

A Different All-Inclusive

Atlantis Paradise Island ups the ante in the Bahamas

By Katharine Fong

While the meetings world waits for luxury complex Baha Mar to open—in September, as of this writing—the other mega resort in the Bahamas is not just sitting pretty. Atlantis Paradise Island, long considered a superb incentive destination and a prime vacation spot, has made a play for more group business, at least in the fall.

This fall (Aug. 24 to Dec. 16) and in the fall of 2016 and 2017, Atlantis is offering all-inclusive packages for meeting groups. It's a win for both the resort and groups: Fall is Atlantis' need period, when its 3,400 guest rooms are not as full as it would like, and groups will find great values at the property.

These include bundling myriad Atlantis activities, both upscale and casual dining, and daily Wi-Fi, among other things. The result: a full-featured, high-quality attendee experience.

"We listened to our customers; it's something they asked for," says John Washko, vice president of group marketing sales for Atlantis. "We streamlined the process for these organizations, so their budget expectations have been met. We crafted a unique experience that includes Aquaventure—the No. 1 attraction in the Bahamas. Our resort is expensive to run, so we had to figure out how to absorb the additional cost as a business and still offer a package that is attainable for groups."

The seasonal move is a creative approach to some of Atlantis' particular hurdles. Unlike Mexico and the Dominican Republic, where many of popular all-inclusive resorts are located, labor is expensive in the Bahamas; all-inclusives could bring in new revenue. Washko says the vast majority of Atlantis' business is from the United States, and U.S. associations generally don't like to hold meetings outside of the country; all-inclusives' friendlier budget and convenience could change that pattern.

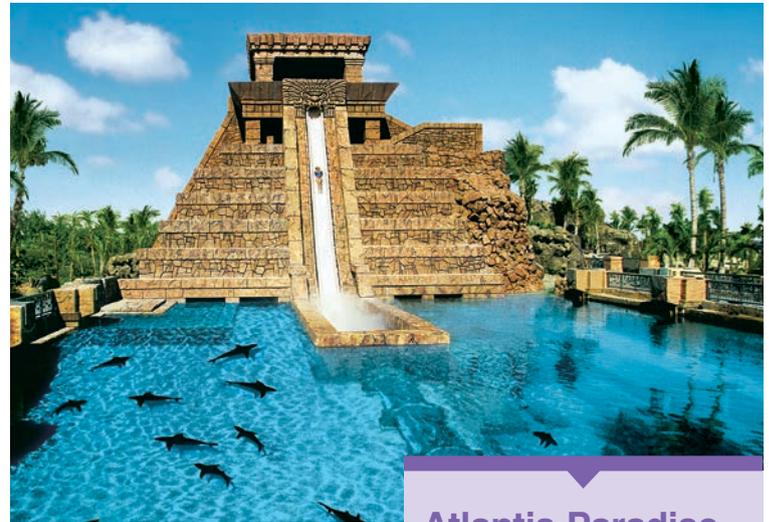
A Lot of Logistics

Packages—selling well, according to Washko—offer 800 rooms in the centrally located Coral and Royal towers; similarly, restaurants, bars and outdoor venues included in the packages are around the resort's core. Factor in the 141-acre Aquaventure water park; dolphin and seal interactions; extensive kids' activities; championship golf and tennis; a spa; nightclubs; entertainment; a 60,000-square-foot casino; and a large conference center and—well, attendees won't lack for things to do.

With five hotels that range from luxury to value, plus the conference center and multiple separate, indoor and outdoor meeting and event venues, Atlantis is a unique place to meet, to say the least. Bill Coteron, vice president and general manager for Atlantis' conference services and banquet operations, deals with extraordinary logistics every day.

At any given time "we might have a big event at the conference center," such as the Battle 4 Atlantis college basketball tournament or the Miss Teen USA pageant (both annual events hosted at Atlantis), "and a board meeting, a record release party and a company incentive," Coteron says. "We have to be prepared to handle everything, spread across 141 acres."

Coteron runs a tight operation, with a warren of offices and storage and maintenance areas under the conference center. These include rooms for convention services, pre-con meetings and conference accounting. Planners making onsite visits can videoconference with sales and marketing execu-



tives at Atlantis headquarters in Plantation, Florida.

Customer Service

Coteron proudly notes that J.D. Power reports show meeting and event planners consistently give Atlantis high marks for service and overall quality. It's due, he says, to careful organization and accurate projections.

"Planners have to understand that getting details right with us at the beginning is crucial," Coteron says. "Last-minute equipment requests for an outdoor event—no matter how small—will be impacted by our scope of work, as we really operate an off-premise catering company within our campus. Unlike a typical hotel, we might have to get it delivered from another part of the resort, and that takes time."

Coteron uses GetPlanning, a cloud-based event planning software and collaboration tool. It offers a streamlined, paperless process for planners, clients, hotel staff, vendors and third parties at permission-based levels.

"We are enthusiastic about GetPlanning and we are trying to educate our customers about the incredible efficiencies," Coteron says. "Eventually it will be the standard in our industry, with little or no paper files."

Atlantis Paradise Island's Big Numbers

- 3,400 guest rooms in five hotels
- 21 restaurants; high-end dining from chefs Todd English, Bobby Flay, Nobu Matsuhisa and Jean-Georges Vongerichten
- More than 200,000 sq. ft. of indoor function space across the property; the conference center hosts up to 4,000 and features a 50,000-square-foot ballroom, 30 breakout rooms, three boardrooms, a large staging area and a banquet kitchen
- More than 300,000 sq. ft. of outdoor function space
- 141-acre Aquaventure park with waterslides and 11 pools
- 50,000 animals in the marine habitat