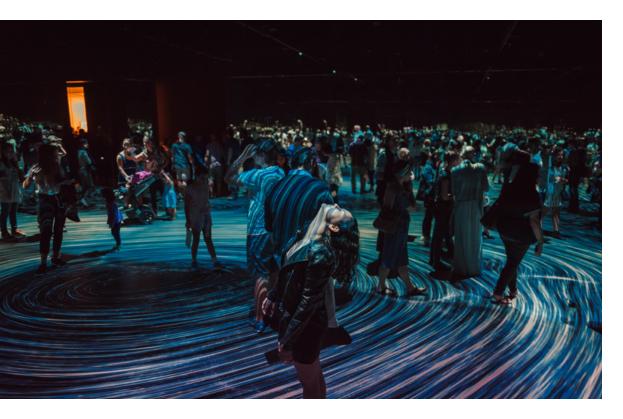




For meetings, augmented reality is more organic and interactive. If you put on VR goggles, you've lost the world around you.

But with AR, you clearly see it. We're working with Holo Lens, part of Microsoft. There are teaching aspects to the technology that have a lot of opportunity for meetings. Specific verticals – such as medical groups – could use Holo Lens for interactive teaching and show techniques from experts around the world.

IMMERSIVE OPTIONS LIKE WALL MAPPING CAN TRANSPORT ATTENDEES



Tech elements such as wall mapping, a feature offered by Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, are also being added to some meetings.

The 360-degree wall projection is "an engaging way to amp up the space," according to a Kimpton spokesperson. "It projects scenery, design, and imagery across the room to create a more immersive environment."

MAKE O2 COMMUNICATION **SEAMLESS FOR PLANNERS**

Today's workforce is composed of a broad range of generations. Each age cohort gathers and processes information differently; this creates a stew of potential miscommunication. Meeting planners and suppliers must work together throughout the planning process to make a program successful.

This means hoteliers need to provide the right information, at the right time, through the right channels if they hope to stay in the good graces of planners.



UNDERSTAND AND ADDRESS GEN X AND GEN Y COMMUNICATION STYLES AND NEEDS

Vs.

Planners of all ages appreciate the ability to choose how and when they interact with hotels. It's important for hotels to offer a variety of ways for planners to do this. If nothing else, hotels need to be clear about what channels are offered and when. Hotels can lead this conversation, asking planners for their preferred communication platform from the moment the conversation begins.



Gen Y/millennials

The perception that all millennials just want to look at a screen and not pick up the phone is not always true. Like other generations, they want suppliers who know them well. They seek trusted relationships and guard them zealously.

Hospitality consultant David Kliman in Destination Marketing: The New Wave, a study by Marketing Challenges International



Gen X

Since more Gen Xers work for companies and associations – versus working for themselves – they're more likely to need to work within their management's requirements and preferences, particularly for budget, dates, and destination.

Cvent's 2018 Planner Sourcing Gen X/Gen Y Report





Each meeting is different, so we have to be good at asking questions and pulling out that creativity. When we're willing to understand each other's problems, it shifts the whole paradigm of the meeting.

Andre Fournier, executive vice president of sales and marketing, Two Roads Hospitality

INTEGRATE TECH **TOOLS FOR PLANNING**

The use of mobile devices during the venue sourcing process is increasing for planners across all generations and in all parts of the world, according to Cvent's 2018 Global Planner Sourcing Report.

Some brands have embraced mobile. Kimpton's "text concierge," for example, allows meeting planners to text their needs while onsite, so planners can communicate with the property at any time during their meeting and the hotel can respond quickly to any needs. The service is available to guests, too.

Planners like the offering as an add-on to traditional communications channels like phone and email. "I like that when I check in, or when I want something, the response is immediate," said Beth Surmont, director, experience design, 360 Live Media.

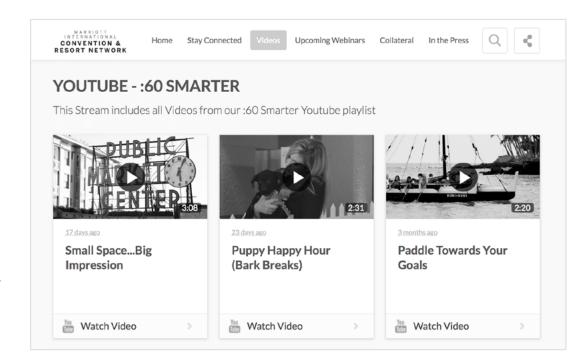
It's now more imperative than ever for hotels, venues, and destinations to optimize their mobile presence to better communicate with planners of all ages.



