



Mixing work with "Bleisure"

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It's a little relaxation after a lengthy assignment, a wine tour after a conference, or an outdoor adventure to cap an annual meeting. More and more, today's professionals are seeking business-related experiences with leisure opportunities, and that's pointing both employers and event planners alike to destinations that cater to this so-called "bleisure" lifestyle.

The popularity of "bleisure" events and assignments is picking up. According to the Global Business Travel Association's research and education arm, the GBTA Foundation, over one-third (37%) of North American business travelers extended a work trip for leisure in 2017 alone. What's more, in a recent poll by the Bridgestreet Global Hospitality research firm, 87% of respondents said professional assignments were more rewarding when they added additional personal days to the itinerary.

There are also advantages for employers who make room for a little "bleisure". Letting employees inject a little "me" time into a professional event or assignment can go a long way towards enhancing morale. This keeps assignees engaged, refreshed, and eager to jump on future opportunities.

A "bleisure" hotspot

Accommodating the "bleisure" lifestyle is about more than adding free time to an event schedule. It's about inviting guests to a location that's ripe with leisure opportunities and linking them to the surrounding entertainment venues, restaurants, sightseeing trips, and other unique experiences.

For example, says Paula Racher, "Traditionally, Niagara Falls' tourism product was almost only leisure-focused, but all of that changed in 2001 when Sheraton on the Falls opened their 30,000 square foot conference centre. As the years progressed, more and more purpose-built meeting facilities were added to our inventory, including the Scotiabank Convention Centre a decade later."

Niagara Falls' evolution as a "bleisure" hot spot makes sense, she continues, considering the city was always a popular tourist destination with an ample supply of leisure activities. And indeed, Racher adds that today's business delegates often look to extend their stay in Niagara Falls by either turning it into a mini family vacation or an impromptu getaway with someone special: "Niagara Falls certainly stands out from the rest with its diversity of team-building activities located in close proximity to the famous waterfall, whether that be a voyage on Hornblower Niagara Cruises, a little R&R at a local winery, or a jaunt to one of Niagara Parks' amazing nature-based attractions."

Local experience

It's destination experts like Racher who play a key role in helping meeting planners and business travelers take their trip to the next level. The first step is reaching out in advance of planning to arrange for a familiarization tour (aka FAM) or a custom consultation.

"Account Directors at Niagara Falls Business Events like myself are a one-stop point of knowledge for all things Niagara Falls. And if we aren't able to find something that satisfies your needs, we can easily connect you to one of our many destination partners who are sure to find you your best option," she notes.

As for helping meeting planners strike the balance between business and fun, Racher says the biggest thing to remember is keeping the event the main focus: "The balance will be off only when you as an event planner draw a strict dividing line between work (business) and leisure (pleasure). Attending an event that includes 'doing business' does not have to be all-business and only-business. There have to be pleasurable elements that can be incorporated into a business event in order to give delegates the chance to unwind, reflect, exercise, socialize, and rejuvenate."

Paula Racher is with Niagara Falls Business Events. For more information, visit www.fallsm Meetings.com.

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