



Photo courtesy of Mandarin Oriental

Europe

Good Values, Great Destinations

By Karen Brost

When planning meetings and incentive programs in Europe, it sure helps to know the territory. "About 90 percent of what we do is in Europe," says Kevin Devanney, president and founder of Incentive Travel Solutions in Charlotte, NC, "so we're pretty familiar with the market."

Devanney explains how the current financial situation in Europe is impacting meetings and incentives. "The dollar has strengthened in 2011 just slightly, and it's helped a little bit with business to Europe," he says. "That's certainly a posi-

The impressive view from the Mandarin Oriental, Prague, a former monastery, includes the historic Prague Castle.

tive for us and for Europeans in the incentive travel business. I think Europeans like a strong euro, however it really helps them when the dollar strengthens because they certainly see an uptick in business. The hotels and DMCs all survive primarily off the U.S. business.

"Spain, Italy, England and France are the big four incentive destinations in Europe," he continues. "Meetings-wise, you can throw Germany into the mix, because there's so much commerce and business taking place there. If you're including meetings, Germany raises the bar a little bit. We do a little more in Germany for that fact."

Spain

Devanney says that Barcelona was a popular destination for a lot of American

companies in 2011. He explains why: "No 1, they have great restaurants over there. The influence of Gaudi on the city of Barcelona (also) has a big impact. You see that through the entire city." Antoni Gaudi was a celebrated Spanish architect in the late 1800s and early 1900s whose innovative designs continue to capture the interest and imagination of visitors to the city today.

A few of Gaudi's most famous works can be found near the 98-room Mandarin Oriental, Barcelona, which opened in late 2009. The hotel is located on the city's prestigious Passeig de Gràcia in an area filled with fashionable boutiques and restaurants.

One of the Barcelona hotels Devanney likes is El Palace, a 125-room luxury property set in the heart of the city. "It's a five-star property that has some meeting space and is in a fantastic location. It was recently renovated, and it's a great location for incentives," he says. The building was constructed in 1919 at the height of the city's cultural renaissance, and the hotel continues to reflect an air of Old World elegance.

England

"London is very strong right now," Devanney comments, citing Prince William and Kate Middleton's wedding, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee upcoming in June as well as the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. "In 2012 we've got some interest from our clients for all of those reasons," he says. "It's not necessarily for the Jubilee or for the Olympics, but because the city will be really decked out and highly decorated through the year in anticipation (of these events). It's really a great location.

"They're doing a lot of building," he continues, "but some of the old hotels like the Grosvenor House and Claridge's are still fantastic hotels. There's a brand new InterContinental and Four Seasons. All of the hotels along Hyde Park have recently renovated, like the



The 99-room Mandarin Oriental, Prague is a five-star hotel located in the city's picturesque Mala Strana district. The former monastery in which the hotel is housed has roots dating back to the 14th century. The hotel offers views of historic Prague Castle, which towers over the city.

"The overall experience in Prague was charming," Jettie continues. "A special moment for our group was our final night event where we were able to have dinner at the Archbishop's Palace. Not a lot of groups are able to do this. The setting was gorgeous, and right outside the window was the view of the city and the Prague Castle."

Jettie summed up the experience. "Our group gave Prague high marks. We loved the shopping, the food and the overall feel of Prague. It was simply charming. It has been one of our favorite destinations."



The city's panoramic views of the Mediterranean coast that are so prized by visitors today are what made it possible for the city to spot approaching pirates and defend the "friendly" ships in its harbors against them.

"Monte Carlo is again popular because it's on the Mediterranean and it has a sense that it's always going to be the most expensive place on earth, but actually, it's a good value," he continues. "At the peak (of the market), everything was high priced, but everybody is getting realistic about coming in and making it affordable now."

The 280-room Hotel Hermitage in Monte Carlo completed a total hotel renovation earlier

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Kellie Jettie, Special Events Specialist
Stampin' Up!, Riverton, UT

Monaco

The principality of Monaco, home of the legendary gaming and auto racing destination of Monte Carlo, is located just 25 minutes from the Nice Cote D'Azur Airport, and boasts more than 300 days of sunshine and more than 2,000 guest rooms in four- and five-star hotels. It also features the Grimaldi Forum, which offers more than 376,000 sf of space, including more than 107,000 sf of exhibition space, three auditoriums and 22 meeting rooms.

Tichenor reflected on Monte Carlo's fairy-tale image. "It's one of those places that has that reputation because it deserves it. Those who like it, like it because it's fabulous. It's still got that wild combination of the elegance of Princess Grace and the grit of the Grand Prix." Held in May, the Grand Prix of Monaco is considered to be the most difficult race in the World Formula 1 Championship.

He described other key features of Monte Carlo. "You can walk so much of the town, get easily over to the palace and quickly appreciate how valuable it was as a defensible port in the pirate days when it was really established."

this year that was designed by award-winning interior designer Pierre-Yves Rochon. The hotel, which overlooks the Mediterranean, has one of the largest wine cellars in the world and offers vintage wines by the glass in its Crystal Bar. The hotel recently added a new meeting room with a translation booth, and it offers satellite check-in and a separate entrance just for groups. The hotel also offers special group rates guaranteed in U.S. dollars.

Guests staying at the Hotel Hermitage receive the Cercle Monte Carlo card, which gives them free admission to the Casino de Monte Carlo and complimentary shuttle transfers within the resort.

The Monaco Convention Bureau is offering a free meeting planning guide, which can be downloaded at www.monacommeetings.com. It contains travel information, value added services, a map, a list of destination management companies and other helpful resources.

Scotland

The Fairmont St. Andrews, a five-star resort located in the legendary destination of St. Andrews, Scotland, was named Golf Hotel of the Year at the Golf Tourism Scotland Gold Standard Awards ceremony for 2011. Located on 520 acres of coastline overlooking the North Sea, the 209-room cliff-top resort is also known for its world-class accommodations and service.

France

The new 138-room Mandarin Oriental, Paris opened in September on Rue Saint-Honoré, one of the city's most fashionable streets. The hotel features a large inner courtyard offering a

choice of restaurants where guests can enjoy al fresco dining.

In a highly unusual move, the French government is allowing a private hotel operator, Belgium's Ivy International SA, to convert part of the historic Palace of Versailles into a 23-room boutique luxury hotel. The new hotel is being created in a building originally constructed in the 1680s to serve as the offices and home of the king's treasurer. Expected to open in early 2012, it will be named Hotel de l'Orangerie after the greenhouse where Louis XIV stored his 1,700 orange and palm trees throughout the winter months.

Germany

The German National Tourist Board and the German Convention Bureau (GCB) will be working together throughout 2012 to promote Germany as a meeting destination. The overall goal of the initiative is to increase meeting and incentive business from the U.S., China, Brazil and Japan.