



Events & Incentive Travel

Industry update

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 5



INSIDE: See why ITA Group's most seasoned experts say Chile is a trending meeting destination.

Hello!

Gathering team members and supplier partners during ITA Group’s annual summer Converge event reminds me of the power of recognition. This issue introduces readers to some of the people who’ve gone above and beyond to help ITA Group deliver exceptional experiences for our clients. See our 2026 Timeless Performance Award recipients, who we celebrated at Converge [\(see p. 15 for the winners!\)](#).

Speaking of accolades, I’m proud to share that this Events & Incentive Travel Industry Report was named a finalist in two 2026 [Content Marketing Institute](#) award categories: Best Content Marketing Program in Travel & Tourism and Best NEW Publication (Print or Digital). As we kick off FY26, we’re listening to colleagues, clients and trusted supplier partners to stay ahead of event trends and emerging incentive travel destinations to continue bringing you our recommendations.



A handwritten signature in dark blue ink that reads "Monica Fasse".

Monica Fasse

Industry & Partner Relations Manager

WHAT'S INSIDE

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INDUSTRY NEWS

These **latest trends** are
shaping the industry.

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Around the industry

What's happening

CEMA

CEMA Summit 2026: Industry takeaways

This year's Summit reinforced why CEMA remains one of the most valuable communities for event marketers. With an attendee mix of industry leaders, conversations are practical, candid and future-focused. I only wish lengthy general sessions hadn't cut into networking time.

The Summit's impressive breadth of content kept multiple compelling sessions happening simultaneously, so building an agenda often required difficult tradeoffs. This reflects our profession's growing complexity and the many disciplines event marketers are now expected to become experts in.

Several themes consistently emerged

- > **Leadership and ownership:** Event marketers have an opportunity and responsibility to take credit for the impact we're creating. We must confidently articulate events' role in driving pipeline, influencing behavior change and delivering measurable business results.
- > **Integrated data and continuous learning:** Speakers emphasized the importance of combining event insights with broader marketing data to better understand audience preferences, improve personalization and create ongoing feedback loops.
- > **The importance of a unifying vision:** Many presenters referenced the idea of a "red thread" that keeps an event aligned from strategy through execution. At ITA Group, we call this the unifying vision, developed during the [alignment phase of Event365](#). This decision-making aid gives teams a framework to focus budget and attention on what truly matters.

Toronto proved to be a vibrant, welcoming and easy-to-navigate host city. My personal highlights included a graffiti tour that showcased how creative expression can become part of a city's identity, and an evening event at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts where they used interactive activations to transform the space.



Ashley Bohnenkamp
Senior Manager, Events
6 years at ITA Group

Around the industry

What's happening (cont.)



Collecting valuable client feedback

Knowing what challenges corporate event clients face and foresee shouldn't be a guessing game. ITA Group's events team takes a proactive approach to sourcing client insights so we continue being a consultative partner that understands their event goals. Our clients' corporate event planners recently told us what they're focused on.

- > **AI:** Using AI to automate and customize processes for efficiencies and quality control
- > **Budgets:** Managing increased leadership expectations with flat budgets
- > **Trends:** Trying new strategies across their event portfolio to stay ahead of trends/competition
- > **ROI:** Better understanding event ROI, including measurement gaps, pipeline and sentiment, and benchmarking
- > **Sustainability:** Navigating sustainability priorities with specific support on reporting/dashboards and embedding sustainability into processes

Readers: What else would you add to our clients' feedback? Share on socials and tag ITA Group so we can learn from each other!



Carrie Winton
Events Marketing Strategist
6 years at ITA Group



MPI Thought Leaders Summit

August 30–September 1, 2026 | Louisville, Kentucky

This annual event gathers up to 75 elite meeting planners, decision-makers and industry suppliers for executive-level education and strategic collaboration. This year's MPI Thought Leaders Summit focused on the theme of belonging. Specifically, that belonging should be designed, not assumed.

Attendees are more likely to engage when they understand:

- > Why they're in the room
- > How they can participate
- > Where they fit within the experience

As event strategists, we can do a better job of creating a sense of belonging through welcoming arrival moments, more direct communications and networking with intention.

I especially enjoyed the Summit's workshop-based content. After teaming up on several scenario-based challenges, our agenda protected time to consider how we can act on what we learned. I also appreciated how well Louisville supported the event story with a walkable downtown convention district, historic character, strong food scene and distinctive off-property venues.



Kristine Forret
Event Destination Strategist, Meetings & Events
27 years at ITA Group

DESTINATION DISCOVERY

This **emerging market destination**
should be at the top of your list.

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Chile

Unparalleled diversity in South America



Why it's trending:

Chile is a rising star for safe, adventurous incentive travel. The country extends nearly 2,600 miles down South America's Pacific coast. Its geography covers over thirty latitudes and various climates ranging from deserts to glacial fields, temperate rainforests, Alpine terrain and Mediterranean heartland. Chile's mix of natural wonders, modern cities and world-class wine appeals to organizations seeking to reward top performers.

Why choose Chile?

