THE FUTURE OF WELLNESS IN MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Presented by

Skift + VENETIAN MEETINGS

THE VENETIAN® RESORT | LAS VEGAS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wellness is taking over the world. The trend is now driving billions in annual consumer spending and, in the process, is reshaping the broader travel industry. That impact naturally extends to meetings and events, which are rapidly integrating wellness and mindfulness elements into programs small and large.

As attendees demand more ways to take ownership of their own time and maintain their wellness routines, venues are upping their game. At The Venetian Resort Las Vegas, for example, meeting planners have asked for "everything from a yoga class to a meditation room to bike races, runs, and even coordinating hikes off the Las Vegas Strip," said Senior Vice President of Sales Chandra Allison. Planners are also requesting more varied and healthful food options, flexible scheduling, and creative alternatives to cocktail receptions, Allison said, signalling a major shift in the way events come together.

Creative planners and venues alike, then, are working together to chart a new future for the meetings and events sector. In this report, we'll report on some of the ways planners are negotiating these seismic changes while staying on budget, what venues are doing to keep today's wellness-minded attendees happy, and suggest a few visions for the future of meetings more broadly, based on numerous interviews with travel insiders.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	2
Executive Letter	4
Introduction: Forecasting the Impact of Wellness	6
The Rise of Meetings That Actually Feel Fun	9
Executive Q&A: Making Mindfulness Part of Meetings	13
Bringing the Wellness Trend to Life	16
In Pursuit of More Human Meetings	18
Insider Q&A: Making Wellness Personal	21
Inspirations for the Future of Meetings and Events	23
Key Takeaways	26
About Skift and The Venetian Resort Las Vegas	27

ABOUT SKIFT

Skift is the largest industry intelligence platform providing media, insights, and marketing to key sectors of travel. Skift deciphers and defines trends for global CEOs and CMOs across travel, dining, and wellness sectors through a combination of news, research, conferences, and marketing services.

ABOUT SKIFTX

SkiftX is Skift's in-house content studio. SkiftX produced this report in partnership with The Venetian Resort Las Vegas.

MASTHEAD

Vice President, SkiftX / Katherine Townsend
Director of Creative Strategy, SkiftX / Matt Heidkamp
Research Editor, SkiftX / Jeremy Kressmann
Editorial Strategist, SkiftX / Paul Brady
Editor, SkiftX / Alison McCarthy
Strategist, SkiftX / Sonali Sen
Editor at Large, SkiftX / Greg Oates
Associate Brand Strategist, SkiftX / Dawn Rzeznikiewicz
Project Manager, SkiftX / Gianna Greco
Senior Designer / Ping Chan
Designer / Joanna Gonzalez

EXECUTIVE LETTER

We are excited to share this new SkiftX report on an area of burgeoning interest to our customers: wellness.

Research tells us that when wellness is built into a company's culture, the company's employees are happier and more productive. We also know that today's consumers are increasingly wellness-focused. For these reasons, meeting planners are wisely looking for ways to incorporate wellness-related programs into their events.

At The Venetian Resort Las Vegas, we've seen this trend evolve in real time and have created a number of health and wellness options that meeting organizers can offer to attendees. To name just a few:

- Canyon Ranch Spa + Fitness offers wellness programs for groups that feature healthy snacks, fitness breaks, and express spa treatments.
- We offer a variety of poolside yoga classes, and we can also customize yoga sessions for groups.
- Our suite products contain no paraben, gluten, silicone, or dyes, and are not tested on animals.
- Our Honest Food program is designed to address the latest trends in wellness and sustainability; it gives meeting planners flexible menu options, including vegetarian and vegan choices.

VENETIAN MEETINGS

THE VENETIAN® RESORT | LAS VEGAS

Chandra Allison,
senior vice president of sales,
The Venetian Resort Las Vegas

These initiatives are just a few of the ways we're helping meeting attendees maintain wellness while they're on site. Our wellness programs also reinforce our uniqueness as a fully-integrated resort: We always emphasize that attendees can work, play, relax, and stay fit — all under one roof.

We're also creating innovative programs that combine wellness, sustainability, and community service. For example, we have a partnership with Clean the World to help families in vulnerable communities. Clean the World recycles unused hygiene items from hotels like ours and distributes them to communities in need. Now, meeting planners can integrate hygiene kit building programs into their events — it's a powerful and eco-conscious way to create wellness for others.

We believe that wellness is far more than a temporary phenomenon, so we're going to continue to create new wellness-oriented experiences that event planners can tap into. We hope this Skift report inspires you to include a wellness program in your next event at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas.

THE VENETIAN® RESORT

LAS VEGAS

THERE'S A GREAT BIG WORLD IN HERE

WANT THE WORLD

INTRODUCTION: FORECASTING THE IMPACT OF WELLNESS

Wellness has been a buzzword in the travel world for years now. But lately the hospitality industry has realized that wellness is not just about providing access to fitness centers, organic food items, and spa treatments. It is, those on the cutting edge know, about much, much more.

