The Impact of European pools on a meeting planner’s booking decision

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THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN POOLS ON
A MEETING PLANNER’S BOOKING DECISION

ABSTRACT

In a city of constant change and competition, many Las Vegas resort properties are offering topless pools (Yeskel, 2008). This phenomenon is known as “adult bathing” or “European-style” tanning, and many of the properties offering this service refer to their venues as “European pools” (Villano, 2007). A number of properties, including at least eight on the Las Vegas Strip, two in off-strip “locals’ casinos”, and one in the downtown area, have added this option for adult sunbathers. While this may be an appealing feature for many leisure travelers, its potential impact on the meeting business for those facilities is not yet known.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore and identify the impact of the presence of a European (topless) pool on meeting planners’ decisions to book a venue. Specifically, the following research questions will be explored:

1. Does the presence of a European pool impact a meeting planner’s decision to book a given venue?
2. How does the presence of a European pool impact a meeting planner’s decision to book a given venue?

Significance of the Study

Previous studies have shown that there are a number of factors that influence meeting venue selection. However, the unique qualities of European pools are a factor that has not
previously been considered, perhaps due to its relatively recent development at facilities also hosting conferences. Results may lead to an indication of the impact that the presence of a European pool may have on a venue’s meeting planning bookings.

**Literature Review**

Colloquially referred to as “European pools” by both Las Vegas resorts and promotional websites, the term refers to topless sunbathing at pools (examples include: Abowitz, 2009; Mandalay Bay, 2009; vegas.com, 2009; vizu.com, 2008). The origin of the euphemistic term appears to allude to the legal and cultural attitude of many European venues where the practice of baring breasts has been accepted at both beaches and in some cities since the mid-1960’s, in contrast to the outlook in the United States in which most places maintain laws against such a practice (state statutes are listed by individual state at Cornell Law School: http://topics.law.cornell.edu/wex/state_statutes2.)

Attitudes among Americans, if not their laws, are reported as changing. In 2003, USA Today cited a study by the public relations firm of Yesawich, Pepperdine, Brown and Russell which reported US travelers rated access to nude recreation as more popular amenity than the presence of golf or tennis in their choice of a travel destination (USA Today, 5/9/03). Perhaps in response to this attitude shift, at least eleven resorts in Las Vegas now offer topless sunbathing areas.

The principles of random utility theory (RUT) offer a sound and fitting approach to the evaluation of meeting planner decisions (Crouch & Louviere, 2004; McFadden, 1974; Thurstone, 1927). RUT suggests that site selection factors can be categorized into both systematic and random principal components, which are then used to represent an individual’s decision making strategy (Louviere, Hensher & Swait, 2000). A random component would account for any
influences that may not have been observed, but that impact the individual’s decision, while the strategic component, or utility function, would include all observable and explainable decision making influencers. RUT thus allows for “tractable probabilistic discrete choice models” (Crouch & Louviere, 2004, p. 119).

Hotels offering such sunbathing assert that the “amenity does help to create a hip, trendy buzz” (Padgett, 2005). However, all of these same resorts also pursue business meeting functions. To date, attendance and events have continued to decline by as much as 5.8 percent since 2007 (LVCVA, 2009). In this current climate of added public scrutiny of meeting venues, this study proposes to investigate whether the presence of European pools is a factor in meeting planner venue selection, and if so, whether the impact is greater on association or corporate meetings. Additionally, the study attempts to determine what factors may positively or negatively affect the selection of a destination in which European pools are a part of the resort offerings.

**Methodology**

The population for this study includes meeting planners with offices based in the United States. This population will include meeting planners working for corporations, as well as those working for associations. A convenience sample consisting of three hundred meeting planners will be used. Participants will be recruited through two online listserv electronic mailing list applications, as well as website serving the meetings community.

Participants will be given the opportunity to complete an internet survey regarding the impact the presence of a European pool has on their decision to book a property for their meeting. The self-administered online questionnaire developed by the researchers includes meeting planner demographic information, as well as questions related to their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about the presence of European pools at meeting venues considered for events.
Responses will be collected between during the fall, 2009. The effort is aimed at a result of 300 completed and usable survey responses. Data will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0 for Windows program.

References