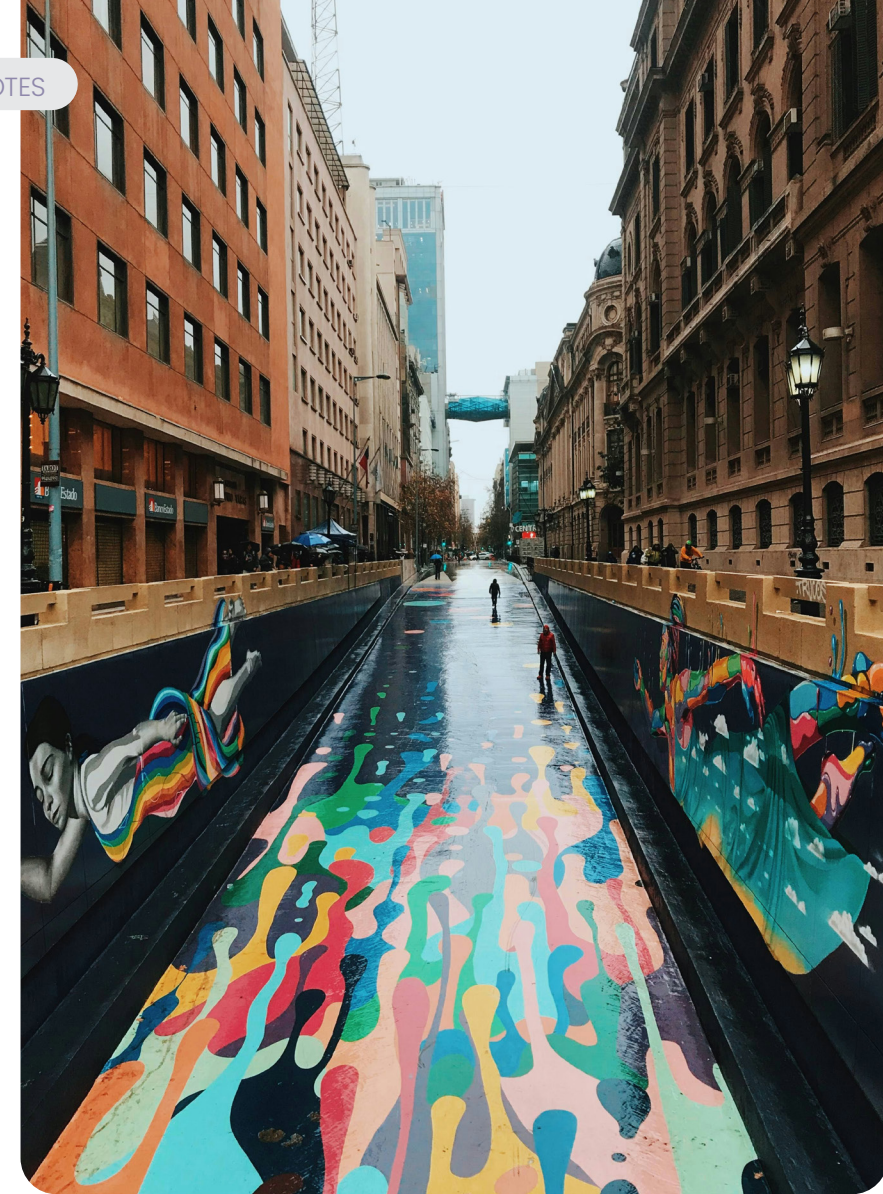
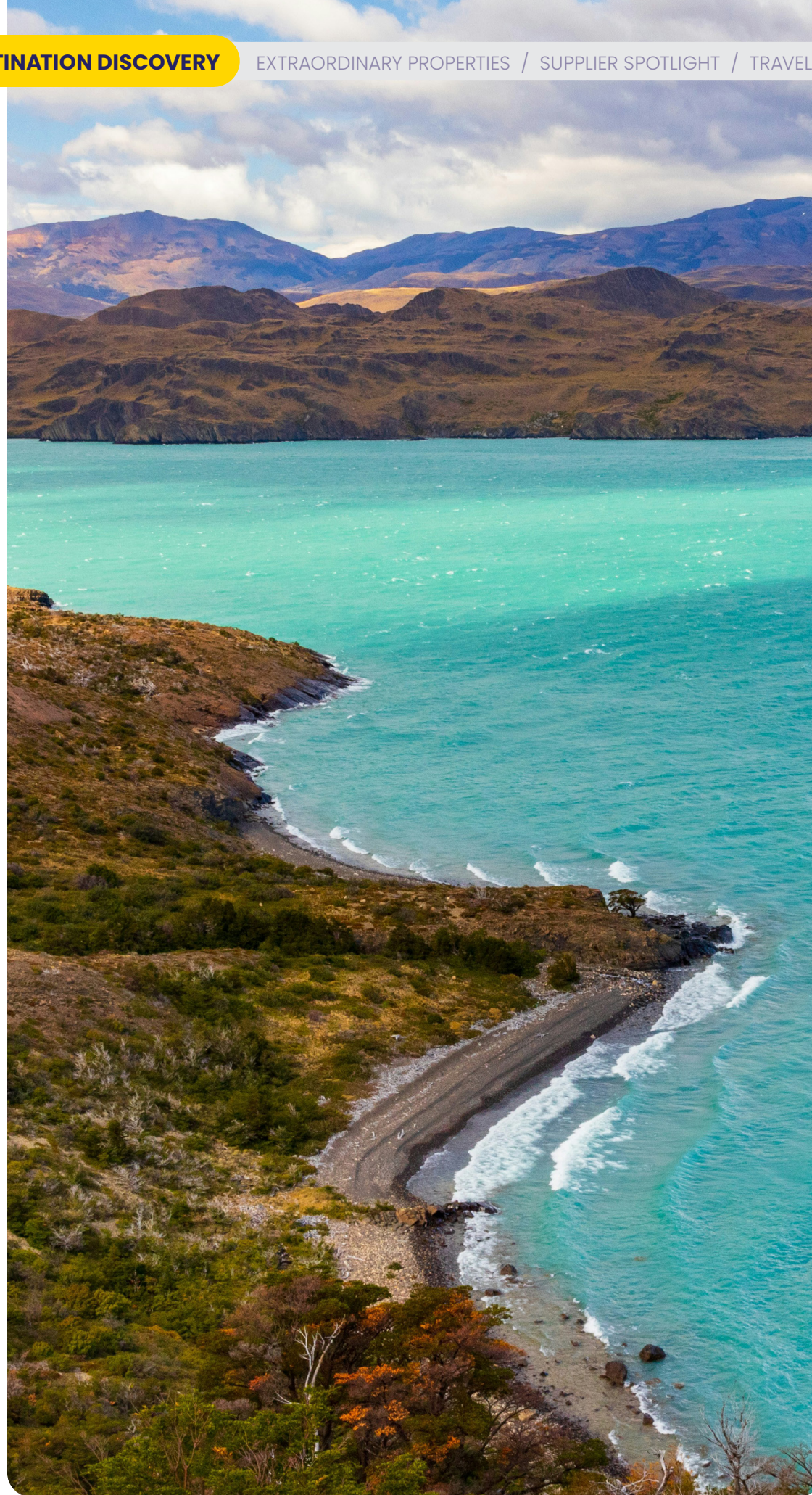
> **Combine adventure and luxury:**