In a world in which work has become more fast-paced and smartphones are glued to hands, people are looking for ways to feel healthy and happy while remaining productive in their careers. The pursuit of wellness is a part of their everyday lives, and with the rise of such in-home exercise options as Peloton bikes and Mirror gyms, it's becoming easier than ever to make fitness personal. And once consumers make fitness and wellness part of their routine, they don't want to give it up when they travel.

Hospitality brands are increasingly realizing they have to provide experiences to help people feel wholesome while on the road.

"Our hectic schedules and 24/7 mobile-focused lives are driving the need for self care and escapism," said Bill Caswell, principal and hospitality practice leader at North Highland, a consultancy. "The hospitality sector is fulfilling these wishes through things like bath butlers, private yoga coaches, quiet zones, health-focused snacks, and unique in-room amenities."

Meeting and event planners are at the forefront of this movement as they acknowledge that productivity requires both a sound mind and a sound body.

"This is definitely a meaningful change. Wellness is really important — and even more so now that our society is constantly connected to technology, struggling with work-life balance," said Melissa Vilders, senior manager for conference management at SAP Marketing in Atlanta. "Wellness and employee care must become top of mind issues for us. We've been making it a priority to implement a wellness element in all our events."

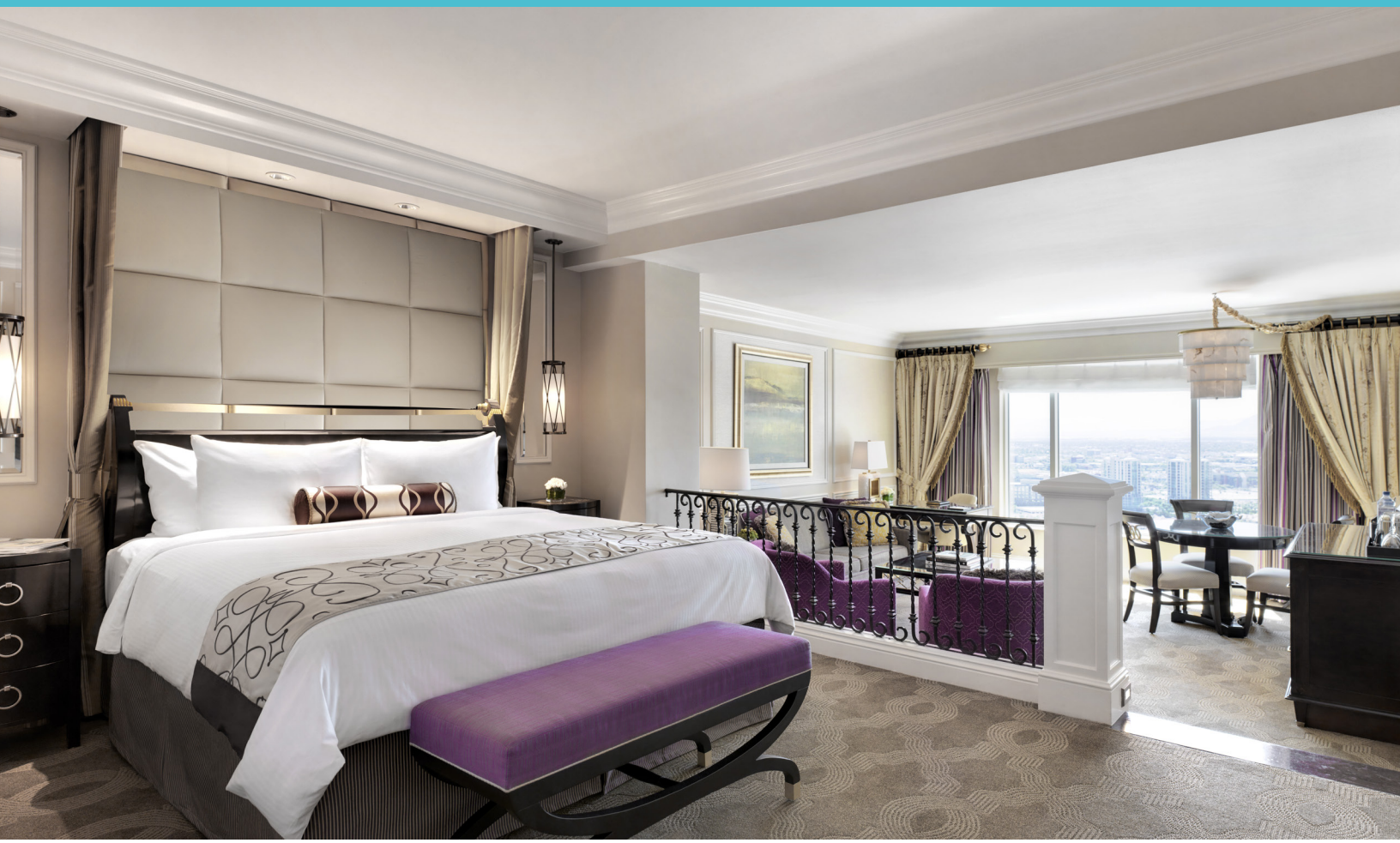
But before this report dives into just how planners are doing that, there's one big question to answer: What exactly *is* wellness?