TRY NEW FORMATS: SPOTLIGHT ON MARRIOTT'S CONVENTION & RESORTS NETWORK

In 2018, Marriott wanted to give meeting planners working with many of the brand's properties some fresh concepts. Rather than emailing documents or engaging in a laborious campaign to reach planners one at a time, Marriott's Convention & Resorts Network (CRN) launched a video series to rapidly share their thinking in an engaging format, according to a spokeswoman. The first, "60 Smarter," features short videos designed to share new ideas for the creative execution of meetings. The second, "Meetings. Made Here. A Marriott CRN Travel Show," features videos of some of the 110 CRN properties and showcases them with a host who walks through the hotels.

Additionally, in 2019 Marriott will roll out Mastermind, a digital platform offering support groups consisting of eight to 10 planners paired with a CRN representative. Groups will meet monthly to discuss industry issues such as culinary trends in meetings, how to engage attendees outside of the meeting room, and providing attendee networking opportunities. Marriott mentors and subject matter experts will join each session.



VR GIVES PLANNERS NEW WAYS TO SEE A PROPERTY

Two-dimensional brochures and websites have their place, but they often only offer static photos and verbiage meant to evoke the feeling of a hotel's guest rooms, meeting space, and amenities. By contrast, VR allows hotel salespeople to make planners feel like they're on-site with virtual walk-throughs and meeting room setups, cutting down on the need for costly site visits.

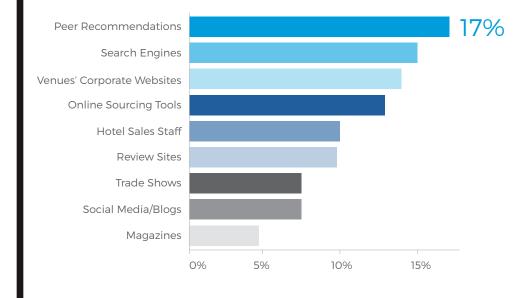
"Virtual reality is becoming more prevalent among suppliers, especially when they're trying to show new product or renovated space to planners," said Michael Dominguez, senior vice president and chief sales officer at MGM Resorts. "It allows you to tell your story in a more comprehensive way."

This is another way for hotels to provide planners with the information they need in a way that is easy to visualize.



HARNESS THE POWER OF PEERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

Top Influences on Sourcing Decision









It's about looking at people's opinions and their experiences at various hotels. For hotels, social platforms are an opportunity to spotlight what they can do for groups. If meeting planners continue to see creative ideas we're showcasing, they'll come back to our page and it becomes habitual.

Michael Dominguez, senior vice president and chief sales officer at MGM Resorts

O3 STRATEGY

UNDERSTAND AND ACCOMMODATE PLANNER BUDGETS

As much as meeting planners want to provide mouthwatering food, dazzling entertainment, and enriching content, the amount of money earmarked for a program always dictates what can be spent and what is produced as a result.

Hotels that offer visible and competitive pricing will never fail to attract the greater share of repeat business.

The good news? "Over half of planners say their event budgets have indeed increased year-over-year, compared with only 32% the year before," according to Cvent's 2018 Global Planner Sourcing Report.



TRANSPARENCY MATTERS: BE UPFRONT WITH RATES

Properties that provide honest, reliable information right when customers need it will also earn brownie points with planners.

"With 71 percent of global planners extremely or very certain of their event budget when they begin sourcing, venues need to prioritize clear and accurate pricing quotes with no hidden charges," according to Cvent's 2018 Global Planner Sourcing Report.

Hotels that offer visible and competitive pricing will never fail to attract the greater share of repeat business.



Ninety percent of planners said they'd switch to their second choice venue for at least a one percent cost savings.

Cvent's 2018 Global Planner Sourcing Report



TIPS TO REDUCE BUDGET TENSION





Ditch the scarcity mindset. Work on bringing down your minimums, show us an all-in price, and increase your rewards when people hit certain spending milestones. Sometimes the price isn't as bothersome as the tension we feel when it seems like you're just trying to hit a sales quota on our dime.

Sarah Shewey, CEO and founder, Happily





The one thing we as an industry could do better is to stop thinking about conditions as a buyer's or seller's market – it's just the market. We've had six years of record demand without much growth of meeting rooms, which is why supply has been so compressed.

