
Meet Well

BY ELITE MEETINGS INTERNATIONAL

LUXURY, TWO WAYS



As attendees' tastes and preferences become more defined, planners are realizing that one definition of "luxury accommodations" doesn't necessarily fit all palates. There's a long, established tradition of formal, even staid luxury certainly. But recently a growing contingent of attendees is expressing a preference for luxury meeting sites that are relaxed and more casual.

It would be easy to assume that gap between the two was strictly generational: older attendees preferring an environment a younger generation might call "too stuffy and black tie." But the reality isn't quite so simple with some mature attendees, for example, finding "dressing for dinner" tiresome, while their more youthful counterparts find it cool in a "retro way," if only "now and then."

Navigating the fine points here are actually something that is on Daniel Hostettler's radar a good deal of the time. As president and group managing director of the OHM Collection, he oversees four New England luxury resort-style properties, including most prominently the formal Ocean House in Watch Hill, R.I. and the more laid-back Weekapaug Inn in nearby Westerly, R.I. Both specialize in small high-end group meetings and executive retreats.

Hostettler offers planners these five guidelines:

- You know your group's expectations better than anyone. Few attendees would claim to like "over-service," when, in fact, they might. Best to strike a happy balance between more and less personal service.
- Seek venues with a strong "sense of place." This tends to be a preference everyone agrees on.
- With history comes tradition. Ocean House originally dates to 1868 before being rebuilt in 2004. With this kind of lineage, attendees can reasonably expect a certain degree of formality. Properties promoted as beach resorts, on the other hand, suggest informality.
- Technology is the great leveler. Look for an appropriate mix of low (or no) tech and high tech (printed, in-room guest service directories plus iPads, room service trays hand delivered plus RFID chip sensors embedded in guest room doors for pick-up). There can be limits, however (i.e. no mobile check-in, at least so far).
- Seek a hybrid solution. There will be destinations where you can have the best of both: two properties in close proximity, each of a contrasting luxury profile, where you can house attendees consistent with their personal preference. You then have two options when arranging meetings, receptions, dinners and so on.

Photo credits: Courtesy of Ocean House and Weekapaug Inn