This destination delivers on the "soft adventure" trend toward low-risk, high-impact activities, like a guided wildlife expedition tracking pumas in Torres del Paine. Outstanding gastronomy and award-winning vineyards elevate every experience on journeys that tuck attendees into luxury lodgings.

- ### > **Ease of entry:**
- Chile does not require a travel Visa. Instead, incentive trip attendees are issued a tourist card at the airport. The destination is especially well-suited for smaller groups of 100 guests or fewer, considering capacity at some of Chile's more unique locations.

Best time to host

- ### > **Peak season:**
- December–February
- ### > **Alternate:**
- October–November; April
- ### > **Travel time:**
- 12–14-hour flights from Chicago



Sample Santiago/Patagonia Itinerary

Day 1

Arrival in Santiago

- > Guests will be greeted at the airport and transferred to the hotel

Private check in

Welcome reception at the hotel

Day 2

Breakfast at leisure

Choice of hosted activity

- > Santiago city highlights
- > San Cristóbal Hill
- > Shopping tour
- > Valparaiso
- > Italia & Lasterria
- > Neighborhood street art tour

Lunch included in activity

Dinner at Entremuros with Chilean entertainment

Day 3

Breakfast at leisure

Winery experience

- > Choose from a red wine experience featuring Haras de Pirque and El Principal or a white wine experience with Matetic Winery and Casas del Bosque Winery
- > Lunch included at one of the wineries

Evening dine-arounds

Day 4

Breakfast at leisure

Hotel checkout and flight to Patagonia

Hotel check in at Explora Hotel Torres del Paine

Lunch at the hotel

Afternoon to enjoy hotel’s activities

Dinner in the Explora Restaurant

Day 5

Breakfast at leisure

Choice of hosted activity

- > Choose from a variety of hotel activities including guided trekking, horseback riding, spa treatments and wellness experiences

