

# Why Your Participants Should Design Your Next Incentive Travel Program



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**True or False?** Asking participants to help design an incentive travel program will only drive up costs and make it more difficult to appease all their wishes.

**Answer: False.**

Instinct, past experience, managerial judgment, beliefs and budgets are simply not enough to effectively drive participant engagement and business performance. Planners need the participants' insights.

Times, and probably the people involved in your incentive travel program, have significantly changed. Incentive travel strategies aimed to effectively motivate the behavior of program participants must change as well. Generational, ethnic, family structure, and the plethora of social and economic forces impacting your participant base is having a profound effect on what people want from your incentive travel program.

Considering this, incentive travel participants need to be viewed as and treated more like a stakeholder. In our opinion, they are the key stakeholder. Why? Your success hinges on whether these individuals commit to achieving your goals and targets. Given the importance of personal commitment, it just makes sense for your employees and channel partners to have a voice regarding program design. At the end of the day, these individuals will weigh the experience against the required level of investment of both their and their families' time and effort.

Authors James Gilmore and Joseph Pine first coined the words "Experience Economy" in a 1998 Harvard Business Review article *Welcome to the Experience Economy*. Paraphrasing a bit for the purposes of our industry, people seek unique and personally meaningful experiences. Travel programs represent some of the best opportunities to create these very meaningful and highly motivating experiences. Getting the most from your incentive program requires a more complete understanding of the motivations of these individuals. This understanding translates into better program design and a better experience.

Organizations that view incentive travel programs as part of a broader strategy of creating "places of engagement" for their people can achieve great results. It all starts with placing a seat at the stakeholder table for the participant to help better inform incentive travel design decisions. After all, it's the people who create the business results. It makes practical business sense to include them in the conversation.



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