

Fun factor

Simulated space trips, race cars, 'Survivor' themes, drummers among the many options

The fun factor is out of this world for today's meetings, and almost anything goes. Groups can participate in their own "Survivor" episodes, drive a race car or take a trip to Mars as meeting planners stretch their imaginations to create memorable events.

At SciTrek, Georgia's technology adventure, the Challenger Learning Center used to be just for children, but about six months ago, the staff decided to extend the flight-simulation experience to corporate America. Begun as a tribute to the Challenger astronauts several years ago by their families, the program now has nearly 50 locations across the country. SciTrek opened its Challenger Learning Center about a year ago.

"It's a perfect team-building and fun experience for corporate meetings," said Jane Quillen, director of sales at SciTrek.

The two-hour simulation experience works like this: groups of 18 to 36 participants are divided into two teams — one team works in Mission Control, the other staffs the Space Station. Each team member is given tasks to complete; midway through the program, the teams change places.

"This way, everyone gains an understanding of their tasks from both sides," Quillen said. "People just have a ball with this."

If you think heading to outer space is fun, try this on for size. Companies are requesting themes for meetings based on television reality shows. For instance, one group is having a "Survivor" meeting, complete with fire.

"The client wanted us to pick a place where we could have the flame," said Cynthia Alford, managing direc-

tor with Destination South USA. "This is really going to be a fun meeting."

Other fun meeting ideas include laser tag, go-carts and floating on the Chattahoochee; extreme adventures like flight-seeing tours, whitewater rafting or hang-gliding; or more sedentary activities such as trivia competitions, name-that-tune and building projects.

Several groups have built race cars or other vehicles out of cardboard and duct tape as a way to solidify a team. Alford's company calls this activity "AutoBond," and it frequently includes a high-profile race-car driver who also talks about teamwork and motivation.

Château Élan Resort in Braselton provides fun options for meetings of all sizes. It is marketing its corporate and incentive programs as "Grape Meetings." People can participate in golf scrambles, night golf shootouts, golf-cart derbies, interactive cooking classes, wine-making workshops, wine and barrel tastings, tennis mixers, spa workplace-stress escapes, intergroup vineyard hayrides, equestrian apprenticeships and the Panoz High-Performance Driving and Racing School.

Recently, Destination South USA worked with several other vendors on a new-product introduction with an upbeat twist. The company brought in African drummers to help deliver the marketing messages about the product.

"High-energy events like this can be very memorable," Alford said. "The sky's the limit in planning a fun event. Just remember to consider the skill level and demographics of the people who will be attending."



Photos by BARRY WILLIAMS / Special

Drum Café musicians Ibrahima Dioubate, Alain Eageles and Jacquelin Mitchel, above from left, lead Aventis employees in a team-building interactive drum circle. Aventis sales manager Julia Hodges, left, enjoys the event. "This is one of the most fun things I've done in a long time," Hodges said. "I'm digging this."



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