Lunch in the Explora Restaurant

Farewell dinner at the hotel

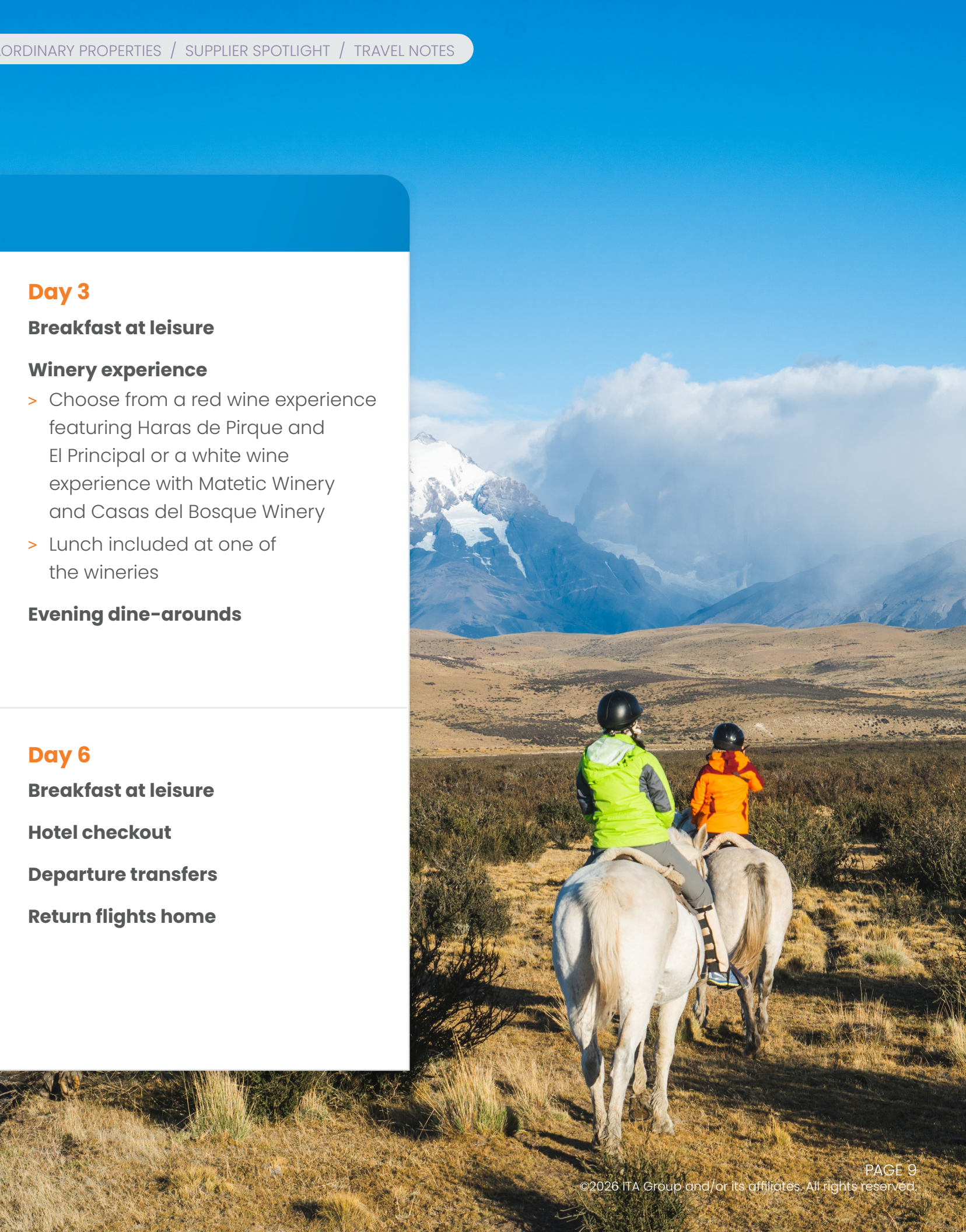
Day 6

Breakfast at leisure

Hotel checkout

Departure transfers

Return flights home



Where to stay



Mandarin Oriental Santiago

Mandarin Oriental, Santiago provides an urban oasis in central Chile's Las Condes district. Opened in 2019, the brand's first South American property features an outdoor lagoon-style swimming pool (complete with a waterfall) and landscaped gardens that support a wellness focus. Targeted sustainability initiatives include food waste reduction technology, optimized air conditioning systems and the Chilean hotel industry's first high-altitude orchard.

The five-star-rated, 297-room hotel has two panoramic suites with breathtaking views of the surrounding Andes Mountains, an executive Club Lounge and afternoon tea in the Atrium. The well-known luxury wine and gastronomic "Descorchados" event takes place here annually, with more than 100 of the best Chilean vineyards participating.



Explora Torres del Paine hotel

Set on the shores of Lake Pehoé in Patagonia's Torres del Paine National Park, this award-winning 50-room wilderness lodge features a striking design, horseback riding stables and an on-site spa with views of the Paine River. Stays include locally inspired and thoughtfully prepared food and a full range of beverages.

The concept is built around all-inclusive services that combine 40 guided excursions, including Los Cuernos del Paine, catamaran crossings and Southern Ice Fields, with relaxation at the spa's heated pool, steam sauna and open-air hot tubs.



