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# Trend in Incentive Programs and Meetings: Is Resort a Dirty Word?

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In late July, a collection of premier international meeting and incentive destinations hosted buyers from U.S. and Canadian incentive companies for two days of networking and information-sharing at the Trailblazers conference.

◆ For the 15th anniversary of Trailblazers, we decided to bring it back to where it all started ◆ Toronto, ◆ says Michele Saran, director, incentive sales development, Canadian Tourism Commission. ◆ This year ◆'s theme was ◆ A Perfect Setting, ◆ and our goal was to showcase why each of our destinations is ◆ priceless. ◆ ◆

The countries that make up the Trailblazers portfolio are: Canada, Germany, Britain, Ireland, Principality of Monaco, and Switzerland.

Cindy Hoddeson, director, meeting & incentive sales, Monaco Government Tourist Office, acknowledged that Trailblazers was not spared the effects of economic turmoil and bad press regarding corporate meetings. ◆ It was a difficult year, ◆ she said. ◆ Our incentive house universe is smaller as many have lost their jobs. Those who remain are doing the work of a couple of people. The buyers are most certainly feeling the perception issue. Some are beginning to see business slowly returning, but still companies are staying closer to home and, perhaps, choosing city destinations over resort locations. Integrating a corporate social responsibility component into a meeting also has become quite important. ◆

Saran agrees that the tide may be turning ◆ but slowly. There is ◆ some optimism about the future and a general feeling that the industry has indeed hit bottom, ◆ she says. ◆ The leads are slowly trickling back in for Canada. I ◆'m not seeing many pure incentive programs but rather hybrids of meetings with leisure elements for top-achievers. Perception is very much on the minds of corporate America right now, and many firms are still avoiding chains that are known to be luxury chains, or have ◆ spa ◆ or ◆ resort ◆ in their names. Some industries are even asking that no signage is present in meeting locations to avoid public perception issues ◆ even when there are clear and valid business reasons for the meeting itself. In situations like this, Canada is always in a good position relative to other locations that may look more glamorous on paper. That said, we can certainly deliver the five-star experience, with the added benefits of proximity and a very good exchange rate. ◆

Next year ◆'s Trailblazers event is set for August 12 ◆ 16, 2010, in Geneva, Switzerland. For more

information, visit the [Trailblazers Web site](#).

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