



LEADERSHIP
HOW THE C-SUITE SEES
INCENTIVE TRAVEL **INsites**

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NOW.

We stand at a transformational moment in time. Sustained crises and conflicts have challenged all of us to examine what matters most, what motivates us, what moves us, and what helps us make sense of the world.



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We are looking to re-connect and to attract new talent; to balance new needs, demands, and priorities.

A changed world requires stronger strategies, better tools, and fresh perspectives. Incentive travel delivers all of this and more: **but you don't have to just take our word for it.** Profiled here are global C-suite leaders, eager to share how incentive travel has produced transformational impacts for their teams and businesses.

The Leadership inSITEs shared here will help you jumpstart your reward and motivational strategy and use incentive travel to embrace what's "now" and "next" for your team.

A NOTE FROM SITE FOUNDATION

Incentive travel is a powerful tool with immense potential for leaders from a wide range of industries, regions, and roles, as demonstrated by the standout group of C-suite executives we spoke with for this report.

Leadership inSITEs is the latest project in SITE Foundation's research portfolio. With Leadership inSITEs, we've purposefully departed from the data-driven narrative of this report's predecessors, our three-part Corporate inSITEs series.

Instead, we've let the stories from the executives we spoke with stand out. Each leader's remarks give strong examples of how they're advancing the business case for incentive travel within their own organizations and with their corporate peers.

This report shows firsthand what incentive travel does best — shape incredible stories where leaders help their teams discover and learn through unforgettable experiences. As you'll read, this leads to incredibly rewarding personal and professional impacts.

Thank you to every leader who generously shared their time with us, and to all of you for taking time to connect with this important research.



Selina Sinclair
VP of Research and Content,
SITE Foundation



Kevin Regan
President,
SITE Foundation

A NOTE FROM THE SMU COX SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

“Incentive travel has the ability to generate long-term engagement far past the incentive period.”

With that quote from a participating executive, the team of SMU Cox MBA students was off and running with a project that would not only provide them an exceptional experiential learning opportunity, but would also provide valuable insights for SITE members through SITE Foundation’s Leadership inSITEs project.

Experienced business leaders want to talk and have a wealth of stories from which we all can learn. The MBA student team, by truly listening to business leaders across the globe, by giving them the time to share, and showing real interest in the stories that flowed, gained deep insight into the use of incentive travel. Whether used to drive sales, retain and engage employees, or foster a strong company culture, the student team learned that incentive travel is a real differentiator for the companies that use it well.

Here at the Brierley Institute for Customer Engagement at Southern Methodist University’s Cox School of Business, this project represents the best of what we do by creating a culture of collaboration, bringing together companies, students, and in this case, SITE Foundation leaders, to move business forward in engaging customers and employees. We are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work together and look forward to doing so again.



Marci Armstrong, PhD
Professor of Practice, Marketing
Brierley Endowed Professor

FINDING #1

INCENTIVE TRAVEL DRIVES SALES AND REWARDS THE RIGHT SALES BEHAVIORS



“We evaluate the number of qualifiers we have against the sales growth and overall income performance that we achieved in the same period so we can see if the data aligns — and it does. [Our incentive travel programs] also specifically drive the behaviors that we’re seeking to achieve.

We wouldn’t offer these programs for the length of time we have if we didn’t really believe that they drive business results. I’m a firm believer that they do.”

Jim Spradlin, Former Chief Executive Officer, GROWMARK

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POSITIVE IMPACTS ON BOTH YOUR SALES PIPELINE AND PEOPLE

The GROWMARK sales pipeline takes years to cultivate. The sales team nurtures relationships over years, not months, and crafts targeted, precise strategies matching this prolonged customer journey.

Contrast this with other leaders we spoke with who oversee much more compressed sales cycles — with customers requiring months, weeks, or just days to decide on a product or service.

Regardless of industry, the connection between incentive travel and measurable sales growth holds true across dozens of industries and business models. Leaders clearly articulated how they connect the dots between incentive travel and the sales behaviors they look to encourage in their organization — no matter what their company’s sales funnel or customer journey involves.