Jodi Swailes

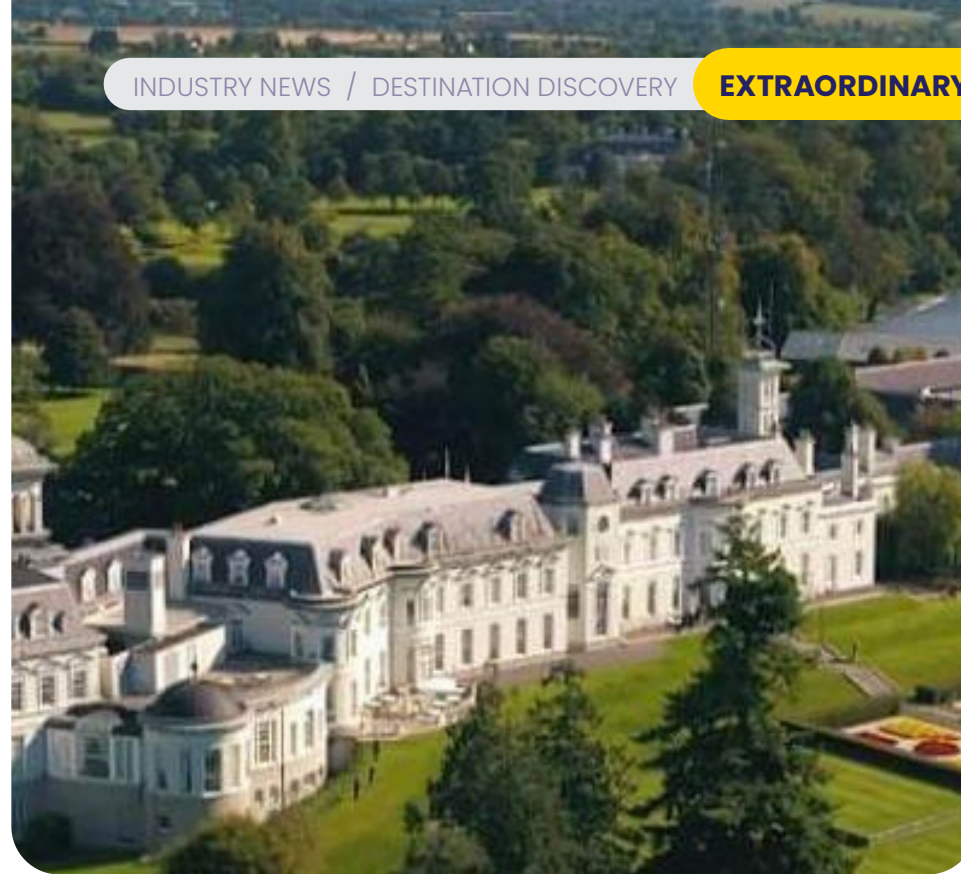
Event Destination Strategist
30 years at ITA Group

An ITA Group employee-owner for three decades, experiences are what Jodi's known for. When she's not working hard to create unforgettable events in all parts of the world, she's either roughing it in the wild outdoors or seeking out live music. She excels at destination and partner sourcing, contract negotiations, program design and budget development.

EXTRAORDINARY PROPERTIES

These **extraordinary properties** make some of the industry's most unique events extra special.

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The K Club

Co. Kildare, Ireland

The K Club, a 550-acre five-star resort hotel in Ireland's Kildare countryside, blends historic grandeur with an abundance of on-site activities that keep guests in the moment. Foodies will enjoy F&B experiences and tranquility-seekers can spend a full day in spa treatments. The K Club is one of Ireland's top golf resorts, featuring two Arnold Palmer-designed championship courses that have hosted the European Open and the Ryder Cup.

- > **Thoroughbred tradition:** With three top-class racecourses, numerous world-renowned studs and the Irish National Stud & Gardens, County Kildare has shaped horse-racing traditions for generations. The K Club offers equestrian enthusiasts a unique opportunity to experience one of Ireland's most celebrated sporting legacies.
- > **Historic wine cellars:** Guided tours explore the extensive cellar, built beneath the original Straffan House by the Barton family, one of the most distinguished wine dynasties in Bordeaux. Guests can taste an exclusive house wine, blended annually by the head sommelier.
- > **Sustainability accolades:** The K Club is Ireland's first hydro-powered, five-star hotel, with a restored 1910 dam on the River Liffey, now generating over 70% of the hotel's electricity. This approach, plus investments in biodiversity, responsible sourcing and heritage preservation made by owner Michael Fetherston, earned the resort a 2024 Historic Hotels Worldwide Sustainability Champion award. Wellbeing focus: In addition to its spa treatments and fitness studio, The Knox features thermal suites and a dedicated space for retreats and gatherings.

Property highlights



Accommodations: 128 guest rooms and suites



Airport transfer: 40 minutes to Dublin Airport (DUB)



[Click to see property](#)



