



INCENTIVE TRAVEL: THE PARTICIPANT'S VIEWPOINT PART III: MEMORABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF INCENTIVE TRAVEL

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Site International Foundation  **International Foundation** and the **Incentive Travel Council** 
of the **Incentive Marketing Association**

The Participants' Viewpoint study was jointly sponsored by the **Site International Foundation** and the **Incentive Travel Council** of the **IMA**. This study examined the participants' viewpoint, both qualifiers and non-qualifiers, on what makes incentive travel experiences more **meaningful**, **motivational** and **memorable**.

This third installment of a four-part series relates to what makes an incentive travel experience *memorable* for participants. For the purposes of our study, *memorable* represents a motivational travel program that provides engaging experiences resulting in short and long-term value, both at the participant and sponsor levels.

The memories of an incentive travel program are rooted in both positive and negative emotions as well as the intensity of those responses against the end-to-end experience. While we often consider what qualifiers or incentive travel earners thought about their experiences right after the program, there are leading and following values to also consider as well as the viewpoints of non-earners. Understanding the effect of these experiences grants significant insights into the types of communications and activities that take place before, during and after the actual onsite experience.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

■ A major purpose of a well-designed motivational travel program is recognizing accomplishment and rewarding those who put in the extra time and effort to achieve the goals set for them. **Fully 88.6% of those who earned the travel reward agreed that it made them feel appreciated by the host company.**

■ Similarly, **72.4% of earners reported an increased feeling of loyalty toward the company that provided the award**—loyalty that we can assume translates into continued positive effort for that company.

■ **Seventy-seven percent (77%) of award earners said that earning the travel award increased their feeling of being part of the company.** However, 63.1%—a somewhat smaller number—claimed that earning the travel award increased their feeling of *trust* toward the company. That difference is surprising and may simply mirror general market trends with respect to the business trust factor that currently is resident.

■ Measuring the type of *emotional impact* and the related level of *intensity* of memories that result from motivational travel experiences gives us a clear indication of the effectiveness of incentive travel programs. A series of questions in this survey addressed the key elements of program design in this regard.

— **The destination generated the greatest *intensity* of memory among earners with 38.6% calling them very or extremely intense and 72.8% saying the *emotional impact* was positive.** Another 39.1% found aspects of the destination to be of average *intensity*



and 24.9% said the *emotional impact* was average. This suggests that great care should be taken to choose a highly attractive destination and organize a strong schedule of events.

- Other aspects of motivational travel programs did not generate the long-term memories that one might expect. For example, 34.2% of earners reported that the **memory of camaraderie with other participants was, at best, mildly intense** while only 14.8% rated it as being very or extremely intense. If this is a core value of the program, organizations should more deeply consider how this function is currently facilitated.
- The greatest plurality of respondents rated the **intensity of memories as only average** for activities like **connecting with senior management (37.7%)** and **team building sessions (31.8%)**. However, the

emotional impact of these experiences fared much better. Fifty-three percent (53%) found connecting with senior management a positive experience and 45.7% said the same about team building sessions. Apparently, these activities rate higher in short-term intensity than for their longer-term impact.

- The aspect of incentive travel programs that fared most poorly was the inclusion of **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects** in the program. Thirty-nine percent (39%) reported the memory as being not intense; 18.2% found it only mildly intense. A mere 12.5% found the memory very or extremely intense. In measuring the *emotional impact* of the memory, 51.7% found the impact average; 12.5% found it negative. If this feature is important to the sponsor, then they may want to review the type of CSR activity they are including in an effort to improve this effectiveness.

Motivational Travel Award Earners Only

DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Earning the travel award made me feel appreciated	0.2%	2.3%	8.9%	52.8%	35.8%
I have an increased feeling of loyalty towards the company that provided this award to me	1.2%	5.9%	20.5%	51.6%	20.8%
Earning the travel award increased my feelings of “belongingness” to the company that provided this award	1.2%	5.1%	17.1%	55.6%	21.0%
Earning the travel award increased my feelings of trust towards my company	1.7%	7.9%	27.3%	47.4%	15.7%

PLEASE INDICATE WHICH BEST REFLECTS THE INTENSITY OF THE MEMORY:					
	Not Intense	Mildly Intense	Of Average Intensity	Very Intense	Extremely Intense
Camaraderie with Other Participants	16.1%	18.1%	51.0%	13.0%	1.8%
Connecting with Senior Management/Leaders	22.4%	22.4%	37.7%	14.4%	3.1%
Team Building Sessions	26.0%	25.4%	31.8%	13.6%	3.2%
Company Sponsored Events	20.4%	22.5%	41.2%	13.0%	2.9%
Aspects of the Destination	9.0%	13.3%	39.1%	31.0%	7.6%
Corporate Social Responsibility Projects	38.8%	18.2%	30.5%	9.4%	3.1%

