

colorado

meetings events

MEETINGSMAGS.COM // SUMMER 2026



Palisade Pool at Gateway
Canyons Resort & Spa



COMPANIES ARE RESHAPING DESTINATION PREFERENCES AND PRIORITIZING MEANINGFUL MOMENTS FOR ATTENDEES

BY BETH BUEHLER

Incentive travel has long been about celebrating success, but today's programs have evolved beyond luxury perks and packed itineraries. Planners are designing trips that emphasize momentous experiences, authentic connections, and places that leave lasting impressions.

Colorado naturally fits that vision. With eminent mountain towns, iconic resorts, and a central location, the state checks multiple boxes for incentive programs that weave together business, outdoor adventure, and relaxation. While Rocky Mountain destinations remain a focal point, several Colorado Springs properties—including Flying Horse Resort & Club, Garden of the Gods Resort & Club, Cheyenne Mountain Resort, and

The Broadmoor—attract groups seeking a blend of urban convenience, spacious campus settings, multiple dining outlets, golf courses, tennis and pickleball courts, swimming pools, and more.

The demand for fresh destinations and innovative experiences is stronger than ever, according to the 2025 Incentive Travel Index survey spearheaded by the Incentive Research Foundation (based in McLean, Virginia) and the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (headquartered in Chicago) and released at IMEX America 2025 in Las Vegas last October. "Buyers continue to seek out something new," says Annette Gregg, CEO of the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence. "Nearly 70% are seeking destinations they haven't used before, and 63% already have new ones booked

PHOTOS (FROM LEFT) Ken Redding, Denver Botanic Gardens/Scott Dressel-Martin, Visit Estes Park

From left: Downtown Estes Park;
Patio gathering at Eleven's Sopris House near
Eleven Scarp Ridge Lodge in Crested Butte



Out of 42 invitations, 41 clients accepted, which was a testament to the appeal of the destination and agenda, says LAXcar founder and CEO Arsen Misakyan. "There were no early departures, and we saw a 30% increase in engagement scores internally."

He credits area partners for helping create memorable experiences. "Smaller mountain resorts are more flexible with custom requests than the big conference hotels," he says. "Instead of tourist packages, locally owned outfitters created exclusive experiences." Sometimes the most meaningful moments were simple ones. He shares, "People skipped the hotel bar and the après-ski to team up to make a snowman with a view."

PROPERTIES RAISING THE BAR

Luxury accommodations across Colorado tailor their offerings to meet the evolving expectations for incentive trips. For example, Four Seasons Resort and Residences Vail offers culinary experiences for groups like cooking classes, mixology sessions, and foraging on the mountain or exploring the farmers market with Executive Chef Simon Purvis. "We typically see [groups enjoy] skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling in winter, and, in the summer, clients turn to hiking, rafting, fly-fishing, horseback riding, stand-up paddleboarding, mountainside picnics, lake canoeing, lunch with llamas, and mountain biking," says the resort's Director of Sales and Events Cody Worden.

The property's typical incentive group ranges from 20 to 100 attendees. "We have a technology client hosting an incentive trip for 40 people [this September] with the traditional agenda of a hospitality room throughout the duration of their program, a staff office, gifting experience, welcome reception, and farewell dinner." He adds, "This group will have some off-site dinners at on-mountain cabins, ranches, and social clubs, and is doing off-site team activities through a destination management company, which we typically see with multiday incentives, as they want to truly experience the destination."

At Gateway Canyons Resort & Spa, located within Unaweep Canyon southwest of Grand Junction, planners will find activities, dining, meeting space, and guest rooms all within the 500-plus-acre footprint. Director of Sales and Marketing Callie

Cornell emphasizes that incentive groups are increasingly seeking host cities like the small community of Gateway that feel private and immersive. "Gateway and Colorado's Western Slope have become increasingly appealing to incentive groups, because they combine dramatic landscapes, luxury-level experiences, and a sense of exclusivity that's hard to find elsewhere," she says.

It's only fitting that Crested Butte, one of the birthplaces of both mountain biking and extreme skiing, also is where Eleven was founded. The experiential travel company has grown a portfolio of 11 high-end lodges it operates in remote locations around the world that are paired with outdoor experiences. The first, Eleven Scarp Ridge Lodge, in downtown Crested Butte, opened in 2011 and hosts up to 14 attendees with six guest rooms. The adjacent Sopris House adds another four guest rooms.

"Eleven Scarp Ridge Lodge has hosted many corporate events over the years, both in winter and summer," says Eleven's Colorado General Manager Rob Layton. "Some groups are entertaining clients, while others are rewarding top performers in their company. We also have put on working retreats that combine our guided activities with daily meetings and other team-building events."

Every reservation, including incentive and meeting groups, has a dedicated experience manager who makes sure the goals of the trip are met. "A typical day could be a morning budget meeting followed by rock climbing; river rafting; and a family-style, chef-prepared dinner in the lodge that evening," he says. "Located a block off Elk Avenue, [the property allows attendees to] easily enjoy the Crested Butte nightlife and take in a concert at the nearby Public House, [a restaurant and concert venue]."

As companies rethink how they reward top performers and strengthen client relationships, incentive travel programs are becoming more intentional. Authenticity, personalization, and meaningful connection now carry as much weight as luxury amenities or exotic destinations, and Colorado's planners, venues, and suppliers stand ready to deliver. **m+**

- 🌐 elevenexperience.com 🌐 gatewaycanyons.com
- 🌐 expjourneys.com 🌐 laxcar.com
- 🌐 fourseasons.com 🌐 vistameetings.com