Importantly, aside from merely driving growth, the C-suite also proudly noted that incentive travel encourages sales teams to sell the “right” way. A well-designed incentive travel qualification process gives leaders opportunities to:

- **Set goals and reward the hitting of targets for a specific product mix**
- **Motivate participants to cultivate meaningful relationships (some organizations even invite both top employees and customers on trips together, to deepen connections)**
- **Reward specific practices and tactics rather than potentially toxic “sell at all costs” mentalities**



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GROWING MOTIVATION BEYOND SALES TEAMS

C-suite executives are increasingly exploring how to expand incentive trip qualification beyond sales teams — though opinions are mixed on how to do so.

A handful of the leaders we spoke with had previously tried extending incentive travel rewards beyond sales teams before, unfortunately with lukewarm results. This caused them to pull back from using incentive travel outside of a sales context.

Other leaders expressed curiosity about extending their incentive travel programs, but were unsure how to identify the right mix of quantifiable and qualitative targets to create a fair qualification process.

Still, another few leaders described how they've successfully integrated other departments (e.g., supply chain). They

noted that doing so has helped everyone at the company realize how critical non-sales staff are, and that incentive travel helps successfully retain talent and ensure employees feel valued. With leaders focused on how to retain key personnel in areas like operations and supply chain management, keeping employees engaged and enticed to stay will pay off immensely.

This is also an area ripe for innovative partnerships. Corporate end-users of incentive travel should work together closely with planners and partners to design thoughtful, deliberate programs that positively influence and could be open to all (or at least more) departments and teams.

Key takeaway: Incentive travel delivers clear, measurable sales results — with innovative leaders exploring how to expand its use beyond sales teams for increased employee engagement throughout their companies.



FINDING #2

INCENTIVE TRAVEL ENHANCES COMPENSATION AND OTHER EMPLOYEE BENEFITS



“Incentive travel has always been in a league of its own, and goes hand-in-hand with compensation.

Oftentimes the incentive travel qualification metrics you choose can help you retain top talent. Incentive travel programs can be more inclusive, whereas compensation plans can sometimes favor certain individuals based on territory size or other characteristics.”

Mark Verratti, Chief Commercial Officer, Myriad Genetics



NOW. ENSURING A WELL-ROUNDED, FULFILLING EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

In an era of “Great Resignations,” “Great Reprioritizations” and “Great Rethinks,” Mark Verratti’s view on incentive travel’s value is right in line with another term from Forbes’ alphabet soup of phrases:¹ the “Great Recognition.”²

Time and time again, leaders shared concrete examples of how incentive travel rounds out and supports compensation schemes and company benefit packages in ways other rewards — including cash bonuses and free merchandise — do not.

The difference, leaders articulated, is that incentive travel allows them to strike a balance between hard and soft targets when recognizing employees’ contributions. Incentive travel qualification can also even the field so it’s not just teams in larger markets that earn the biggest rewards.

Verratti explained, for example, how his company’s incentive travel qualification process looks at factors beyond sales and quantitative growth metrics. They adjust for the impacts of different market sizes, differences in territories, business growth stages, and other factors that are harder to compensate for through salaries or bonuses.

Verratti and other leaders also stressed the invaluable opportunity incentive travel gives employees to build relationships with key company personnel, especially senior leadership.

These strengthened relationships can lead to performance and retention gains. A July 2021 Gallup study, for example, found “it takes more than a 20% pay raise to lure most employees away from a manager who engages them, and next to nothing to poach most disengaged workers.”³

Picking a reward strategy that offers plenty of face-to-face time with engaging leadership seems like a no-brainer when faced with odds like those!

¹ McGregor, Jena. “Careers Weekly: All the Other Names for the ‘Great Resignation,’ Omicron Is Crashing Return to Office Plans and More.” Forbes. December 14, 2021.

² Fieldman, Matt. “It’s Not ‘The Great Resignation.’ It’s Actually ‘The Great Recognition.’” NIST. November 19, 2021.

³ Gandhi, Vipula and Robison, Jennifer. “The ‘Great Resignation’ Is Really the ‘Great Discontent’.” Gallup. July 22, 2021.

NEXT >>>

CATERING BENEFITS TO MATCH NEW EMPLOYEE NEEDS

Benefits, including ones from incentive travel, need to keep pace with employee demands and expectations. This is especially true as younger generations start dominating workforces.

