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CONFETTI: ME PRODUCTIONS GETS ISLAND FEVER

BY KELLY WARDLE

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MENTION THE ISLANDS of the South Pacific, and images of crystal blue water, palm trees and deserted beaches come to mind. What you may not consider are shipping rates, transportation problems and power outages.

Amanda Heyder, executive sales and event manager at Pembroke Park, Fla.-based ME Productions, had to consider all of these factors when she was asked by client LSI Logic Storage Systems to produce an incentive event on the island of Bora Bora — a site she had never seen. With just three months to plan the five-day April event, "it took almost every employee and the entire resources of ME Productions to bring this event to fruition," Heyder says.



Guests get their feet wet at an event staged on remote Bora Bora by ME Productions.

The planning process included arranging arrivals and departures, a welcome reception, daily activities and tours, a dine-around and final-night awards ceremony for 110 guests. The island's limited resources posed potential problems. Staff had to stay at separate hotels and use water taxis to travel everywhere, which "proved to be a real timing challenge, especially when locals are on 'island time,'" Heyder explains. Additionally, electric power went out repeatedly because the island's generator wasn't powerful enough for the event equipment — including a projector and sound equipment — shipped from the United States. And while seafood, fruit and vegetables were sourced locally for the group's meals, "We had to decide menus far in advance because almost everything else is shipped in," she adds. "If you don't order it two weeks in advance, you probably won't get it when trying to provide for a group of this size."

Of course, part of visiting exotic locales is going with the flow, and there was plenty of that, too. For one of the evening ceremonies, ME design consultant Gad Cuenin created centerpieces made from young coconut palms, flowers and other native materials that he foraged on the island. And a trip via outrigger canoes to a private coral island, where guests sat at tables placed in the ocean while they enjoyed a traditional Tahitian buffet, coconut-cracking show and pareo painting, gave the group a taste of the local culture. The result, Heyder says, was "truly a unique experience that guests would not have had if they had gone to Bora Bora on their own."

Despite the long list of challenges, the trip went off without a hitch, partly because the event team accepted the remote location for what it offered rather than what it lacked.

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"In the U.S. we are accustomed to schedules and a frantic daily pace," Heyder notes. "Just being on this island paradise forced everyone to slow down and accept that stores aren't open on Sundays, and that WalMart and Burger King aren't just across the street."

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