



Incentive Travel Promotes Cultural Understanding

As calls for isolationism grow, we must advocate for a safe, open, and inclusive world

Author, Kevin Hinton: Chief Excellence Officer for SITE and the SITE Foundation.

At a time when there are populist calls for isolationism in various countries, it is more important than ever for incentive travel advocates to act as champions of the global business marketplace, and particularly for experiences that serve as real inspiration for people, whether they are across the street or across the globe. This is why it is more important than ever for incentive industry organizations like the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) to embrace our responsibility to advocate for a world that is safe, open, and inclusive.

In the more than 43 years that SITE has championed the motivational power of incentive travel, our members have worked across continents and cultures. In 2016, our global community grew more than 7 percent to more than 2,150 members in 89 countries. Diversity is one of our hallmark strengths, and the ability to travel internationally remains an important part of the power of incentive travel.

With the heightened sense of political and economic uncertainty, people across the globe are seemingly becoming more divided. At the same time, diversity and inclusion are playing increasingly important roles in all areas of companies' human resources strategies. In a report by Bersin by Deloitte, diversity and inclusion top the list of talent practices linked to stronger financial outcomes. The report points out that, "in today's working world, a company's ability to attract and engage people of all ages, cultures, backgrounds, and types is paramount to business success." A study by McKinsey shows that ethnically diverse companies are 35 percent more likely to outperform their peers.

For those multinational companies that implement one global incentive program, travel awards provide an ideal platform on which to build stronger relationships among colleagues from around the world. Incentive travel promises unique experiences for qualifiers, exposing them to new destinations and expanding their understanding of people from different countries and cultures. In turn, this helps foster greater understanding, tolerance, and empathy for others.

Incentive travel continues to grow and gain recognition as an important component of a balanced talent-management strategy. Findings from the 2017 SITE Index show that companies are increasing their use of incentive travel to improve engagement and strengthen employees' identification with, and emotional commitment to, the company. And, SITE Foundation research into participants' viewpoints from the U.S., U.K., and India proves that incentive travel helps strengthen loyalty, build trust, and create feelings of "belongingness." It is all about bringing people together to recognize, celebrate, and inspire performance, and build stronger relationships between management and peers in a world that is continually becoming smaller and more global.

SITE's international board of directors -- made up of industry leaders from nine different countries -- is committed to engaging our members, chapter leaders, sponsors, and partners to create a strong sense of community built around our core values of connections, creativity, trust, and results. Our industry's success requires an understanding of various cultures in order to design programs that embrace global diversity. Incentive travel programs provide a bridge between the power of diverse travel experiences that inspire people to deliver excellence -- and the sense of human solidarity we envision as the most important benefit of a global economy.