

Corporate Events at Resort Destinations Deliver Unexpected ROI

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The morning sun crests over the Brundage Mountains, reflecting across McCall's Shore Lodge's lakefront boardwalk. At 7 a.m., the first conference attendees are already gathering for sunrise yoga on the dock, coffee cups steaming in the crisp mountain air. Another group laces up their hiking boots for an early morning hike while others take in the views of the lake while networking.

This scene would be impossible to replicate in a downtown conference center, and that's exactly the point.

Shore Lodge's 77-room boutique property has become a destination of choice for corporate retreats, medical conferences and state association meetings, drawing business leaders from across the Treasure Valley and beyond. But like many resort destinations across Idaho and the broader Pacific Northwest, Shore Lodge represents a growing trend in corporate events where businesses make a calculated decision to move important meetings away from traditional venues in favor of destinations that promise both productivity and transformation.

The perks and challenges of holding corporate events at resort destinations are moving beyond simple cost-per-attendee calculations to measure engagement, retention and long-term business outcomes. While destination events typically cost more upfront, industry data and resort managers argue the investment pays dividends through higher attendance rates, enhanced networking and stronger team cohesion that translates directly to workplace performance.

The numbers behind the trend

The meetings and events industry represents a significant economic force, with 1.9 million meetings held annually across the United States, resulting in \$325 billion in direct spending. Within this landscape, destination events at resorts are capturing an increasingly large share of corporate budgets.

For 95% of events teams, demonstrating event ROI is the top priority, according to a 2024 Forrester study. Yet traditional metrics often miss the intangible benefits that resort destinations provide. Event communications services account for up to 30% of overall marketing spending for some businesses, making the pressure to prove return on investment more critical than ever.

“We measure success by the comments we receive from both attendees and meeting planners,” Shore Lodge President and General Manager Tom Garcia said. “Our meeting planners want to ensure that the agenda goals have been met and the satisfaction of the attendees has been positively perceived.”

Brittany Burgess, Shore Lodge’s director of sales and marketing, added that participation rates tell the story most clearly.

“We definitely see an increase in participation when people attend destination meetings,” she said. “When it’s a memorable experience, people are more likely to attend any unique location, combined with a mix of professional and recreational activities.”

The psychology of place plays a role

Industry experts increasingly recognize that physical environment plays a crucial role in meeting effectiveness. Resort destinations offer what traditional conference centers cannot, which is the psychological impact of removing participants from their daily routines and placing them in inspiring settings.

“The intent or focus of a meeting is truly enhanced with a resort setting,” Garcia says. “Breakouts are usually done in and around the resort, so casual, relaxed get-togethers lead to more thoughtful discussion. Bringing the outside into a meeting space, through windows or on patios, allows for more creativity without even realizing it.”

This environmental psychology translates into measurable business outcomes. According to industry data from Convene Magazine, 93% of senior-level managers agree that a face-to-face meeting improves their ability to close a deal..

Combining workable convention space with outdoor beauty seems to be a winning combination for event planners. For instance, at The Coeur d’Alene Resort, which offers more than 32,000 square feet of conference, exhibit and meeting space across 25 event rooms, the emphasis on location-driven experiences is central to their value proposition. The resort’s signature venue, the Hagadone Event Center, features retractable floor-to-ceiling glass walls that literally bring the outdoors inside, with views of Lake Coeur d’Alene and the resort’s famous floating golf green.

Calculating the true cost

While destination events require higher upfront investment, meeting planners are finding that total cost of ownership often favors resort locations when factoring in engagement and outcomes. The average cost per attendee is expected to increase globally by 1.5% for small and simple meetings to 3% for conferences and trade shows, but resort destinations often deliver participation rates that offset the premium.

“We don’t see a difference in participation between companies that pay for everything versus those where attendees pay their own way,” Burgess said. “Both types of conferences tend to fill up completely.”

The destination effect also extends stays, creating additional value for both attendees and their organizations.

“If the company is paying for their meeting time, we’ll do a lot of pre and post days,” Garcia said. “Family members may come up, and they’ll extend their stay since they’re up here anyway.”

This extended engagement model aligns with broader industry trends. The demand for business-oriented hotels with conference spaces, fast internet and close access to business centers is gaining traction as companies seek venues that can accommodate both professional and personal needs.

Perhaps the most significant ROI factor from destination events lies in relationship building that extends beyond the conference room. Resort settings naturally facilitate the type of informal interactions that strengthen business relationships.

“We have found that once they have this shared experience, trust has increased, and so confidence to express yourself translates to making workplace relationships more comfortable,” Garcia said. “Shared destination experiences can help develop that understanding between personal and business interactions.”

The activities available at resort destinations become tools for professional development. At Shore Lodge, popular team-building experiences include hiking the surrounding mountains, water sports on Payette Lake, and group dinners featuring locally sourced cuisine. Similarly, The Coeur d’Alene Resort offers multiple outdoor adventures, day trips and team-building activities including whitewater rafting on the Spokane River and guided hikes on Tubbs Hill.

“Both outdoor activities and networking events like happy hours and dinners create a more casual environment where you can get to know someone outside of work,” Burgess said. “This really helps break down the silos.”