LOEWS
HOTELS

Loews Philadelphia Hotel

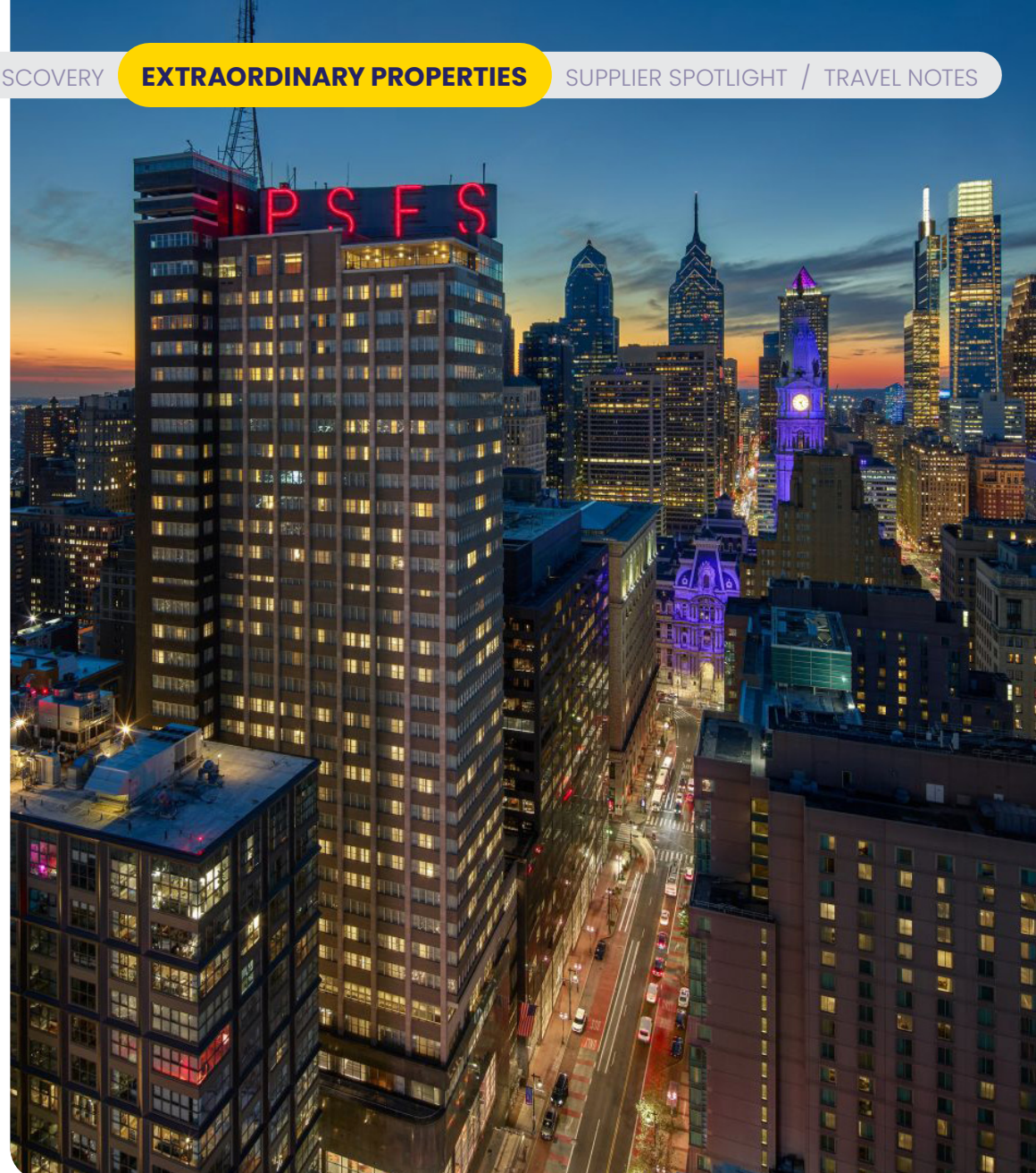
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Loews Philadelphia Hotel is a historic, four-star hotel in Philadelphia's city center, within walking distance of attractions including Reading Terminal Market, Independence Hall and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Situated within an architectural landmark directly across from the Pennsylvania Convention Center, the hotel recently completed a renovation of the 33rd-floor meeting rooms and other event spaces.

Skyline views: Once reserved for the building's bank executives, the newly refreshed 33rd floor offers refined finishes and sweeping skyline views from one of the United States' first modern skyscrapers. It features a luxurious boardroom and meeting space connected to a large terrace.

Large event capacity: 47,000 square feet of flexible function space across 22 different venues, including three ballrooms. The hotel can accommodate up to 1,000 attendees in a single room.

Private dining: Host a sponsor reception or seated dinner away from the hubbub in the Bank & Bourbon private dining rooms. Select a specially crafted cocktail by the house Bourbon Master to complement a customized menu or choose from an expansive wine list. The dedicated private dining manager guides planners through options.



By the numbers



Accommodations: 581 guest rooms and suites



Airport transfer: 20 minutes to Philadelphia International Airport (PHL)



[Click to see property](#)



SUPPLIER SPOTLIGHT

These **supplier partners**
stand out for providing
superior service to our clients.

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Standout supplier partners

ITA Group's 2026 Timeless Performance Award honorees were selected based on nominations from our sales and event management teams, as well as client feedback. [Read the full press release.](#)



IMS DMC

Proactive, knowledgeable and genuinely invested in the outcome, IMS DMC consistently shows up, even when things get complicated. When a site inspection came together in two weeks and fell during the busiest festival week of their year, they delivered with split destinations and multiple venues. Later, they executed every program element exactly as planned, from the activities to the evening functions to a flawless train transfer. On another program, after a client expressed hesitation about their gala venue the evening before the event, they immediately identified an alternative, confirmed availability and had it ready for us to review. In yet another trust-building instance, IMS DMC stepped in after a flight cancellation and managed the inspection with real-time updates.



Presenting Atlanta

Highly creative, logistically unusual, photographically driven and fast-moving programs put Presenting Atlanta to the test. Georgia and her team showed up ready to lean into every quirky ask and even assisted on challenges outside of their scope, proving a genuine, personal approach to partnership. The impact they make speaks for itself, especially as projects scale up. There's no pretense. Just genuine hospitality, deep expertise and a level of care that feels like working alongside our own team.



Nicole Bauer, Hyatt GSO

In our industry, it's easy to promise support. Consistently delivering on those promises is much harder. What makes Nicole special isn't simply her performance or professionalism; it's the trust she's built through years of following through and doing the right thing. Nicole always advocates for us, genuinely listens to what we need and provides honest feedback. She always goes the extra 100+ miles and genuinely values and cares about our partnership.