"Wellness to me is not just being in good health, but taking a more holistic approach to your body — being in balance physically, mentally, and spiritually," said Chandra Allison, senior vice president of sales at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas. "It's about choosing a lifestyle that provides the highest quality of life."

Along with taking care of the body, people are increasingly trying to take care of their minds. Mindfulness has become another burgeoning area within wellness that hotel brands are embracing.

"Wellness traveling 25 years ago meant ordering a Diet Coke instead of regular and hitting the hotel gym in the basement to sit on the recumbent bike for 20 minutes," said Victoria Nickle, executive director of the California Health and Longevity Institute. "Now we find guests who are choosing their hotels, specific flight times, and destinations all based on improving their fitness levels — and creating a healthier experience — while away. Mindfulness, or being present, is just as important in an increasingly busy world where technological distractions, stress, and pressure are all now simply an expected part of our day."

Reacting to these demands, hotels have been upgrading fitness centers, adding better equipment and moving facilities to upper levels with brighter light and even views of the destination city. They're also providing outdoor areas including gardens and walking trails where meeting attendees can escape for fresh air and a break from indoor conference rooms — not to mention their ever-present smartphone screens. Other properties have focused on adding windows and more natural lighting to meeting and event space.



"They're creating environments for meetings aligned more to art galleries and museums," said Mark Cooper, CEO of IACC, which helps meeting planners find spaces and create experiences. "It's about design and acoustics and aesthetics that make people happier."

Properties have embraced sustainability indoors as well, using natural materials and plants to create a more eco-conscious and pleasant environment. They've revamped guestrooms with better soundproofing for better sleep; headboards are thicker, and air-conditioning units are quieter. Many hotels, including The Venetian Resort Las Vegas, now offer free water bottle filling stations, something that was a novelty before. And, yes, menus have improved with more farm-to-table ingredients and items that cater to people with a variety of dietary needs.

"It's still a competitive world out there," said Janet Sperstad, program director of event management at Madison Area Technical College in Wisconsin. "People have choices and they're making different choices, whether for business or pleasure. The hotels that integrate wellness are attracting more people."

And when it comes to "more people," really it's a question of many, many more: The overall wellness economy grew to $4.2 trillion worldwide in 2017, according to one widely cited Global Wellness Institute report. Tourism specifically contributed $639 billion to the total.

This report will examine the consumer trends that are making wellness and mindfulness an area that hotels must focus on to attract events and meetings. It will examine how the hospitality industry is adapting to make hotel guests and meeting attendees more comfortable and fulfilled. And it will explore the various real-world efforts that leading brands are using to win more meetings and events business and better engage attendees.

THE RISE OF MEETINGS THAT ACTUALLY FEEL FUN

People no longer want cookie-cutter vacations. Travelers are after **unique experiences that make them feel engaged.** It should come as no surprise that the same goes for people attending corporate gatherings and meetings. They may be attendees, but that doesn't mean these individuals want sit in an environment that reminds them of an office conference room back home.

In other words, **bleisure trips** that blend work and play are here to stay.

Meeting planners are becoming more cognizant of that. They're spending more time on "experience creation," according to **a 2018 report from IACC.** Planners also said they expect the focus on experiences to become more important over the next five years than it is today.

Venue operators, too, said they are offering more creative meeting rooms and outdoor meeting spaces. They are coming up with ideas for themed food and beverage options, ice-breakers, team-building activities, and local excursions including wine tastings and cultural tours, according to IACC. Popular team-building exercises cited include solving puzzles, performing skits, or attendees interviewing each other about their childhoods.

Another team-building exercise growing in popularity involves culinary competitions, said Cooper, of IACC. He's seen meeting delegates tasked with making a dish — and it could be as simple as designing canapés — before a team is declared a winner, a la Chopped or Top Chef.

"Your delegates can actually share the food and enjoy the food at the end — and have a glass of wine," he said.

AFFORDABLY INTEGRATING NEW CONTENT

Making meetings more interesting doesn't necessarily have to cost a lot of money. In fact, meeting planners said that only four of 26 specific wellness practices would necessitate extra expenses that would require additional approval, according to a recent survey conducted by the Incentive Research Foundation.

Some affordable practices they pointed to were frequent breaks and a casual dress code to encourage moving. They said mindfulness breaks, free fitness activities such as hiking and yoga, and off-property activities within walking distance of the hotel could also be inexpensive additions.

