

How to Take Incentives from Another Day at the Beach to a Bucket List -Worthy Experience—And Why It Matters



MEETINGS & EVENTS



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Organizations offering incentive reward trips to desirable, bucket-list destinations are a step ahead in employee motivation and retention. When strong reward programs are a core part of your brand story they set you apart and aid not just retention, but also recruitment of top employees. When you combine the anticipation of a spectacular reward trip with intrinsic drivers of success, the positive effects are reflected in consistent employee performance, superior customer experiences, and business growth. In this paper, we will explore how offering “can’t buy” reward trips to bucket-list destinations will move the needle on business results and illustrate these key points using Auckland, New Zealand as an example of a truly bucket-list destination.



Program Design Delivers Results

A well-designed program underscored by an aspirational and awe-inspiring destination with high-end experiences offers emotional satisfaction. Both the anticipation and fulfillment of this satisfaction are key tools in turning employees into rock stars.

Many incentive programs offer trips to individual winners, and this is often appropriate. When you consider a bucket-list incentive destination, it may be appropriate to offer this as a partner/guest opportunity. Showing appreciation to the person (or people) who supported the recipient in their effort to earn the award, can create deeper loyalty.

Today's traveler is looking for more than just an authentic experience, they want personal fulfillment. A bucket list destination such as Auckland, New Zealand, more than delivers on authenticity with energy and vibrancy evident in every part of the city. Visitors want to come to an edgy and happening city or a destination offering a unique identity and health and mindfulness experiences.

However, budget is a reality and some program owners may view long-haul bucket-list destinations as out of reach.

Increasing global air connectivity may be starting to change that perception. For instance, Auckland's accessibility to North America has increased over 29% over a 12 month period, with direct flights from LAX, SFO, Houston, Chicago (effective from November 2018), Hawaii and Vancouver. More airlines are flying to New Zealand with both Star Alliance and One World. Over 92% of all international arrivals fly into Auckland International Airport!

For some organizations, a bucket-list destination may mean having a longer-than-normal incentive cycle, justified because the reward is so much greater. Consider a self-funding structure for your incentives, setting goals in such a way that they fund any potential cost increase. Like any large business decision, this requires a deeply strategic approach that takes business cycles and possibly unique circumstances, such as launching a new product or service, into your mix. Ultimately, aligning sales or service objectives with the goals of the reward program will return long term value for your customers and your organization. With a truly spectacular destination, the motivation to earn will drive more participation across the entire team, resulting in the ability to fund the incentive from increased earnings.



Reward programs continue to evolve to meet changing needs of organizations and expectations of employees. The following are some common business objectives supported by smart reward programs.

- 1.** Increasing sales with a combination of sales acumen and diligence, product(s) and service(s), and marketing all working together.
- 2.** Achievement of sustainable revenue through increased innovation and higher productivity; through reducing expenses or cost-saving measures; or measurably increasing service levels and client satisfaction.
- 3.** Recognizing years of service.
- 4.** Rewarding positive behavior including safety, wellness or excellent customer service based on achievement of set metrics or awarded on a discretionary basis.



Promise Drives Participation

Participants who have achieved an incentive reward trip to a bucket-list destination are typically your leaders, and your legacy leavers. They are often open to transformative experiences, and appreciate opportunities that push them to the next level. They want to connect with motivating people and share ideas; they want to access game-changing content, and seek meaningful connections with an expanded peer network. This pursuit of knowledge, connection and larger opportunity drives them to win this reward. They appreciate the reward and prestige elements of incentive travel and will work to be part of positive change opportunities.



Nothing enhances social currency more than sharing experiences enjoyed as part of an earned, can't buy incentive experience to a bucket-list destination.



According to 2017 research from the Incentive Research Foundation, the top three primary objectives for sales rewards and incentive programs today are:

80%

increasing overall sales

76%

improving morale

58%

improving productivity²

Improved morale comes from a well-designed incentive program where the rules and paths to success are clear, fair, achievable, relevant and motivating. The rewards may apply to an individual or to entire teams, and may be based on set metrics or may be discretionary. Discretionary or nominated reward programs can be used to particular effectiveness when organizations are in an adaptive phase, where there is a need for accelerated learning curves, growth or change to move the organization to where it needs to be. In our rapidly shifting global economy, this is more prevalent than ever, and savvy management can tie desired behaviors to appropriate rewards to accelerate adoption.

An 'ideal' incentive program ensures employee loyalty is integrated into the experience and continues long after the event is over. Selecting a destination that is a once in a lifetime opportunity also works to motivate the next-level tier of employees to achieve an upcoming reward trip.

The Yearn to Earn

When designing incentives, it is important to know your group and understand the people behind the role. Are they experienced incentive earners? Have they already traveled extensively? If so, offering a bucket list destination can play a major role in ensuring they are motivated to earn, and feel truly rewarded when they do.