Malely Davila, Hilton International GSO

Malely does more than respond to the ask. She understands how we do business and her expert market insight helps us qualify destinations and uncover new locations. For instance, when a member of our team was sourcing a conference for 1,500 people, the targeted European city required more than 15 hotels based on initial availability. Malely stepped in, leveraged her relationships across the portfolio and helped consolidate that list down to five. What could have involved months of back-and-forth became something manageable. Malely briefs her hotels on our expectations and follows up quickly to keep things on track. She brings her heart and unwavering commitment into every interaction.

TRAVEL NOTES

These are the insider perspectives, trending keynote speakers and must-have resources. This is your

catchall for 2026 success.

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INCENTIVE TRAVEL

Insider
perspective

Recent ITA Group Sales Leadership strategy sessions proved that a change of scenery prompts expansive thinking. The collaboration with the Arizona Biltmore, Hilton Corporate, Imprint Events and MC&A presented a compelling example of strategic partnership, leadership development and purposeful program design. Abby Sherman, Assistant Vice President, Sales, was among ITA Group team members who found inspiration amidst the Phoenix property's Art Deco surroundings.



Q: The Arizona Biltmore boasts a rich history. How does it come to life?

A: You feel how the property, which first opened in 1929, is excellently preserved. We spent time in the Aztec Room, which has an original 18-karat gold-leaf and copper ceiling and lawn access. In 2020, Hilton's \$150 million reinvention refreshed the elegance and glamour, while keeping what makes it so unique and special. Their team offered wonderful on-site hospitality. After the event, they sent us home with a beautiful coffee table book about the architecture, which was designed with a strong Frank Lloyd Wright influence. It was such a thoughtful touch.



Q: Would the property be better suited for small group meetings or incentive travel?

A: The Arizona Biltmore is well-suited for all different types of groups. It's conveniently located and a quick transfer from the airport. The 15 of us never felt overlooked, and with more than 700 rooms and a mix of adult-only and family-friendly spaces, it would be wonderful for a warm-weather, multigenerational incentive trip that wants to stay within the United States. They have fabulous on-site dining options and a spa, seven pools, fitness activities, retail and two golf courses. It's such an expansive property, which means you can easily find your area to feel secluded or included. We had access to the Citrus Club, their elevated concierge lounge.



Q: What's the on-site activation potential?

A: We did a really cool tequila tasting. In the '30s, Arizona Biltmore's master bartender, Gene Sulit, invented the Tequila Sunrise on site at The Wright Bar. They also have a genuine, Prohibition-era speakeasy, with a special bookcase where notable patrons once hid from police.



Q: Did you explore off property?

A: Our DMC partner arranged a five-minute transfer for dinner at Christopher's in The Wrigley Mansion. Nighttime was spectacular because it's situated on a bluff with incredible views of Camelback Mountain, the hotel and much of the Scottsdale/Phoenix area. Our leadership team felt the wine pairings, service, food and atmosphere created a truly remarkable experience.

Property at a glance

ARIZONA BILTMORE™

[Click to see property](#)



Abby Sherman

Assistant Vice President, Sales
15 years at ITA Group

Abby Sherman thrives helping organizations realize impactful moments. Whether it's a global sales kickoff, incentive travel program, leadership conference or customer experience event, she loves turning ambitious ideas into unforgettable experiences. As an AVP of Sales at ITA Group, inspiration comes in unexpected places, especially Abby's favorite—the legendary, high-energy studio of The Price is Right.

Q: What impressed you about the accommodations?

A: They have many different configurations within the Arizona Biltmore. It's not a standard hotel. They have guest rooms, suites, desert-chic cottages and spacious villas.

Trending keynote

Lindsay Shookus

LAI: Leading Authorities, Inc.



For more than 35 years, LAI has matched speakers with audiences across almost 100,000 events, earning a reputation for exceptional client service.

Each week during her tenure at Saturday Night Live, award-winning producer Lindsay Shookus faced a high-pressure challenge: Earning credibility with high-profile hosts just days before millions watched them perform. Today, she brings those “late-night lessons” to the stage, emphasizing resilience, accountability and adaptability.

As a keynote speaker and executive coach, Lindsay works with senior leaders, rising talent and organizations to strengthen transformational relationships and lead with confidence under pressure.

Accolades

- > 7-time Emmy-winning and 2-time Peabody winner
- > Founder of Women Work F#cking Hard (WWFH), a community committed to empowering women founders and business leaders.
- > Henry Crown Fellow within the Aspen Global Leadership Network

Keynote topics

- > The 48-hour best friend: Building lasting relationships in a fast-paced world
- > Late night lessons in leadership



Quick facts

- > **Preferred format:** Keynote
- > **Budget range:** \$20,000–\$35,000 inclusive of all travel besides hotel



Why we recommend

Shookus draws parallels between TV and business with engaging backstage stories. Her insights for creating meaningful, in-depth relationships are relevant in transactional and ever-changing environments. With humor and wisdom, she helps audience members reframe their mindsets to find opportunities in adversity, make quick decisions and develop actionable solutions.

