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Short and Sweet

By Libby Estell

When you want to squeeze maximum reward value into a minimal amount of time, the Sunshine State is bursting with options



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-- In recent months incentive programs have felt the pinch of an uncertain economy, restricted budgets and concerns associated with air travel, but that doesn't mean we've given up on travel awards. Instead, some experts say, many incentives are being shortened by a night or two, which cuts down on hassles, costs and time out of the office without sacrificing the reward value.

"Whereas groups used to stay for five days, now they're staying for three. The whole experience is being condensed," says Fe Domenech, senior executive events consultant at M.E. Productions, a full-service destination management company located in Pembroke Park, Fla. "Incentives are a critical part of motivating top people, so you can't cut them out. We end up packing in a lot of activities so qualifiers don't feel like they were cheated. It's not the amount of time or money; it's fitting the program to the group and making sure to see as much as possible within that time and budget."

And when incentive planners are shopping for a destination that is both easily accessible and worth the trip, they often set their sights on Florida. From the sugary sands of the Panhandle to the palm trees of the southernmost point in the United States, the Sunshine State is packed with enough options to keep even the most active incentive group busy from dawn to well after dusk. Great golf is par for the course. Watersports are widely available. And resort and restaurant options are first-rate. No matter how long the program, the taste it provides of the Sunshine State's many flavors is sure to leave any group hungry for more.

To help get your planning juices flowing, Incentive has collected a sampling of successful programs from some of Florida's top destinations:



Sample South Florida

With its Latin-inspired late-night lifestyle and cosmopolitan culture, Miami is an obvious choice for Florida-bound programs, but just outside the sprawling city lie upstate communities like Boca Raton. These communities draw groups not their proximity to Miami's nightlife and culture, but also high-end shopping and posh resorts.

When a high-tech company brought its top salespeople guests to South Florida for a four-night meeting and a group of 200 staked its claim at the Boca Raton Resort. "There's enough culture and nightlife for a much longer program. There's so much to do here that people don't get bored," says Jon Summersfield, vice president of sales at Intraworld Incentives, the Boca Raton-based incentive planner. "Not everyone is a beach or golf

To fit with its meeting theme of combining disparate parts into a functioning whole, the company offered tours to some of the area's architectural landmarks. One trip took people to Boca Raton, a sprawling Italian Renaissance-style estate and finished with lunch at a trendy restaurant in South Boca. There was also an architectural walking tour of the famous Deco district in Miami Beach. Other options included a shopping trip to Worth Avenue for some of the area's best shopping and a nighttime cruise aboard a lavish motor yacht.

But that doesn't mean the program was short of tradition and fun. "We did all the old favorites," Summersfield says. "You can't go wrong with a golf, beach and spa package." "You can't go wrong with a golf, beach and spa package."

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