Yoga sessions during conferences have been popular for many years, thanks in part to the fact that hotels have more generally offered them as an amenity. But meditation breaks are now on the rise as well. (In fact, that's true both in meetings and beyond: The proportion of the U.S. population that meditates rose from 4.1 percent in 2012 to 14.2 percent in 2017, **according to the Centers for Disease Control.**)

Carina Bauer, CEO of the IMEX Group, said that adding meditation was a key effort at two recent shows: IMEX, held at Messe Frankfurt, and IMEX America, held at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas. Organizers created a Be Well Lounge, with meditation, massages, and quiet "white space" for personal reflection. Many meeting attendees started the day by participating in a 5K IMEXrun, as well.

"We know from talking to our delegates and from attending other industry events that personal health and well-being can take a backseat during busy days on the show floor," Bauer said. "However, wellness elements are increasingly being incorporated into events — often in a big way."

Those thoughtful amenities are becoming more and more frequently requested, said Rachel Andrews, Director of Events, Cvent. "Amenities that support attendees' cultural and personal needs such as prayer rooms or quiet rooms, 'mother pods' for nursing mothers, and the like are so important for delivering a comfortable, memorable experience," she said. "Casual lounging areas where attendees can connect in a less-formal setting or check their email are also frequently requested" for the more than 1,000 events that Cvent supports every year.

CREATING MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Activities and experiences that are interactive and collaborative are the ones that attendees tend to remember fondly, experts told SkiftX. To take one example, the Live Zone at IMEX America featured a giant floor piano where attendees gathered together to perform. They were also entertained by giant puppets, a VR zipline, jugglers, and carnival games over the course of the show, held at the Sands Expo at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas. A similarly distinctive Discovery Zone will launch at IMEX in Frankfurt in May with an interactive art mural, a talking robot, a holographic show, and other surprises.

In general, planners are re-imagining their meeting floors, said Karla Bauman, director of event management at Experient, the global events company.

"When we all go to industry events or conferences, if you are not used to that engagement of people, we all need a lot of downtime," she said. "It's a lot of networking. If we provide a 'white space moment,' that will enhance how they take in that conference."

Another way to make it easier to get through busy conferences is to provide attendees with "the element of surprise," she said. "If you're able to, maybe you don't announce everything you're having," she said. "We all like the unknown, whether that's a pop-up food experience, entertainment, a walking magician. If you turn a corner, and it's a night lounge or activation you weren't expecting, that's cool."

Victoria Hoffman, founder of Concierge & Events by Victoria, said planners or employers can also surprise attendees with incentives such as gift certificates, discounts on spa treatments, or prizes that are either sports- or wellness-oriented. Planners might hand out eye masks, ecologically-friendly stainless steel cups, or branded flip flops. Fitness trainers might roam the floor, giving pointers, hosting classes, or providing wellness tips.

Karen Watson, senior director of strategic events at Maritz Global Events, says she likes to offer her attendees group activities such as morning runs or walks; yoga, Zumba, and boot camp classes; and guided meditation.

"We want to make sure our guests have a myriad of options to meet their wellness needs while they are here," said Allison. Among the many available on-site are a 134,000-square-foot Canyon Ranch Spa + Fitness facility with 90 treatment rooms, a 40-foot rock climbing wall, and numerous fitness machines and classes, including poolside yoga, Allison said.

But she's also organized non-physical activities such as a Cuddle Corner, where attendees can play with rescue dogs and cats. "People absolutely loved it," she said. "It gave them a moment to de-stress."

At another meeting, Watson's attendees were treated to a silent disco. "It was hysterical to watch," she said, recounting the light-up wireless headphones everyone was wearing. "People loved it. We got so many raves for that event," she said. "We're always trying to do something new."

And during one lunch meeting, Watson gave attendees a "chat pack" of cards with questions to encourage conversation — and to keep people from defaulting to checking their smartphones, **one of the latest challenges planners confront.**

A FOCUS ON TREATING PEOPLE LIKE PEOPLE

Food options at meetings and events have also become more interesting and more wellness-oriented. Yes, healthier snacks — think fruits and nuts versus cookies and candy, and fruit-infused water versus just coffee — are a part of this, but many planners are going further and getting more creative.

"Now, it's all about food trucks and bringing the outside world in," said Sperstad, of Madison College. At The Venetian Resort Las Vegas, the newest innovation is an Honest Food program that puts hearty, healthy choices front and center for attendees.

"At the end of the day, we're humans — and humans crave humans," said Sperstad. "We crave more meaning and not more data. We should be creating experiences that elicit more emotion — which in turn creates more buy-in."

That same thinking should guide any planner's approach to integrating wellness, Sperstad said. "We can't be engineers of exhausted people," she said. "We're not robots. We can't run 100 percent all the time. Attendees want to have that space and time, and they want to have choices." Put another way, definitely offer that fun run or yoga class — just don't schedule them too early in the morning.

