

# MeetingNews

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After nearly three decades, Susan Sarfati bids farewell to ASAE. page 8

## Oil Is Number One Factor Affecting Industry in 2008

Soaring fuel prices, surcharges, & related costs roil meeting budgets in a vicious domino effect



Coming up with our list of the 25 Most Powerful was a challenge, because of the diversity of the industry. But one choice was clear: With U.S. gasoline

prices averaging \$4.10 a gallon and a barrel of crude oil at a record \$146-plus, it's safe to say that fuel prices now dictate every aspect of meetings and events.

For Ken Deans, a Los Angeles-based trade show manager, items that used to cost \$3,500 in shipping each way from L.A. to New York now cost \$8,000. Peter Huggins, planner for the American Chemical Society, based in DC,



noted that many of the large pharmaceutical firms are canceling travel for staff: "Speakers are withdrawing due to the elimination of non-critical travel." And fuel costs have brought the airlines to their knees.

Acknowledging the fuel-price hardship, the Internal Revenue Service this month raised the fuel mileage rate, from 50.5 to 58.5 cents. IRS commissioner Doug Shulman declared, "We want the reimbursement rate to be fair. Rising gas prices are majorly impacting Americans."

But while this represents an overall 36-percent increase over six years, it has not kept pace with skyrocketing fuel prices, which have more than doubled.

For more on the people and forces that are affecting meetings, turn to the MeetingNews 25 Most Powerful on page 10.

### Cedar Rapids: 'Half Our Visitors Guide Is Obsolete'

Midwest flooding washes away Heartland venues

By Rayna Katz

Like many other dramatic weather catastrophies, the floods that struck the Midwest this summer left some areas unharmed while others were submerged and will be repairing the damage for some time to come.

Similarly, among meetings and events that were taking place as the region's rivers overflowed—as well as those scheduled for the coming weeks and months—some went

unscathed, others had to alter their plans, and still more are weighing their options.

Several of Iowa's cities were hit hard by the unforgiving waters after months of heavy rain. "The floods rendered our downtown, and about half of our visitors guide, obsolete,"

continued on page 73

#### Hotels & Resorts

##### WESTIN TIMES SQUARE KEEPS PEDAL TO METTLE

In city that never sleeps, hotel will finish meeting space upgrades next month before more room renovations begin. see page 14

##### 'CALLING ALL CHEFS' TO A CHALLENGE IN BOCA RATON

Attendees at Boca Raton Resort & Club can cook against each other—or against a property chef and vintner. see page 14

#### Convention Centers

##### CRY FROM THE HEARTLAND

Destinations in the region push for more convention space. see page 15

#### CVBs

##### DMAI IS PUTTING 'DMAP' CERTIFICATION ON THE MAP

Destination Marketing Accreditation Program now has close to 60 members. see page 16

##### HOUSTON FLICK HONORED

"One Day in Houston" short film wins public relations award. see page 16

#### International

##### COCONUT BAY BRINGS OUT SWEET TASTE OF ST. LUCIA

Leisure resort now targets groups by offering plethora of outdoor teambuilding options and event/meeting spaces. see page 18

#### Destination Insider

##### HAWAII'S GROUP SUPPORT

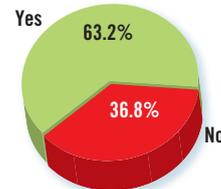
As leisure arrivals continue to drop, the islands look to meetings to carry them through the short term. see page 21

##### L.A. & THE BEACHES

Redondo Beach and Ventura offer cost-friendly meetings close to LAX. see page 22

#### MeetingNews Exclusive Research

Are you planning to take all of your allotted vacation days this year?



Source: MeetingNews survey of 310 meeting planners

Bailing Out On Vacation see page 20

# MN Exclusive Research

## Finding the Time for Time Off Is a Challenge for Planners

Our latest survey finds that planners get more time off than the U.S. average but have trouble taking advantage of it

By Nancy Lazarus

Planners' jobs not only involve a great deal of business travel, they also entitle them to generous vacation benefits. In *MeetingNews*' recent survey of 310 meeting professionals, respondents reported an average of 23 annual vacation days, far greater than the national average of 14 days. But their heavy work travel schedules prevent them from taking a lot of vacation time, and they usually check in with the office while away on break.

The amount of time off is only part of planners' enviable vacation packages. One-quarter of those surveyed said their vacation time has increased in the past couple years. Two meeting professionals with substantial vacation time are Joel Whitten, meetings and events manager for the Subway sandwich chain in Milford, CT, and Christine Dahlgren, associate director of the Greater Boston Real Estate Board. Both Whitten and Dahlgren have 25 paid days off annually, including vacation and personal days, marking an increase of five days since they reached their five-year work anniversaries.