Michael Dominguez, senior vice president and chief sales officer at MGM Resorts



leads, and software solutions to maximize the value of the business won.

cvent

CONCLUSION

The meetings and events industry is thriving thanks to a strong economy – but if there should be a shift that creates instability, planners and suppliers alike will need to work together more strategically.

That starts during the planning process, when meeting buyers are hungry for accurate information. Hotels need to communicate clearly and as fast as humanly possible to truly address planners' questions and concerns.

The need for collaboration continues once a group is on-site, where there's an expectation for experiential meetings, as well as a hunger to try out new technologies. Throughout the process, communication remains key.

Even post meeting, hotels can boost their chances of booking repeat business by engaging with planners and providing valuable insights. In a world of peer influence, a happy planner is a sales tool.

Like any good relationship, the hotelier/planner relationship requires transparency, communication, and trust. Planners should feel confident that their budget is as much the hotel's concern as it is theirs — and that their hotel-side contact is fully invested in taking a particular event to the next level.

"By earning the trust of planners of all ages, venues can book and retain more group business," said Cvent.



ADDITIONAL READING

Here, a selection of additional useful resources for hoteliers, curated by the SkiftX team.

What Do Meeting Planners Actually Want? Here Are the Surprising Survey Results...

https://www.tambourine.com/blog/what-do-meeting-planners-actually-want-heres-the-surprising-survey-results/

What Is Experiential Travel and Why Does it Matter to Hotel and Travel Brands?

https://www.hospitalitynet.org/opinion/4075442.html

Five Trends that Will Shape Experiential Travel in 2019

https://skift.com/2018/11/06/five-trends-that-will-shape-experiential-travel-in-2019/

What an Artful Touch Can Do for Your Meeting

https://meetingsimagined.com/tips-trends/what-artful-touch-can-do-your-meeting

Venues Investing in More Sophisticated Virtual Site Visits

https://www.bizbash.com/venues-investing-in-more-sophisticated-virtual-site-visits/los-angeles/story/35953#.W-3hjnpKi9Y

SmithBucklin Acquires Association Meeting Specialist 360 Live Media

http://www.successfulmeetings.com/News/Products-and-Services/SmithBucklin-Acquisition-360-Live-Media-Association-Meetings/

7 Venues with Outrageous V.I.P Areas

https://www.bizbash.com/jewel-nightclub-jewel-nightclub-aria-resort-casino-latest-las/gallery/195375

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Cvent's 2018 Global Planner Sourcing Report

https://www.cvent.com/sites/default/files/files/2018-07/2018%20Global%20Planner%20Sourcing%20Report.pdf

Meetings Mean Business

http://www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com

Cvent's 2018 Planner Sourcing Gen X/Gen Y Report

https://cloud.kapostcontent.net/pub/370d569f-7161-4d4b-ba2f-dd5014af03a1/2018-planner-sourcing-gen-x-slash-gen-y-report?kui=YMUSg5YgWj9C1oTlwbrT2A

AMEX Meetings & Events 2018 Global Meetings and Events Forecast

https://www.amexglobalbusinesstravel.com/content/uploads/2017/12/2018-Global-Meetings-Forecast-US.pdf

How Virtual and Augmented Reality Are Transforming Event Venues

https://www.bizbash.com/how-virtual-reality-and-augmented-reality-are-transforming-event-venues/new-york/story/34746/#.W9s9mXpKi9

Why Virtual Reality – and Why Now?

https://freemanxp.com/insights/blog/why-virtual-reality-and-why-now/

CMO Interview: Understanding Omni Hotels' Pivot Toward Experiential Meetings

https://skift.com/2016/10/25/cmo-interview-understanding-omni-hotels-pivot-toward-experiential-meetings/

Pushing the Experiential Envelope with Smaller Meetings

https://blog.cvent.com/events/pushing-experiential-envelope-smaller-meetings/

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ABOUT SKIFT

Skift is the largest industry intelligence platform, providing media, insights, and marketing to key sectors of travel.

Through daily news, research, podcasts, and Skift Global Forum conferences, Skift deciphers and defines the trends that matter to the marketers, strategists, and technologists shaping the industry.

SkiftX is Skift's in-house content marketing studio, working collaboratively with partners like Mastercard, Hyatt, Adobe, Lyft, Airbnb, and many more on custom projects to engage the world's largest audience of travel influencers and decision makers.

Visit <u>skiftx.com</u> to learn more or email at <u>skiftx@skift.com</u>

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