Trending content

Resources, tips and tricks

What's in your travel bag?



LARQ Bottle PureVis™ 2

This self-cleaning and water-filtering, double-wall insulated bottle features hydration tracking smart sensors so you can meet your sip count goals.



Hulili Maui Jim Sunglasses

Constructed with durable and lightweight carbon fiber and specialized lens technology, these stylish shades stay put while you're sightseeing.



JBL Live 680NC headphones

Stay immersed in seatback entertainment with these Bluetooth on-ear, noise-cancelling headphones, available in five color options to match your carry-on.

Bio insights showcase: Events Buyer



Karissa Smedley

Associate Buyer, Event Gifting
8 months with ITA Group

Karissa launched her career with ITA Group after earning a degree in fashion merchandising/buying from Iowa State University, with a minor in event management. Finding a perfectly aligned position in Central Iowa was a pleasant surprise for Karissa, who also stays in touch with retail trends through a part-time gig at Anthropologie.

Trending content

Resources, tips and tricks (cont.)

From around the industry



Northstar/Cvent meetings industry PULSE survey



The business case meeting planners are getting wrong



CEMA Summit session recap: Designing corporate event strategy that lasts



Event sponsorship for incentive travel: 3 expert tips and ideas



Too hot to handle? What Europe's heatwaves could mean for the sector



On topic

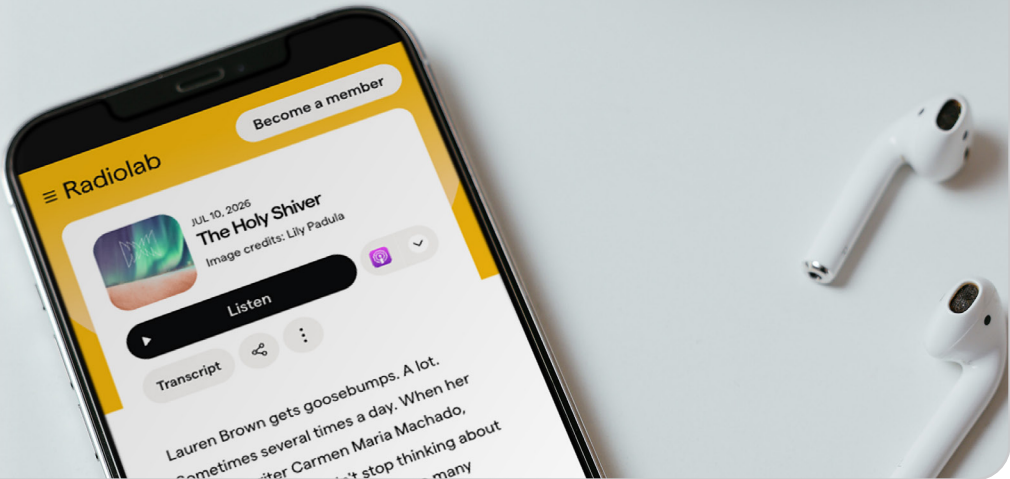
Listen

"The Holy Shiver," Radiolab



“ This thought-provoking podcast episode about getting goosebumps inspired me to connect the theme to our event strategy team’s efforts. Goosebumps are a physical indication that our brain registers something different and important, whether that’s a cool breeze, a moving concert performance or an emotionally resonant conference keynote. This episode does a great job exploring the human response to the meaningful moments that leave a lasting impression.

—ASHLEY BOHNENKAMP, SENIOR MANAGER, EVENT SOLUTIONS



Events & Incentive Travel

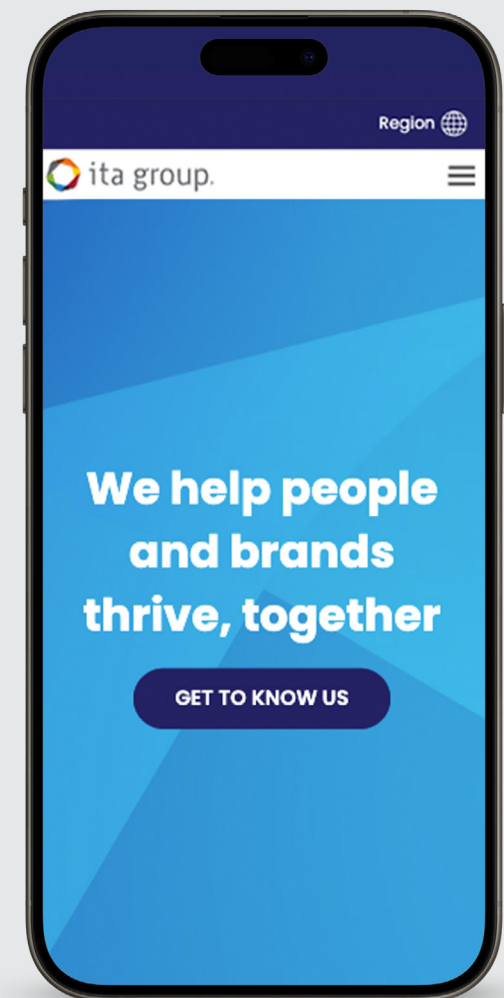
Industry update

Direct to your inbox on a bimonthly basis

Questions?

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