EXECUTIVE Q&A: HOW THE VENETIAN RESORT LAS VEGAS MAKES MINDFULNESS PART OF MEETINGS

Senior Vice President of Sales Chandra Allison shares her perspective on the future of the meetings business, how best to engage attendees, and what makes Las Vegas special.

SkiftX: In the last year or so, we've seen a huge surge in interest regarding wellness and mindfulness, particularly in the travel sector but also beyond it — consumer packaged goods, fitness, and lifestyle. What's motivating this shift and why is it important to pay attention to this change?

Allison: The shift is happening on both ends. When mindfulness and wellness are incorporated into the culture of a company, it's been noted that companies see an increase in employee happiness and productivity. Meanwhile, consumers are becoming more focused on wellness. With both sides more interested in wellness, it's a natural leap for meeting organizers to weave wellness activities into the fabric of their programs. As part of The Venetian Resort Las Vegas's commitment to innovation, our team has curated a number of wellness options for meeting professionals to include in their programs.

What's your definition of "wellness" as a concept more generally?

Wellness to me is not just being in good health, but taking a more holistic approach to your body — being in balance physically, mentally, and spiritually — and choosing a lifestyle and path to provide the highest quality of life. It's not a final destination, but an ever-changing journey.

How should hospitality companies be approaching wellness?

As consumers are more focused on wellness, we've seen travelers are keen to "stay on track." Hospitality companies can integrate wellness offerings in approachable ways to help their guests achieve their goals. For instance, our hotel guests have access to Canyon Ranch Spa + Fitness during their stay, and we offer wellness breaks for convention groups that pair healthy snacks with quick fitness classes and express spa treatments.

How are guest demands changing when it comes to wellness?

They are looking for ways to help them keep their routines while traveling. They are looking for ways to maintain optimal levels of health, mitigate jet lag, and keep balance through fitness options and healthy culinary options.

What specifically has The Venetian Resort Las Vegas done to address guests demanding more on the wellness front?

We want to make sure our guests have a myriad of options to meet their wellness needs while they are here. Canyon Ranch Spa + Fitness, for instance, offers two state-of-the-art fitness centers and dozens of group classes, as well as an extensive list of spa services to help attendees relax and rejuvenate.

We offer a number of healthy culinary options for meetings, all which fall under our Honest Food program. In the terms of our banquet service, we've revolutionized our menus and procedures to address trends such wellness and sustainability. The program offers diverse and flexible options, including vegetarian and vegan, which addresses the changing needs of our meeting guests and attendees. In addition, no-alcohol or low-alcohol choices are becoming popular for evening functions.

These healthy and sustainable culinary practices continue to evolve, and we look at it as a collaborative effort with meeting professionals to ensure they achieve their goals and provide their attendees with a memorable experience.

In what ways are meeting planners asking hospitality brands to incorporate wellness into events?

Over the last few years, we've seen customers looking for ways to bring wellness into their events — everything from a yoga class to a meditation room to bike races, runs, and even coordinating hikes off the Las Vegas Strip. These requests continue to increase, but through our partnership with Canyon Ranch Spa + Fitness, we're well positioned to accommodate many options for health, wellness, and mindfulness activities.

What are some "need to knows" for any meeting planners interested in upping the wellness quotient of their events? What challenges do planners face when it comes to recognizing wellness during events?

As attendees are looking to "stay the course" while traveling, wellness offerings are becoming vital parts of meetings and conventions. It can be a definite challenge for meeting professionals to incorporate wellness options into their programs while still achieving meeting objectives. However, at events where wellness is incorporated as a major goal, clients have seen measurable productive outcomes and increased engagement from attendees. After all, meetings and events can sometimes be taxing on attendees. Because of this, we suggest that our clients plan content and schedules that still allow time for attendees to participate in wellness and mindfulness activities.

What do you forecast as the future of wellness? What would you like to see more of when it comes to wellness at events?

Wellness continues to be an important part of client programs, but it's also an important part of the culture at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas. We recently brought on Leslie Klinger, our vice president of team member wellness. For us, team member wellness is not just health, but purpose, social, community, and financial wellness as well. This is vital for us because our guest success begins with our team members.

Wellness has seen a recent rise in popularity but we don't see it as a passing trend. We believe our customers will continue to incorporate wellness offerings into their programs, and we will continue to innovate our offerings to provide the best experiences for them.

BRINGING THE WELLNESS TREND TO LIFE

Almost every part of a meeting should include wellness and mindfulness moments, from the meals to the way speakers present to the audience to the post-sessions programming, planners said in a series of interviews with SkiftX. Here's a closer look at how The Venetian Resort Las Vegas is embracing the trend.

"Wellness really is something that is very much at the forefront," said Bauman, of Experient. "I think people are starting to be aware of it and figuring out what that means in the event space and how they can incorporate it and how they can pay for it."

