

BEYOND BORDERS **EXTRA**

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International Intelligence **Blazing an International Incentive Trail**

By Alison Hall

For the 14th year, a group of international incentive travel buyers and suppliers gathered for two days of intense networking and information-sharing at the exclusive Trailblazers Marketplace. The annual event is presented by a partnership of national tourist organizations that extend invitations to both buyers and suppliers. After a couple of name changes and a few changes in country membership since its beginnings in the early 1990s, Trailblazers is now set at six countries: Britain, Canada, Denmark, Ireland, Monaco, and Switzerland.

Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac played historic host to the meeting in July, giving attendees an elegant front-row seat to Québec City's 400th anniversary party, happening throughout 2008. Perched atop the lovely walled city and overlooking the St. Lawrence River, the Grande Dame opened in 1893 with 170 rooms (at \$3/night!) and now offers 620 individually decorated guest rooms and 14 meeting rooms.

Trailblazers attendees heard quick updates from the six incentive destinations at an opening ceremony. The next day, buyers from incentive houses met with the suppliers. Naturally, much of the talk focused on budgets. The consensus, however, was that "buyers still want to buy," in the words of Paula Carroll, director of sales and marketing at Ashford Castle in County Mayo, Ireland. But it's taking creativity on both sides to make it happen.

All the more reason for face-to-face events where the suppliers from a destination can work together to help buyers build programs. "The Trailblazers committee does so much work," said Tracy Norum, CMP, vice president and general manager, Fox Premier Meetings and Incentives, Oshkosh, Wis. "Everything is so well thought-out. The appointments are all about sharing information and forming new partnerships, and at the social functions these partnerships turn into friendships. It's really an honor and a privilege to be here."

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