To understand what your potential participants consider a yearn-worthy reward destination, consider designing a survey that offers thoughtful, yet easy-to-answer questions. It is worthwhile to take this initial step as it will radically improve your overall success. Strong data sets the foundation to build a strong incentive program. Using what you learn about the driving participant needs allows you to work with your event partner to design and ultimately deliver the program and results that make the investment in a long-haul incentive trip worthwhile for your organization. Post-event surveys close the loop, particularly as you build programs over multiple years.



Moving Past “Been There, Done That.”

The transformative power of travel is key to its appeal across the spectrum of humanity. Finding destinations that appeal to well-traveled guests, particularly when they must earn this reward by reaching specific sales or service targets, is more daunting than ever. Imperative in a world where our participants' desires mirror current consumer trends for local, cultural, personalized experiences, is delivering rewards that are fresh, delightful, and offer positive surprise, both in the moments and on reflection post-trip.

When you select a destination that offers the thrill of the unexplored, with the sense of comfort that comes from knowing they will be taken care of, you have a great beginning. When you add in fantastic accommodations, various modes of transportation, unexpected venues, unique cultural experiences including performance, food and beverage, music and activities which cannot be experienced anywhere else, you certainly won't leave them with a feeling of “been there, done that!”

Event planners undertake destination searches seeking the perfect balance of flight, accommodation, activities and appeal, within certain budget parameters. You may reach far and wide, from five to eighty-five destinations, and can become overwhelmed by the options, all in the quest to please stakeholders. If we take more time at the beginning to question and use data to our advantage, the opportunity to find the bucket list destination to inspire year-over-year increases.



Exclusive experiences are the new sought-after luxury. According to the Incentive Research Foundation 2018 Outlook Study, 37% of those surveyed indicated they see an increase in experiential rewards.³

Destinations, Authenticity and New Thinking

There was a time not that long ago where incentive travel was perceived as being for the elite, with extravagance the norm, often with a high percentage of repeat winners. The most popular incentive destinations, as reported in the 2018 Global Meetings Forecast from American Express Meetings & Events, continue to be primarily the world's largest cities and beach resorts, with slight variations dependent on the region. The 2018 Skift Trends Report: The Rise of Midsize Cities indicates there is a

resurgence on the way for mid-size cities driven by growing consumer trends.⁴ We see consumers shifting favor to second and third-tier destinations for their authenticity and access to the local way of life. These relatively unexplored destinations offer a great blend of culture and amenities but without the traffic found in a larger destination, and often a great deal of flexibility for customizing your events with unique elements. This can be an excellent counterpoint to the

homogenized elements seen in the largest cities in the world, where familiar, mid-point to high-end retailers and restaurateurs tend to congregate. Incentive trips to destinations which are not 'traditional' are the newest wave hitting the market and an excellent opportunity for organizations poised to take groups to these places. There is great value in finding the right mix of infrastructure with prestigious 'first to experience it' offerings.



A Sense of Place

One of the greatest motivators in achieving an incentive reward trip is a desire to experience the announced destination. When offering a bucket-list destination you can motivate everyone to participate in earning by promoting the destination, creating a sense of the experience early, and reinforcing it often. Modes of transport, from air to train, coach, town car or elephant; the types of accommodation from luxury yurt to five-star hotel, exclusive cruise or spa resort; the activities to be offered and the unique venues which may be included for special events, can all help potential earners visualize the experience. Evening events may be held at impossible-to-access-on-your-own, off-site venues showcasing the magic of a destination. Promote exclusivity, and the experiences that are being customized for your group. Offering high-touch, immersive experiences that deliver a special glimpse into a culture and are not found in a brochure or on a website requires tapping

into local expertise and building partnerships with key suppliers in a destination. This effort will pay off in visible motivation in your team to earn this trip. With more ubiquitous information available on travel channels and recommendation websites, your participants want to experience what they have been exposed to, and this consumer shift for authentic experiences can be used to your advantage. Unique destinations appeal, and when localization is ingrained into the event, allowing travelers to embed themselves in the culture they are visiting, whether a new city or country, the experience is more powerful. Intentionally designing experiences which allow them to enjoy a greater sense of place will serve you well. We do this with the selections we make, from nature to food, music and performance to capitalizing on the intellectual and artistic capital of the people who inhabit this special place they come to.