In recent years, many venues have gone to great lengths to make integrating wellness easier for planners. Here's a look at a few interesting examples of what's worked for The Venetian Resort Las Vegas.

- At The Venetian Resort Las Vegas, the Sands Expo convention center has a wellness program for conventions that includes healthy food, active lifestyle moments, and relaxation.
- The Honest Food concept features fresh salads, healthy side dishes, and oven-roasted vegetables — and absolutely no processed meat. There are vegan and gluten-free dishes on every menu, lunch and dinner, too.
- For relaxation, the resort has meditation rooms, oxygen lounges, and a partnership with Canyon Ranch to offer yoga, massage, mini spa services, fitness breaks, and classes. Many conference attendees use the spa's services, including 25-minute Morning Express Services, before sessions begin, said Deirdre Strunk, vice president of spa, fitness, and beauty at Canyon Ranch.

> **"Many travelers want to stay on their wellness routine during a conference. We offer special pricing in addition to early and late appointment times to accommodate schedules.**
>
> — Deirdre Strunk,
> vice president of spa, fitness,
> and beauty at Canyon Ranch

IN PURSUIT OF MORE HUMAN MEETINGS

Major consumer trends are driving the surge in wellness in events. “I believe we’re at a breaking point in our society where people are tired of feeling tired,” said Vilders, of SAP Marketing. “People finally realize the importance of taking care of themselves in order to be the best person they can and deserve to be.”

Today's attendees are those people — the same people who want each and every trip tailored to their personal interests.

"The distinction between work life and home life is becoming increasingly blurred. People no longer separate the two spaces and therefore expect their personal wellness priorities to be reflected in their workplace and at the events they attend," said Bauer, the IMEX CEO. "When attending an event, delegates want to be treated as well-rounded human beings with individual needs and requirements — not simply as a representative of their organization."

These days, an increasing number of companies are planning trips for highly-niche personalities. They're not just vacations; they're memorable adventures, pursuits, expeditions, and quests.

Is it time for the meetings industry to stop thinking of "meeting attendees" and to start thinking of them as "travelers?" And how can meeting planners speak to large audiences in a way that feels personal to each one?

"That's a tough one," said Watson, of Maritz Global Events. "One of the things with meetings and global events is personas. There are different personas of people that attend your event. Some are going to be serious note takers in the front row. Some are networkers. Some are just motivated by being around others, and some are motivated by awards. You have to weave different elements into your event that will appeal to different personas," even if that means not everyone will love every part of a program.

When Watson held that silent disco party, for example, some people didn't want to participate. So she made sure other options were available: In one area, there was a screen with movie clips. For those who just wanted to chat over drinks, they had a bar in a foyer with comfortable chairs.

"In general, we try to incorporate things that create opportunities [to gather and converse] outside the meeting space," she said. "Meeting attendees are people too. You need to be brave in giving people true choices. Allow them to craft and mold their experience to fit not only their individual personalities but also the experiences that match their moods."

That's a strategy supported by one major study conducted by PCMA, a network of business events strategists, Marriott International, and the global innovation consultancy Fahrenheit 212.

"As companies get smarter with predictive analytics, consumer expectations for personalized, seamless experiences will continue to rise. Meetings and events will need to move past reactive adjustments to adopt a proactive approach to personalized experiences, understanding the needs of participants before they arrive," **the study found.**

Offering choices is another tactic event planners can use to further personalize their meetings.

"If you have a meeting room and every chair and table is exactly the same and laid out the same, you're not giving a choice," said Cooper, of IACC.

He usually makes sure to have high top tables, sofas, and regular chairs at functions. The same variety needs to be seen in the food, including cuisine from different parts of the world, he said.

Vilders said she looks at post-event satisfaction surveys to see what she can do to improve the next meeting.

“It is hard to appeal and satisfy every different personality when it comes to travel and events planning,” she said. “However, we take into consideration the post-event survey and try to implement as many changes as possible in order to satisfy everyone.”

Melinda Burdette, director of events at Meeting Professionals International, said there is no reason to think of meeting attendees and travelers separately.

“Why does it have to be one or the other? Our attendees are looking for experiences that not only help them professionally but contribute to their personal growth as well,” she said. “As event planners, we need to provide more opportunities for our attendees to create their own path within our events. We need to get away from the ‘herding’ mentality and provide environments that allow our attendees freedom of movement within the event while still fulfilling their return on investment.”

She said planners can make attendees feel that they are getting personal attention by recognizing all communities and special interest groups and giving them opportunities “to find common ground and network.”

INSIDER Q&A: MAKING WELLNESS PERSONAL

More and more event planners are turning to outside experts to motivate their attendees to embrace the wellness and mindfulness movements. Las Vegas–based Lee Papa is one such pro who began giving talks at meetings and events in 2014. Now, she attends a variety of conferences with her Mindfulness Lounge, where she leads meditation sessions for attendees. One of her latest came during IMEX Americas, held in 2018 at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas.