Adam Grant, a prolific organizational psychologist and best-selling author, said in an April 2022 podcast that seven in 10 millennials & Gen Zers who left a job during the “Great Resignation” now wish they could return to the role they left.⁴

Good leaders should be picking up on an innate challenge behind this statistic: how can they prevent younger talent from leaving in the first place?

Incentive travel rewards could very well prove to be a key part of that equation — especially if programs are designed to showcase and grant exclusive access to current C-suite leadership. Leaders can then, in turn, encourage qualifiers to deepen their commitment, feel confident about future visions for the company, and their role within it.

While incentive travel largely focuses on “real world” benefits, an increasingly savvy tech-oriented set of workers also presents new opportunities. So, too, do the virtual tools firms experimented with during the COVID-19 pandemic, and emerging Web3 and metaverse technologies.

Leading companies are starting to introduce new tech to incentive programs to realize additional benefits. Smart technology applications can tease what awaits in a destination, for example. Or, leaders can share highlights more widely — offering further motivation to inspire future would-be qualifiers.

Key takeaway: Incentive travel complements other benefits and meets employee needs and desires more flexibly than other rewards do. This provides a distinct advantage for recruiting and retaining new generations of talent.

⁴ Grant, Adam. “The Not-So-Great Resignation: Transcript.” TED. April 12, 2022.

FINDING #3

INCENTIVE TRAVEL SHAPES — AND REFLECTS — CULTURES



“People are not living merely for the sake of money. They need to have emotional fulfillment, a sense of pride, and visibility. When you’re selected as one of the best employees for an incentive travel program ... you’re not alone: there’s a mutual reinforcement and a synergy you create, something a cash bonus cannot build.

The interactions, communication, the experience itself and the memories after — this is part of how we develop corporate culture. It lifts up people and gives a sense of honor and belonging.”

Mei Yang-Mille, KARL STORZ-Endoskope Shanghai, Managing Director

NOW. INCENTIVE TRAVEL SHAPES COMPANY CULTURE

Mei Yang-Mille (and many of the other leaders we spoke with) can clearly articulate the role incentive travel plays in driving and in reinforcing company culture. Yang-Mille and her company use incentive travel not just to motivate employees, but also to spotlight individuals who are advancing the company “ethos” and reward them for doing so.

Incentive travel programs spark a sense of pride in qualifiers, says Yang-Mille. Qualifying becomes a personal point of pride, with employees “loud and proud” champions for their accomplishments and how their teams helped them qualify.

Culture-building through incentive travel also works both ways, says Yang-Mille. The in-person connections and shared bonds forged through incentive trips reinforce company culture. New ties are created to one another and to the company’s mission, values, and vision, even after a program ends.

Some of the leaders we spoke with also described how incentive travel rewards send positive signals to prospective hires and partners about the company’s culture and values. Incentive travel becomes a selling point to highlight for recruiting and retaining top talent.



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INCENTIVE TRAVEL THAT REFLECTS WIDER CULTURAL DYNAMICS

Keen planners and their incentive partners need to understand global nuances and preferences of qualifiers, in addition to the corporate context they operate in. This came across in these interviews and has also repeatedly surfaced in discussions around SITE's Manifesto series.

Culture (both corporate culture and wider socio-geographical cultural dynamics) affects virtually every part of incentive travel programs. Culturally savvy managers will create qualifying schemes and design programs that both motivate participants and meet their needs and desires — including understanding what destinations are most appealing, life circumstances to account for, and specific cultural sensitivities.

Previous regional Incentive Travel Index reports⁵ are a good place to start in understanding trends, patterns, and habits of specific incentive travel markets. Other tools and frameworks

(e.g., the Hofstede Insights Index⁶) can also flag differences, but simply engaging in conversations can be an incredibly powerful way to discover cultural nuances.

Mei Yang-Mille, for example, gave examples of country-specific values such as harmony, team spirit, and pride that surface in her Chinese team. Another leader working in North and South America shared rich examples of how expectations and motivational desires of qualifiers differ between the two continents.

Being mindful of and celebrating cultural differences, from the macro to the micro, is increasingly important. The strongest leaders will be those who can understand, respond, and adapt to the increasingly diverse, socially aware landscape in which we live, do business, and explore.

Key takeaway: Incentive travel uniquely shapes and reflects company culture — but users ultimately need to be sensitive of larger cultural dynamics to design and manage successful programs.

