

MEETINGS TODAY

ON the SCENE

MARRIOTT CRN CANADA

A TRANS-CANADA TREK

By Gary Singh

Meetings Today recently flew up to Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver to further understand how these destinations are relating as new members of the Marriott Convention & Resort Network (CRN).

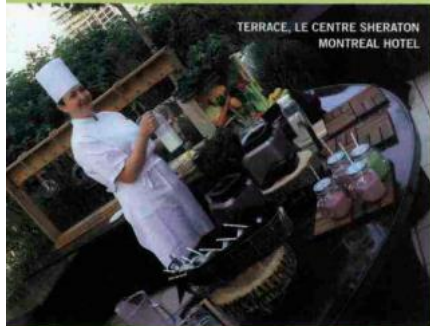
We discovered that instead of certain properties competing for the same meetings business, these convention-centric hotels now collaborate with each other to keep business in the network and make it easier for groups to plan multiple years' worth of annual meetings at once. A customer can thus transfer

Montreal

U.S. groups that haven't met in Montreal often incorrectly assume the culture is only French. Not true. Every Southern European ethnicity or nationality also commands a presence here. Many Greeks, Italians, Spanish, Portuguese and even a huge North African contingent all contribute to the cuisine of the city. And in pure European fashion, business travel mingles freely with an authentic cuisine scene and colorful street murals.

At Le Centre Sheraton Montreal, we saw firsthand how planners can utilize the food culture of the city for a uniquely Montreal experience. Montrealers claim their bagels are far superior to those in New York City—fighting words, we know—but regardless, two local bagel shops, St-Viateur and Fairmount, supplied their goods for a private function and we were challenged to vote on which one we thought was best. Bagels and salmon then filled us up for the morning, fueling our next adventures.

"When we host a meeting at our hotel, we're really trying to work with groups in making them feel that



TERRACE, LE CENTRE SHERATON MONTREAL HOTEL

his or her group's information and their post-convention report, essentially handing off the whole shebang to the next destination.

"As groups move across Canada, one year they could have a meeting in Montreal and the next in Toronto, and the very next in Vancouver, and stay within the CRN," said Marriott CRN Director Todd Sherstad. "And the national salesperson could book that meeting for that customer for three years, multi-years, and put it in a rotation."

In each locale, food tours and/or street art proved logical additions to corporate group travel, as the sights and flavors of the Great White North contribute greatly to any group business.



LE CENTRE SHERATON MONTREAL HOTEL

they're in Montreal, to give them that local feeling, so they can get a taste of that Montreal flavor," said Marie-Andree Beaudoin, director of sales and marketing for Le Centre Sheraton. "And the bagel competition was one [way of achieving this]."

Once away from the property we pounded the pavement with a local tour company, Spade & Palacio, who guided us around the Plateau to see numerous street murals, either hidden or in plain sight. The company specializes in tours of the underbelly or anything non-touristy, they said.

The guides also steered us throughout Marche Jean-Talon, a legendary public market known for local fruits, vegetable, spices, artifacts, craft beer and even an upstairs meeting room and school where chefs teach underprivileged kids the ins and outs of food. Any group meeting in Montreal can take advantage of such offerings at Jean-Talon.

"It's another unique way to see Montreal," Beaudoin said. "A way to do something that's more personal. There's more bonding."



MONTREAL STREET ART

WESTIN HARBOUR CASTLE, TORONTO



Toronto

As in Montreal, we arrived in Toronto to digest street art and foodie tours, neither of which were presented as separate from corporate group travel. Graffiti Alley encompasses multiple side streets, back alleys and corner buildings. The entire social spectrum of people stop by to visit, from trench coats to tuxedos, from down-and-out street people to brides and grooms taking wedding photos. By now, Graffiti Alley seems like one of the selfie capitals of Canada.