SkiftX spoke to Papa about how the meetings and events industry can better incorporate wellness and mindfulness into gatherings.

SkiftX: Many hotel brands have invested in wellness lately. Would you say there is a meaningful shift going on?

Papa: I grew up with alternative healthcare methods and natural and holistic approaches to wellness decades ago. However, those were predominantly focused on the body. And that's the difference that I see in this current incarnation of wellness. We're in an evolved phase of understanding and scientific backing of the mind-body-spirit connection. Even though there were large communities that understood and practiced this, they were seen as fringe. Ten years ago, when I operated my wellness center in Las Vegas, mind-body-spirit was just becoming a significant mainstream phrase. During the six years that the center was open — with more than 4,000 classes and tens of thousands of visits to the center — we saw the evolution. The integration of the mind-body-spirit is now a way of life with personal power and responsibility. It's not just a catch phrase.

So, with all that background, that leads me to, *Why wellness in travel and hospitality?* Because it's smart. Over the years, the trajectory was towards amenities and excessive indulgence. As individuals made wellness-based shifts in their personal lives, they no longer define amenities and indulgences in the same way. They feel the deep and profound effects of wellness practices. When they travel, they want to continue those practices that support and expand their well-being.

We hear a lot about wellness and more and more about mindfulness. What's your personal definition of those terms and why should they matter to meeting planners?

We know that wellness is all the rage as the newest trend in meetings and events, but often there's a lack of knowledge on the subject. It's not something you can understand after a quick search of the web!

Wellness is the trend but mindfulness is leading edge. In its simplest form, mindfulness equals awareness — awareness of your thoughts, your feelings, the external world around you with no judgement. The training, techniques, and practices that follow are based on the individual instructor but the core — awareness — is the same.

With my background in hotels, hospitality, meetings and events, I understand first-hand how these sectors wear stress like a badge of honor. But it can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. We cannot change an industry or the world without first changing ourselves. With each individual that moves to mindfulness-based practices in their personal lives, the ripple effect leads to their professional lives, their co-workers, and their meetings.

What are your recommendations for the best ways that the hospitality industry and meeting planners can promote wellness?

First, engage in meditation and mindfulness practices yourself! This will give you a new mindset that will be the foundation. You can't hide authenticity. If you're planning to jump on the bandwagon and come at this from an inauthentic motivation, success will be an uphill battle. But when you're practicing mindfulness yourself, the shift is palpable — and it expands outward exponentially.

Attendees often spend their time running around, checking their devices between sessions, and not getting enough sleep. How can planners better manage time while still delivering a return on investment?

The interesting thing about trying to use every last second and to overschedule during events is that attendees can't actually retain all the information. Often, there's the perception that an event is successful if it provides robust amounts of knowledge, even if the attendees don't remember the key components. This is exactly why I created the Mindfulness Lounge. Science has proven that with short meditative breaks throughout a learning experience, the level of retention increases. Attendees who aren't feeling overwhelmed and stressed are the ones who are going to remember the information.

INSPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS

There are plenty of ways to engage — and even attract more — wellness-oriented guests by emphasizing sustainability initiatives at meetings. Adding more group activities, improving lighting, and incorporating smart technology offerings are good ideas, planners told SkiftX.

"In many ways, sustainability and wellness go hand in hand," said Bauer, of the IMEX Group. "A meat-free diet tends to generate less of a carbon footprint and uses less water, and locally sourced food supports local communities and is more environmentally-friendly," she said by way of example.

Bauer also believes more travelers who want to practice wellness will do volunteer work, such as supporting a charity or community, while on the road. Doing so, she said, "has well documented physical and emotional health benefits."

Some organizations are making volunteering a concrete part of programs, multiple experts said. "We're doing things that benefit the community, including team activities building prosthetic hands for children in need or cooking in our wellness kitchens for people with disabilities," said Nickle, of the of the California Health and Longevity Institute.

"Attendees desire more human connection," said Caswell, of North Highland. "The need for greater interaction among attendees is also being reflected in more active entertainment options including local cultural adventure, local dining, and volunteering or charity events intertwined with meetings."

EMBRACING TRENDS AND USING TECHNOLOGY WISELY

Technology and wellness are sure to become just as intertwined as sustainability and wellness, said Vilders, of SAP Marketing.

"We see it already now with sleep, steps, and food tracker apps heavily used in our society," Vilders said. "Technology can be a great tool to help us reach our well-being goals."

Anne Dimon, president of the Wellness Tourism Association, said she sees many changes on the horizon for the meetings market. The association is in the middle of developing a program to work more closely with the corporate market.