⁵ Access past ITI reports: <https://siteglobal.com/itii-regional-sectoral-reports>

⁶ Access this tool at: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/>

FINDING #4

INCENTIVE TRAVEL CREATES UNPARALLELED HIGH-PERFORMING NETWORKS

“Incentive travel creates networks inside of our company that are broader than the specific marketplace [an employee] happens to work in: and there’s value in that. Not only is there value in retention, but there’s value in sharing best practices.

In food service in [the US], trends start on the Coasts and work their way to the Midwest — so the fact that Midwesterners can start to get insights as to what’s happening on the Coasts quicker from their counterparts, that’s cool and allows them to start talking before things actually happen.”

Jay Kvasnicka, Executive Vice President of Field Operations, US Foods

NOW.

REWARDING HIGH PERFORMERS WITH HIGH-QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS

At time of publication, a quick look at the US Foods website previewed food trends predicted to dominate summer 2022 menus — from farm-raised seafood “getting its due”⁷ or, closer to many a Midwesterner’s heart, a new lens food purveyors are viewing cheese through.⁸

What Jay Kvasnicka and other executives we spoke with have discovered is that incentive travel ensures these trends quickly spread beyond their origin points, through the organic conversations and relationships that result from reward trips.

Incentive travel offers two main network benefits. First, it allows people to form relationships with high-performing colleagues they otherwise might not interact with, from different geographies, job functions, or teams that are simply more distanced in an increasingly remote world.

Second, high-performing employees form relationships with senior company leadership. Kvasnicka’s company sometimes includes a meeting or brainstorming component during an incentive program, and invites company executives to join qualifiers. These become opportunities for senior leaders to receive direct feedback from employees responsible for a significant portion of company revenue.

The benefits of these networks are clear. Qualifiers earn unique opportunities to gain early insights into new trends, products, and strategies; best practices spread naturally from the highest performing, most eager advocates, encompassing multiple geographies and seniority levels; and C-suite leaders report retention and loyalty gains from helping people meaningfully connect.



⁷ Gibson, Amber. “As the Tide Turns.” Food Fanatics Magazine, republished by US Foods. Spring 2022.

⁸ California Milk Advisory Board. “From Understudy to Star: Cheese inspired by a variety of countries can reach GOAT status.” US Foods. Spring 2022.

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USING INCENTIVE TRAVEL NETWORKS TO STRENGTHEN LEADERS' DECISIONS

McKinsey & Company advises that actions taken by company leaders must be credible, feasible, sustainable, and personal to earn and sustain employee trust.⁹ The networks forged through incentive travel give C-suite leadership a direct, distinct way to showcase these very qualities by generating, responding to, and reflecting on feedback from top performers. This can help leaders spot potential challenges and identify meaningful solutions that strengthen the trust, faith, and loyalty of employees.

During his interview, Jay Kvasnicka shared an example from a recent incentive travel program where top performers were able to give direct feedback to executive leaders that was taken onboard after the trip.

Top performers in key markets asked to pause the rollout of new strategies for an upcoming quarter. Field teams expressed the need for more time to fully operationalize current strategies and also candidly stated that the new proposals would create unsustainable workloads that could lead to burnout.

As Kvasnicka's example shows, meaningful, well-designed incentive travel programs provide an opportune space for leaders to demonstrate all four of McKinsey's prescribed trust values.

Moreover, setting discussions in a "neutral" destination away from the office acts as a prime leveling agent. This opens channels of communication that might otherwise remain shut were the same activities conducted onsite at company HQ.

In this context, incentive travel is not just about creating space for powerful networks to flourish. It also represents a chance for companies to come together and find new ways of working that promote trust, employee wellbeing, and bright outlooks.

Key takeaway: Incentive travel creates distinct pathways for developing relationships between employees and leaders grounded in trust, faith, and loyalty — ultimately improving performance, morale, and overall job satisfaction.

⁹ Emmett, Jonathan, Schrah, Gunnar, Schrimper, Matt, and Wood, Alexandra. "COVID-19 and the employee experience: How leaders can seize the moment." McKinsey and Company. June 29, 2020.