Social Media Creates FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)

The new reality of social physics in the age of mobile is that a majority of our audience have a desire, and now the device in hand, to immediately share their experiences and feelings, tagging their friends, family, colleagues and event compatriots in real time. Bucket-list worthy destinations only add to the drive to Instagram, Facebook or Snapchat about the experience! You will likely find the majority of your team members are active on some form of social media, all to varying degrees, and on various platforms. The opportunity when designing incentives is to offer up material worth sharing! We do this by creating photo-worthy special environments, food and beverage

sensations, and moments that “surprise and delight.” Utilizing both intranet and external social channels, combined with a phenomenal destination, creates a sense of FOMO (fear of missing out) in those who are not there, driving next year’s incentive results. Often a new program cycle is well underway by the time this year’s incentive trip is on, so this shared excitement naturally generates anticipation for a repeat win the following year. Creating greater social influence can be one of your best internal marketing tools for future events and drive higher yield results and return from your investment in a bucket-list worthy experience.



Why Long-Haul Destinations are Worth the Trip: Auckland, New Zealand as a Case Study

From Cape Town to the plains of the Serengeti to the seductive beaches, temples and jungles of Thailand, the lure of the Big Apple—New York, to the many islands of Hawaii, there are destinations that speak to us on an emotional level, and where we imagine ourselves traveling to one day. These are the bucket-list destinations we work towards, dreaming, saving, and planning for, at our desks and on our commutes. When the destination holds an emotional appeal, participants will not be daunted by a longer travel time or the effort it takes to get there, to a place they have

always pictured themselves in. We have partnered with Auckland Convention Bureau, a division of Auckland Tourism Economic Development (ATEED), to illustrate how a top bucket-list destination like Auckland can positively impact the success of your incentive program.

Auckland is one of the most culturally diverse cities on the planet. Its 220+ different ethnic groups and 160 languages makes it a real melting pot. With a population of 1.6 million people, it is the financial and economic powerhouse of New Zealand,

contributing 37% of the national gross domestic product.⁵ Auckland is a new world city that blends a vibrant urban lifestyle with a beautiful natural playground of harbors, beaches, volcanic cones, native forests and gulf islands. Anna Hayward, Head of Auckland Convention Bureau, explains, “Auckland is a hub of Asia-Pacific with connections that open doors to opportunities across the region. We are the first global city to see the new day, and we look out to the world with a fresh perspective, shaped by our place in the world.”



First Challenge: Flight Time

It's real. When event professionals begin their destination search, a core criterion is often "x" hours of flight time. While New Zealand is a long-haul destination for most, there are many direct flights taking less than 12 hours from origins around the globe. For programs coming from North America, the return home is especially sweet when crossing time zones means you arrive home from your trip at almost the same time you left New Zealand! When you are considering a long-haul destination, thorough research of departure cities and total flying time might reveal the trip is not as difficult as you imagined. Factor in the sheer excitement of getting to the destination, and the benefits might outweigh the downsides.



Delivering Unique and Going Boutique

When we take our most important events to the most popular cities, we can be challenged to create never-been-done experiences, or going all out to create a sense of 'we own this town.' Simply put, both smaller centers and boutique properties offer more customization opportunities. The Skift Report *The Rise of Midsize Cities*, discusses the additional focus many cities have put in to revitalizing their compact, charming, easy to navigate centers, are building welcoming, cool vibes for both locals and visitors. In Auckland, similar to many European cities, you will find limited big-box properties balanced with boutique and mid-size properties. While it may mean more than one room block, it also means offering accommodations made more desirable because of details included that define the location.



2nd

**New Zealand is the 2nd
safest country in the world**

2017 Global Peace Index



220+ 

**DIFFERENT ETHNIC
COMMUNITIES CALL
AUCKLAND HOME**

Statistics New Zealand (2013 Census, excludes unspecified data)

Craving The “Safe Exotic”

There is an increasing desire for travel to destinations we perceive as exotic, but also where we are safe and comfortable. Participants will appreciate the spirit of adventure that underlies Auckland’s hospitality culture and local customs. Anna Hayward, Head of Auckland Convention Bureau, elaborates, “Whether we take participants on a moderate hike through native bush and forests to dormant volcanoes, or explore a cave lit entirely by glowworms, maybe even stepping off the edge of a bungee bridge – if your risk management team lets you—program owners will find that a ‘day of activities’ really offers options outside the norm.” When a program offers the unexpected, unattainable or the only-imagined, in a safe, comfortable environment, you have succeeded in maximizing a bucket-list trip.

The Familiarity Conundrum

Meeting professionals are feeling the pressure to deliver ever-more unique experiences that engage employees and align with the values of both the organization and the individual participants. We want to travel to exotic locations, but at the same time we appreciate the familiar, and seek the friendly. As a case study in friendliness, New Zealand appeals as a destination where the people welcome you wholeheartedly. For the meeting organizer, there is peace of mind in the ease of planning with professional and deeply experienced supplier partners who understand expectations of incentive travel guests and with English as a common language. New Zealand is both a Commonwealth nation offering this familiarity

TOP 10

Friendliest cities in the world

Condé Nast Traveler Reader Choice Awards 2017

to visitors from many parts of the globe, and a country with strong roots in its Maori culture, offering a spirited culture with Polynesian roots which can be easily explored and integrated into a program.