Flexible time-off policies are also the norm for planners. Two-thirds of those surveyed noted that

they are allowed to carry over vacation time into the beginning of the following year, including Whitten, who usually holds over five days due to his work schedule. Furthermore, over half of association planners and one-third of corporate planners can take comp days for business trips that occur on weekends. Ericka Katz, director of programs for the Software Association of Oregon, in Portland, said, "Every time I have an event on a weekend, I can take a comp day within the following 30 days."

To be sure, planners earn every day of their leisure time, as they spend nearly 30 percent of their work life on the road performing their jobs. Beth Becker, global meeting services manager for MicroTek in Downers Grove, IL, travels one-third of the time. Planners tend to keep business and pleasure trips separate, however, as those surveyed reported only occasional instances of adding on leisure days to their fam trips or site inspections. Becker recalled the last trip she managed to add personal time off was the MPI education conference in Houston, staying three extra days to visit Galveston, TX.

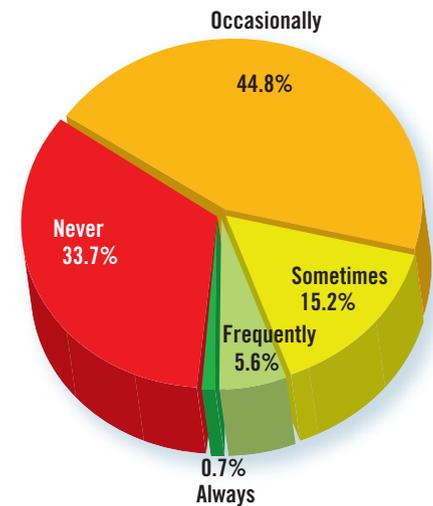
Meeting professionals were divided as to whether they access work messages while away on vacation. Becker confessed a "love/hate relationship with my BlackBerry." Whitten pointed out that he always stays in touch with his office because "it prevents a lot more work when I return." Dahlgren, however, resists the temptation to stay connected. "I try not to check in and plan for that while I'm away except under special circumstances."

But, in many respects, planners' vacation patterns reflect those of Americans overall. One-third of those surveyed do not intend to take all of their allotted vacation days this year, similar to other U.S. workers. Dahlgren explained, "Nothing concrete prevents me from taking the days; it just usually turns out that the end of the year comes before I have used them all due to a busy schedule."

Meeting professionals' leisure trips average only five days, also mirroring national vacation trends toward shorter periods of time off. Katz noted that she takes her vacation time in "two- to four-day increments throughout the year." Furthermore, planners tend to favor the summer months for their longest trips—again typical of the traveling public. Whitten said his longest trip is in "late summer or Christmas/New Year holiday season since it is my

### Before and After

When you travel for work on fam trips or site inspections, how often do you add on leisure vacation days?



Source: *MeetingNews* survey of 270 meeting planners

office's slowest period."

The U.S. is the most popular leisure destination for these planners. Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed prefer to spend their vacation time on domestic trips, while less than one-fifth prefer international trips. Another 13 percent like staying at home to relax, instead of going away. Becker recently enjoyed a "staycation" in June, when she prepared the house, pool, and yard for summer entertaining.

During their longest vacations this year, planners are visiting different regions of the U.S., especially the East and West coasts. Whitten will vacation in Florida, while Katz will travel to the Bay Area in California to visit her family.

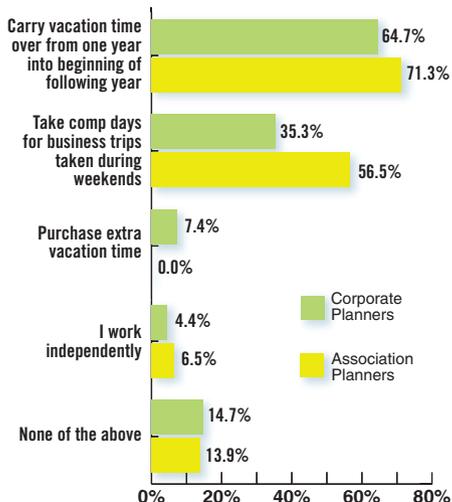
Not surprisingly, few are venturing abroad, well aware of the high costs for American visitors. As Dahlgren observed, "I would love to go overseas, but because of the weak dollar it's unlikely it will happen this year. My next international trip will be determined by the exchange rate, plane ticket prices, and my budget, when my other vacations are planned." ○

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Web Extra

### Bankers' Hours

Which, if any, of the following does your current employer allow?



Source: *MeetingNews* survey of 309 meeting planners