FINDING #5

INCENTIVE TRAVEL HOLDS POWERFUL CIRCULAR AND TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL



“I enjoy bringing incentive trips to a city, and for that city to then feel the support coming from our organization. Ultimately that can pay back for them as well, in ways that are circular to our business.

After our 2019 incentive in Singapore, we saw business, particularly out of North America and Europe, increase as a result of participants understanding what we have [in Singapore] and what we’re able to offer. We saw a boost in visibility and leads that resulted from people having been there and better understanding the destination relative to their own customers.”

Markus Keller, Chief Sales & Distribution Officer, Accor

NOW. INCREDIBLE JOURNEYS, WITH INCALCULABLE VALUE

The business potential incentive travel unlocks along an industry's full value chain cannot be understated — with leaders like Markus Keller providing strong proof of this point.

Time and time again, leaders shared that one immediate, positive benefit they've seen from using incentive travel within their organizations is how it helps companies connect into and understand the importance of vendors, suppliers, and partners across the company's supply chain.

Whether it's a hotel partner, a food vendor, or components supplier, qualifying for an incentive program often requires participants to take into account the full process and number of people behind a successful sale. In order to qualify, participants must engage thoughtfully and meaningfully, and invest time, energy, and capital with a range of

parties beyond just their immediate teams.

It's the second part of Keller's quote though where we see the real magic of incentive travel. Like Keller, many C-suite executives were instantly able to invoke the transformational benefits that come from exploring a new destination and the self-discovery and other intangible benefits that stem from these explorations.

It's this memory-forging impact of incentive travel — the experience of it all — that makes incentive travel fully stand out from all other motivational tools and reward strategies.

The very process, journey, and life learnings from travel is what leaves qualifiers transformed for life, with experiences they simply cannot find elsewhere.



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TRANSFORMING THE COMMUNITIES WE TRAVEL TO

Leaders also talked (some at significant length) about the value of integrating CSR components into programs to design meaningful and transformational experiences.

Markus Keller's organization, as one example, incorporates volunteer projects into all incentive travel programs. Participants can opt into the project, and most do. Keller noted that these CSR activities are overwhelmingly what receive the most positive feedback from participants.

He also stressed the importance of ensuring that CSR efforts are rooted in the community and not just "for show" or kitschy PR opportunities. Participants should be given time to connect with one another through the activity as well as with those the activity serves or impacts (as is appropriate).

Another leader shared an even deeper example of CSR integration. One line of business within their company operates a program designed entirely around CSR. This CSR incentive trip goes hand-in-hand with the company's wider culture of giving back and has proven itself to be a rewarding way for participants to experience the company's values and mission firsthand.

The positive returns of CSR incentive programming are clear for C-suite leaders. The challenge now will be for companies to ensure activities are responsive to community needs and offer authentic benefits.

Key takeaway: Incentive travel's transformational potential is magnified through strong CSR programming, that can also meaningfully reflect company and individual values. Care must be taken though so that CSR efforts authentically benefit destinations and host communities.

FINAL REMARKS

SITE Foundation wishes to formally thank the nearly 50 C-suite leaders who were willing to be part of Leadership inSITes.

We wish to extend our thanks as well to the SMU Cox MBA team who supported this project, and whose initial findings served as the baseline for this report.

Finally, our thanks to the SITE Foundation Research Committee, the full SITE Foundation Board of Trustees, and to the individuals and Chapters whose generous financial support helps advance the research, advocacy, and education work of the Foundation.



ABOUT SITE FOUNDATION

SITE Foundation was established by SITE to raise funds and support research, education and advocacy projects on behalf of the incentive travel industry.

Monies raised by SITE Foundation enable us to make the business case for incentive travel and highlight the transformational potential of travel experiences on individuals, enterprises and communities.

Since 2017, SITE Foundation has invested over \$1.25 million to drive the business case for incentive travel and support professional development within the industry.

CURIOUS FOR MORE?

For more information about incentive travel, visit www.siteglobal.com or email site@siteglobal.com with specific questions or to connect with a member of the SITE or SITE Foundation team.

You can also join SITE in-person at one of our many annual events, including:

- **SITE NITE Europe** (held each spring in Frankfurt, Germany)
- **SITE NITE America** (held each autumn in Las Vegas, Nevada)
- **SITE Global Conference** (held each year in a rotating major global city)