Ramping Up the Incentive: Yachts, the Haka and Hobbits

Now it's time to put your cards on the table, when meeting professionals lay down their hand and wait with bated breath to show the stakeholders their bet on the long-haul destination has paid off. This comes down to delivering on the promises made as you built anticipation. It is also about finding special places and bringing moments to life in ways you can only do here.

Auckland is a city where everything is within arm's reach. Compared with other capital cities, diversity and proximity means you can reach most parts of the country within an hour or two (flights to Queenstown or drive to Bay of Islands, Hobbiton, Waitomo Glowworm Caves).

Travelers looking for something different, value the energy and sense of adventure in Auckland. "Furthermore", Anna Hayward, Head of Auckland Convention Bureau, remarks, "Being surrounded by the Pacific Ocean offers opportunities for exploration, fishing, sailing, island-hopping, snorkeling and diving. Yacht racing fans will be blown away by the thrill of being on the water where sailors will compete in the Americas Cup, coming to Auckland in 2021."

Participants can also experience the countryside with an amazing day trip to Hobbiton to view the fantastic landscape of JJ Tolkien's Lord of the Rings films. These 12 acres

on the North Island will absolutely be on the bucket list for some, and when it becomes privately yours can be a magical venue.

Sports fan or not, when we think of New Zealand, we think of rugby. Whether a native sport for your group or a novelty, the sheer spectacle of the All Blacks Haka, the ultimate team cheer designed to intimidate the strongest opponents, is sure to be memorable. Your group might get lucky enough to catch a game live in the season, or you might find yourself on the pitch of a local team, and if you do, get some refreshments and get ready to enjoy first the Haka, and then this sport at its finest.

Including Education: Bring on the Innovators and Intellectuals

For organizations who rely on knowledgeable and curious team members to spark innovation and collaboration, including a learning component in your incentive trip makes sense. You won't have a problem finding excellent presenters with the plethora of intellectual capital available on New Zealand. Auckland is home to more than 100 multinational corporations which have established their New Zealand footprints in one of the most business-friendly markets in the world. Auckland is now emerging as an innovation hub of the Asia Pacific region.⁶ There are a growing number of technology incubators and accelerators impacting a wide variety of industries, providing for a sustainable future on many levels. If you thought this was a sleepy destination, you will be pleasantly surprised by the warm energy and enthusiasm that infuses Auckland and its people.



In New Zealand, light adventure underscored by surprising food and wine experiences can be built into the program, delivering wellness on many levels. Imagine a short boat cruise in crisp salt air across from Auckland to Waiheke Island and a day spent touring wineries, farms and even olive oil producers that call this region home. This is one of the few places in the world where vineyards slope down to the ocean, and where you can include a stop on the beach where participants harvest oysters and 'freshly shucked' will take on a new meaning.

Conclusion

It can't be argued that Auckland and New Zealand have so much to offer visitors. However, it comes down to this, does the lure of a bucket-list destination achieve your objectives? We have noted the importance of pre-event and post-event surveys and using the available data to continually improve incentive programs and their outcomes. It is inherently understood that the more valuable the perception of the incentive destination, the harder your talent will work to achieve the reward. Consider what a bucket-list destination incentive can do for the motivation and satisfaction of your top performers. Delivering an incentive program that leaves every participant feeling like a well-rewarded VIP offers a nearly incalculable value. Let the results speak for themselves.

¹ [Auckland Airport 2017 Annual Report](#)

² [2017 Incentive Research Foundation Report- Designing for Successes: Effective Design Patterns for Employee Recognition and Reward Programs](#)

³ [Incentive Research Foundation 2018 Outlook Study](#)

⁴ [Skift Trends Report: The Rise of Midsized Cities in the Meetings Industry \(2018\)](#)

⁵ [New Zealand 2013 Census](#)

⁶ www.aucklandnz.com/business



MEETINGS & EVENTS



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About Auckland Convention Bureau

The expert team at Auckland Convention Bureau are here to assist organisers to deliver an unparalleled experience that is sure to surprise and delight delegates every step of the way. Whether it's bidding to bring an international conference to Auckland, sourcing world-class conference facilities, hotel accommodation, providing inspiration to create memorable incentive reward programmes and out of the box experiences, including award-winning dining and entertainment options, the team at ACB is here to support you, no matter the size of your event or group. From large scale international conferences, meetings, incentive reward programs, to more intimate boutique experiences, Auckland can cater to groups of all shapes and sizes. Auckland can cater to groups of all shapes and sizes. The best part is our time and advice is also free.

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