She said companies will offer more individual and personalized incentives focusing on science-based wellness and prevention. That could include a week at LifeWorks in Montana, where a team of health and neuroscience professionals can help employees learn how to improve the health of their brains, or a week at the Pritikin Health Resort in Miami for those looking to seriously improve their eating habits.

Dimon said there will be a greater emphasis on offering healthy food options, including customized meals for those with allergies or dietary restrictions, and less emphasis on "open bars."

Dinners will be scheduled earlier so that meeting delegates who prefer to follow their typical nighttime rituals before bed with still be able to participate. For those who don't want an evening out, there will be quiet evening sessions that would include yoga, meditation, and massage.

> **"Attendees desire more human connection. The need for greater interaction among attendees is also being reflected in more active entertainment options including local cultural adventure, local dining, and volunteering or charity events intertwined with meetings.**
>
> - Bill Caswell, principal and hospitality practice leader, North Highland

PERSONALIZATION AND FORECASTING THE FUTURE

The specifics of what venues offer will get more unusual and more niche over time, said Hoffman, of Concierge & Events by Victoria. No doubt, yoga, Zumba, and running will remain popular — and sports such as Brazilian jiu-jitsu, kickboxing, and TRX will almost certainly take off, she said. Her other prediction? "Integrative medicine will play an enormous part as more hotels are focused on combining doctors and practitioners to feed the body and soul," Hoffman said. Team-building activities will include more active components, and there will be more breaks that integrate movement during conferences so people don't have to sit for hours, she added.

More broadly, the booming bleisure trend will keep going strong — and meeting planners will try to find ways to capitalize on it, said Bauman, of Experient.

"As a community we are all working a lot," she said. "If you're going across the country and going for work, people are tacking on a few days for the leisure. Are people bringing their spouses? Are they having them meet them? What can we do as planners to encourage that business and leisure travel? It helps our attendees, and it benefits the city and the hotel partners — so can we bundle some opportunities?"

One thing is for certain, Dimon said. "We will see an increase in bookings at hotels and resorts located in places that offer easy access to nature, along with the peace and quiet not typically available at the larger, busier city properties," Dimon said.

The push to find peaceful, natural settings is so buzzy that the Global Wellness Summit named "prescribing nature," or taking advantage of the health benefits of nature, one of its leading trends for 2019. It's one that meeting planners, wherever they're working, would be wise to embrace in the future.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- "Wellness is far more than a temporary phenomenon," said Chandra Allison, senior vice president of sales at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas. "We know that today's consumers are increasingly wellness-focused, and meeting planners are wisely looking for ways to incorporate wellness-related programs into their events. At The Venetian Resort Las Vegas, we've seen this trend evolve in real time and have created a number of health and wellness options that meeting organizers can offer to attendees."

- Wellness and mindfulness demand more than just fitness facilities. Forward thinking venues are now integrating the two concepts into food and beverage, relaxation spaces, spa treatments, and the creative use of technology in a non-gimmicky way.

- Attendees are after unique experiences that make them feel vibrant and engaged; nobody wants to sit in an environment that feels like an office conference room back home.

- Bleisure trips that blend work and play are here to stay — and the same goes for meetings and events.

- "The distinction between work life and home life is becoming increasingly blurred — people no longer separate the two spaces and therefore expect their personal wellness priorities to be reflected in their workplace and at the events they attend," said Carina Bauer, CEO of IMEX. "When attending an event, delegates want to be treated as well-rounded human beings with individual needs and requirements not simply as a representative of their organization."

- The future of wellness in meetings and events is about embracing the niche, the personal, and the outdoors. "Easy access to nature, along with peace and quiet," will become increasingly important in the coming years, said Anne Dimon, president of the Wellness Tourism Association.

ABOUT SKIFT

Skift is the largest intelligence platform in travel, providing media, insights, marketing to key sectors of the industry. 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 Adobe, Airbnb, Hyatt, Lyft, Mastercard, and many more on custom projects to engage the world's largest audience of travel influencers and decision makers.

Visit skiftx.com to learn more or email at skiftx@skift.com.

ABOUT THE VENETIAN RESORT LAS VEGAS

The Venetian Resort Las Vegas, The Palazzo, and Sands Expo® are on the forefront of meeting innovation, continually introducing unique experiences and non-traditional meeting venues. The Venetian Resort Las Vegas is the ideal choice for everything from large trade shows to small meetings, with unique services and spaces to serve every need. The fully-integrated luxury resort was built with the needs of business in mind: meeting space is easily accessible and highly configurable, and attendees can avail themselves of countless dining, shopping, entertainment, and spa options.

The resort is also a recipient of many hospitality industry awards, including Forbes Four-Star ratings for more than 10 consecutive years, Cvent's top five meeting hotels in the U.S., and over a decades' worth of Meetings & Conventions' Gold Key Elite and Gold Platter Elite awards. The resort has also long been recognized for sustainability leadership. For more information, please visit venetianmeetings.com.