

Got Wellness? —BY STACEY ZABLE

MEETINGS IN THE CARIBBEAN FOCUS ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL FITNESS

ATTENDEES THAT LIVE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE when they are at home want their commitment to continue even when they are at a meeting or incentive in the Caribbean and Bermuda. Resorts and tourism bureaus are responding by offering them creative ways to keep fit both physically and mentally and to eat well before, during and after a group event.

"A lot of [attendees] are already involved in wellness and like to see that programs are going to incorporate that in general," says Hal Davis, North America sales manager at the Aruba Convention Bureau. "There is a whole healthy movement with cuisine, activities and other types of things available to them from all aspects."

Among the fitness/health group activities popular at resorts in Aruba is beach yoga, says Davis. Any of the larger resorts can bring in yoga instructors for special events, he adds. A nature experience/hike within rugged and wild Arikok National Park, which covers 20 percent of the island and is home to indigenous flora/fauna, cacti, natural pools, ancient caves and more, is also popular.

Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa has seen wellness requests as a trend, according to marketing manager Jean Anderson. Examples of organized wellness activities include healthy cooking classes, group meditation and fitness-focused activities.

"Groups tend to appreciate having the opportunity to get out of the board room, especially when in a destination like Aruba," says Anderson. "There's a sense of team building and encouragement that happens when a group participates together in something like a bike tour to the lighthouse, or a stand up paddleboard excursion. Guests leave feeling like they've had a successful meeting or

event, and the added value of getting to experience the destination."

Group participants also have the option of joining in an activity like stand-up paddle boarding, yoga, or a beach run on their own with the resort's Discover Program, which is a complimentary series of daily activities. The resort can tailor the programs for large, resort sell-out groups, as well as smaller incentives/meetings that want to have a group activity inspired by the Discover activities.

"We hosted a large group in January that loved the idea of our Discover Program activities, but wanted to encourage their group to participate together rather than individually," says Anderson. "We worked with the group leaders to develop a streamlined schedule that included yoga and biking each day and specific group events during their stay."

In Bermuda, groups can also get out and explore the island — either by land or sea. Victoria Isley, chief sales & marketing officer, Bermuda Tourism Authority notes the 18-mile Bermuda Railway Trail, named for the former transit route, as a great option for engaging groups. A five-mile bike tour can include various historic and natural points of interest. As the host for the 2017 America's Cup, Bermuda is the ideal destination for setting up group sailing regattas, says Isley.

"A sailing regatta gets groups out on the island, and though sailing is an independent



sport, it needs the group to come together as a team when it matters," she adds. "It teaches individuality and teamwork."

Alan Doyle, vice president of sales, MICE for Palace Resorts, agrees that fitness helps the team bond.

"Physical fitness in a group setting such as CrossFit or cycling can motivate healthy competition and act as a catalyst for camaraderie," he says. "The dynamics associated with group fitness can also be considered a great analogy for successful team interaction as participants are bound by the same goals on the field or in the corporate world — watch out for the best interest of your teammates and work as a group to achieve your goals."

Doyle notes that the new 19 Palace Wellness Suites at Moon Palace Golf & Spa Resort in Cancun offer a healthy alternative for groups seeking to stay in shape together. Palace Wellness Suites promote clean eating, physical and mental well-being, and physical fitness. In addition to the property's two fitness centers and fitness activities, Palace Wellness Suites guests can also participate in aqua spinning with a private instructor in the private pool. Every room features an "Awe Sports Kit," complete with a yoga mat, jump rope and dumbbells. Guests can also choose from a menu of heart healthy and gluten-free meals from the resort's complimentary 24-hour room service.

Going Green

Companies that have a green mantra for the way they do business will want to continue this practice during a meeting or incentive trip. The following Caribbean islands and resorts have embraced sustainable practices with efforts that will put green meeting planners at ease.

Aruba recently won the National Geographic Travel World Legacy Award in the Destination Leadership category. These awards honor "leaders and visionaries in sustainable tourism best practices." The island's green energy efforts began in 2012 when it partnered with Sir Richard Branson's Carbon War Room (CWR.) Aruba's government promotes the use of renewable energy through wind farms, airport solar park, waste-to-energy plant, smart communities and a \$1 billion investment largely dedicated to eco-tourism. A new trolley is said to be the world's first municipal streetcar system using hydrogen fuel cell technology, running off a battery charged through

wind/solar energy. In 2014, six Caribbean islands committed to follow the "Aruba Model" by signing with CWR as part of a 10 Island Renewable Challenge to transition off fossil fuels.

Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa has won awards for its sustainability efforts for three years in a row by Green Key eco ratings. For Earth Day last year it partnered with Arikok National Park to put on an eco-themed Biba Aruba festival.

Atlantis, Paradise Island recycles and treats all flushing and shower water, which it then uses for irrigation. It also recycles green waste, reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers. Atlantis' green waste from pruning and manicuring its landscape is shredded in a chipper and processed into organic mulch, which is used by the resort or produced and sold locally. It also makes an effort to deliver unused food to Hands for Hunger, a local humanitarian organization committed to the elimination of unnecessary hunger and the reduction of food waste in The Bahamas.

Barceló Bávaro Beach Resort, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic has been honored with a recertification from Green Globe, a premier worldwide certification and improvement program designed to improve economic, social, and environmental sustainability. The resort has upgraded their facility with energy-saving technologies. It also uses a collective recycling program to decrease its contribution to local landfills.