Putting Toronto on the map even more is the Kensington neighborhood, in particular the market of the same name. Almost every ethnicity imaginable already exists in Toronto somewhere, but in Kensington an entire substratum of ethnic restaurants, artisan crafts and bohemian goings-on have made it one of Toronto's most renowned enclaves. Kevin Durkee owns the aptly titled Culinary Adventure Co. He met us out on the main drag and then promptly introduced us to a wealth of eats in just a few hours. His insanely popular tours are common for VIPs, groups, parties and all sorts of corporate affairs.

At both the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel and the Westin Harbour Castle, we realized immediately the benefits each property could offer, in addition to how planners could utilize the CRN in Canada. At the Sheraton, Sous Chef Alex Shterenberg gave us coffee brewing lessons and breakfast outdoors on a patio area overlooking an ample waterfall. Over at the Westin, right on the water, celebrity chef Corbin Tomaszewski took us into his private dining room, just off the kitchen, and cooked up a spectacular rabbit dish, a perfect setting, say, if your board of directors needs a private escape.

Vancouver

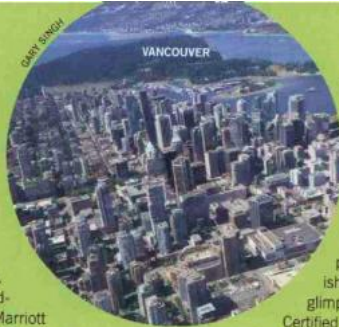
In Vancouver, we floated in a boat down False Creek,



360 THE RESTAURANT AT THE CN TOWER, TORONTO

near B.C. Place, the city's iconic stadium with a retractable roof, all just to scope out Parq Vancouver, a relatively new entertainment district inspired by L.A. Live in Los Angeles. A truly inimitable building is now connected to B.C. Place, housing two brand-new properties, the JW Marriott Parq Vancouver and the Douglas, an Autograph Collection Hotel.

Both share the same 60,000 square feet of meeting space and the same 30,000-square-foot rooftop park with over 220 fully mature trees. If guests don't require the eight in-house



restaurants, they can walk to any major part of downtown Vancouver.

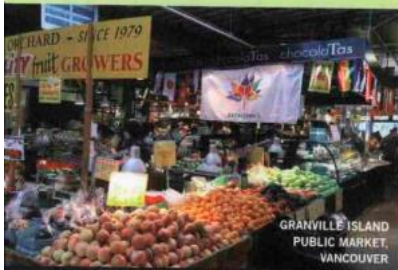
Historically, Vancouver had not done much with this neighborhood. No one ever built a hotel on False Creek, and since the property was not yet finished upon our visit, we only glimpsed at the LEED Gold Certified structure from the water.

But the possibilities were impressive, even for seasoned Vancouver travelers.

"We're giving the meeting planner and meeting attendees the luxury of choice," said Amy Ballard, the sales and marketing director for both properties. As we floated down False Creek, she continued: "Groups can choose which hotel best fits their personality. They're each cool and luxury, but just very different personalities. You can choose which hotel best fits either the reflection of your brand or what reflects your personality."

As with Montreal and Toronto, culinary expeditions into the guts of the city beckoned us. Vancouver Foodie Tours took us on its Granville Island Market Tour through the island's famous public market. Artisanal breads, teas, meats and street buskers highlighted the experience.

In a different part of downtown, the sleek




GRANVILLE ISLAND PUBLIC MARKET VANCOUVER



CLUB LOUNGE BALCONY, SHERATON VANCOUVER WALL CENTRE

Sheraton Wall Centre with its two towers figured prominently on top of a slight hill and remained visible from anywhere downtown. Thanks to Marriott's acquisition of Starwood and a new relationship with CRN, opportunities abound.

"In Vancouver, the new JW and the Autograph Collection, the Douglas, are now speaking to the Sheraton Wall Centre all the time," Shers-tad said. "And they're partnering on business instead of previously working in a silo." 



MARRIOTT CRN

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