PLEASE INDICATE WHICH BEST REFLECTS THE *EMOTIONAL IMPACT* OF THE MEMORY:

	Very Negative	Negative	Average	Positive	Very Positive
Camaraderie with Other Participants	0.7%	2.7%	32.8%	47.3%	16.5%
Connecting with Senior Management/Leaders	0.7%	4.6%	41.5%	36.7%	16.5%
Team Building Sessions	1.3%	7.0%	46.0%	30.1%	15.6%
Company Sponsored Events	0.3%	4.2%	45.4%	36.5%	13.6%
Aspects of the Destination	0.1%	2.2%	24.9%	36.1%	36.7%
Corporate Social Responsibility Projects	3.7%	8.8%	51.7%	22.7%	13.1%

SUMMARY

Effectively measuring the performance of incentive travel programs can be a tenuous and arbitrary experience. These experiences are usually around hard measures of performance, such as sales increases, retention and market share to name but a few. These, along with softer-values of incentive travel that have to do with what it means to the participant—earners and non-earners alike—are important factors to consider when we think about the type and level of intensity related to motivational travel memories. General measurement practices involve a post-program survey that is quickly sent to earners right after a program’s operation. These often are centered on service level and personal experiences related to program operations. But, how do these measurement practices provide the right answers to broader questions, such as:

■ **How do we gain the general sentiment from the broader participant base about the program experience?**

How did it influence your attitude or behavior? Did you professionally grow and develop as an outcome of the program? If so, how? What are your sentiments on the next program? Would you recommend or encourage participation from others?

■ **Where do I stand individually and in comparison with others as a program participant?** Whether individually or team based goals, the business opportunity to provide direction and support to participants through periodic performance reviews helps guide their efforts while further supporting effective business objective achievement. So,

not remaining reactive but also creating formal, proactive progress reviews provide stronger opportunities for creating the right engagement experiences.

■ **Can we provide a sense of both short and long-term residual value of program experiences?** While traditional program surveys target earners right after the program, consider resurveying them 60, 90 or 120 days afterwards as well. This helps gain broader insights into the longer-term value of the program experience versus just the short-term promotional period influences. Understanding residual value helps provide avenues to create follow-up reminders to promote value longevity from the memories of program experiences.

With respect to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), our study found a low degree of emotional impact with participants. Conventional wisdom in the motivational events industry is that CSR events are necessary in order to have positive impact on Generation Y (Millennials). To further explore this, we looked at differences in response between generations and found there were no significant differences across generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y) with respect to the impact of these memorable experiences. The only reliably significant difference was that participants in Generation Y felt the memory of the CSR event more intensely than the Baby Boomers.

While it is premature to say that CSR events are not necessary for Generation Y, this finding bears more study. With the data we have, we cannot say whether it was the actual CSR event that led to less than stellar memories



or whether it was the inclusion of a CSR event at all. We did ask those who had received a travel incentive whether or not they felt a CSR should have been added to their program. A larger percentage of respondents agreed that it should (45.6%) when compared with those who felt otherwise (22%). However, there was no difference across the generations. **The net of CSR is that successful inclusion and highly perceived value that leads to memorable experiences hinges on how it connects with the audience.** Organizations need to answer the question as to whether or not participants perceive CSR experiences as loose, add-on elements or truly integrated inclusions that mirror our organizational vision, mission, values and culture.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCHERS

This survey was designed with assistance from practicing incentive managers and other incentive industry professionals. The survey was then assembled by the marketing research firm, **ResearchNow**. There were 1,003 valid responses from individuals who had been eligible to receive incentive travel. Their demographics can be found in the first installment of this report, **Incentive Travel: The Participant's Viewpoint, Part I: Incentive Travel as a Meaningful Motivator**.

The survey was supervised by Scott A. Jeffrey, Ph.D., Monmouth University, and Marion Joppe, Ph.D., University of Guelph.

THE SITE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Site International Foundation has provided research and educational programs that assist business executives, practitioners and professionals since 2006. The Foundation is the research arm of Site, a membership community that represents 90 countries and professionals who deliver best-in-class solutions and insights to maximize the business impact of motivational experiences regardless of industry, region or culture.

For more information, contact:



Site International Foundation
401 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611 USA
+1 312.673.5876
site@siteglobal.com

THE INCENTIVE TRAVEL COUNCIL

The Incentive Travel Council, a strategic industry group within the Incentive Marketing Association (IMA) is dedicated to exploring, promoting and educating about how incentive travel strategies can best be designed and leveraged to help organizations achieve better business performance.

For more information, contact:



The Incentive Travel Council
1601 North Bond Street, Suite 303
Naperville, IL 60563 USA
+ 1 630.369.7780
sue@incentivemarketing.org