Caneel Bay, St. John, USVI, uses 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper manufactured with wind power and soy dyes used for the ink for printed collateral, and its water supply for irrigation comes from collected rainfall merged with "gray water." It has environmentally friendly electric buses to transport guests around the property and energy-efficient light bulbs in exterior lighting. Its food and beverage options include locally produced honey, locally caught fish and lobster, plus organic greens grown on

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One of the most appealing aspects of Atlantis, Paradise Island, Bahamas resort for groups is the high level of interactive and team-building activities, according to John Washko, vice president of group sales & marketing for the property.

"Some of Atlantis' offerings include spinning, group Pilates and beach yoga, which are able to be tailored to the program and the group's liking," he adds. "Groups can take advantage of Atlantis' basketball courts, lap pool, snorkeling opportunities, or beach space for games (such as beach volleyball or Wild 'N Wacky Beach Olympics) that promote fun forms of exercise and sports-centric activities."

HEALTHY EATING

"Food has always been important for meetings and events, but we try to offer a healthy experience with a Caribbean flare," says The

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St. John. Caneel Bay also uses 100 percent biodegradable beverage cups for all beach service and plastic to-go bags, as well as compostable to-go containers for food and a glass crusher to grind glass bottles down to a fine sand that is easily disposable.

El Conquistador Resort & Las Casitas Village, Waldorf Astoria Resorts, Fajardo, Puerto Rico have been awarded the Blue Flag award for their private 100-acre Palomino Island. Administered by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), the Blue Flag is awarded to beaches based on water quality, environmental education and information, environmental management, safety and other services. Green initiatives include the use of treated water for their golf course and lawns, locally harvested ingredients for restaurants, an on-site green house and herb garden and

biodegradable products, as well as bottle-less water coolers, among others.

Palace Resorts became the first new group member globally to join the environmental sustainability EarthCheck Program, successfully completing the certifications for MARTI, the Meso American Reef Tourism Initiative, which awards companies that protect the region's natural landscape through sustainable hotel operations. Palace Resorts also cares for native leatherback and loggerhead turtle eggs until they hatch at the Palace Turtle Conservation Camps at Moon Palace Golf & Spa Resort.

Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas sources sustainable seafood and local produce for its restaurants and banquet events, reduces water and energy use, recycles, and inspires its employees and guests in conservation efforts through various themed events.





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Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas' Andrea Bruce, public relations manager. "For instance, we grow herbs here on property, which we use in smoothies, dishes or for herbal tea. We also have local whole fish that is delivered to the hotel on a daily basis. Groups can even arrange to see the fish being delivered by the fisherman and given to the chef wait-

ing on the shore. There's nothing more fresh or healthy than that!"

The Fairmont Southampton in Bermuda offers the Cook Like a Chef with Fairmont program. The interactive cooking demonstration teaches groups to cook authentically local dishes or specialties from one of the property's nine restaurants. Home to a bee-hive, Fairmont Southampton can also provide a tour of the hive followed by a tasting of items made with Bermuda honey harvested on-property. Prior to or after treatments at the Willow Stream Spa at The Fairmont Southampton, Spa Experience Coordinators can customize food and beverage for a group spa party.

A special health-conscious package is one option that meeting planners can pick for their attendees staying at the

Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino. The Energy Break Package includes vitamin water, ice teas, granola and energy bars, assorted yogurt and whole fruits; complimentary smoothie station; music during a coffee break; fitness instructor to give an active icebreaker session; spa gift certificate for meeting planner; and social media exposure (#EnergyMeeting) capturing all the energy filled moments of the meeting live on the digital screen in the ballroom foyer.

"[Groups] are always looking for distinctive experiences that are unique and focused on health and well-being," says Carolina Voullieme, director of sales and marketing for Aruba Marriott. "Planners nowadays know that adopting healthy options can help to create an environment in which attendees are more energized and focused."



Rooftop herb garden at
The Condado Plaza Hilton

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At the on-site greenhouse and vegetable/ herb garden at El Conquistador Resort, A Waldorf Astoria Resort in Fajardo, Puerto Rico, groups can learn from a guide about the ingredients grown at the resort that are incorporated into many of its restaurants. The resort's Waldorf Astoria Spa combines

food, sustainability and spa with a unique coffee scrub treatment made using coffee grounds from the on-site Starbucks and oils created by local alchemists, harvested and produced in Puerto Rico.

A private culinary experience is available for small groups of up to eight at the Chef's Studio, the newest venue at El San Juan Resort & Casino, A Hilton Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Located in the resort's main kitchen, small groups are treated to tailor-made, personalized menus and wine pairings accompanied by presentations from the resort's Executive Chef Ana Parga.

Groups in San Juan can also discover the fresh flavors of more than 10 varieties of herbs at The Condado Plaza Hilton with the hotel's

recently introduced on-site herb garden for meetings and events group catering services. It is located on the rooftop of the hotel's waterfront meeting space, the Royal Ballroom. Meeting group attendees get to learn about methods of culinary preparation, simple practices for cultivating at home, and can take home suggested recipes.

In an effort to further a resort-wide wellness focus, Colony Club in Barbados has a "Garden to Plate" concept that includes a tour of its on-site organic garden, followed by an interactive cooking demonstration with the hotel's chef using the garden's organic vegetables, herbs and aquaponics tilapia for a group of up to 12. Guests are greeted with the hotel's signature wellness welcome drink, Cumila, which was invented by the hotel's "Mind and Body" team "to promote a feeling of well-being, improve digestion and increase hydration." ■

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