

# Redefining All-Inclusive



## Quality F&B, local exploration & luxury now characterize the all-inclusive concept. *By Jessie Fetterling*

The terms “luxury” and “all-inclusive” have long been at the opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to architecting the group experience—until now. With experiential meetings on the rise, the attendee demand for local culture to be part of the all-inclusive concept is high, whether that means authentic decor, F&B or off-site excursions.

“Luxury now has a wider meaning, one that is more about brag-worthy experiences like rolling your own cigars with a glass of rare rum or a private dance lesson,” explains Juan Perez Sosa, senior VP of sales and marketing, Barcelo Hotel Group.

To keep up with the times, all-inclusive resorts across the world are revamping their resort offerings so that they, too, can promise the same local experiences once

saved for boutique hotels and property rentals. Fresh dining concepts, experiential activities for groups and an emphasis on high-level service are a few of the ways these all-inclusive hotel groups are redefining the all-inclusive concept and breaking the mold of its all-in-one reputation.

### **PALACE RESORTS**

The biggest news for Palace Resorts is the recent \$450 million transformation of **Moon Palace Golf & Spa Resort** in Cancun. It added more than 800 guest rooms, two adults-only swimming pools with poolside DJs, a six-lane bowling alley and more than 80,000 sf of meeting space. Its new dining establishments, however, were the real highlight, with everything from local Caribbean fare to authentic Mexican and

even Lebanese cuisine. In true Palace Resorts form, each restaurant offers top-shelf liquors and premium ingredients.

Up next on the Palace Resorts docket is the 250-room **Le Blanc Spa Resort Los Cabos**, scheduled to open on Mexico’s West Coast later this year. While details have yet to be released about the property, meeting planners can expect an all-inclusive, adults-only concept, with five restaurants, a massive spa and 13,000 sf of meeting space.

### **BARCELO HOTEL GROUP**

Last fall, Barcelo Hotel Group announced a new, multi-brand strategy in response to the demand for experiences over things. Its three brands—Royal Hideaway Luxury Hotels & Resorts, Occidental Hotels & Resorts and Allegro Hotels—are shifting



Left: Rendering of Le Blanc Spa Resort Los Cabos  
Below: Occidental Cozumel pool

**Destination** hotel to explore some local history. It is conveniently tucked away within an ecological and historical preserve in the heart of Riviera Maya, Mexico, and offers a complimentary *trajinera* (or riverboat) that takes attendees through the property to the eco-archeological **Xcaret Park**, located adjacent to the resort. There are also authentic Mayan ruins on the property: one oceanside and one enclosed in a mangrove.

#### CLUB MED

Club Med plans to open 15 new resorts worldwide in the next three years. That includes three in France, which is Club Med's biggest market and a big draw to groups. A new mountain village resort will open every year until 2019; the 420-room **Club Med Samoëns** opens this December. It will offer attendees a dual ski experience, with two ski areas: Le Grand Massif (for beginners) and the high-altitude Flaine (for more advanced skiers).

A lot of the company's recent success can be attributed to the rise in health and

wellness trends, two of the top MICE trends, and increased interest in Club Med's all-inclusive ski resorts. Another factor is the popularity of its Club Med Creactive by Cirque du Soleil, which was first launched at **Club Med Punta Cana** in the Dominican Republic, offering groups more than 25 acrobatic and artistic activities for circus-inspired meetings and incentives. These include flying trapeze, tightrope, juggling and high bungee options, and custom-created workshops are available for groups.

#### MELIA HOTELS INTERNATIONAL

Melia Hotels International continues to add unique group experiences to its Paradisus resorts by incorporating specialty concepts

#### Barcelo

For more on how Barcelo is answering the call for experiences over things in meetings and incentives, visit us at [prvue.me/barcelo-new-direction](http://prvue.me/barcelo-new-direction)

their focus to provide more authentic, culturally immersive experiences. That also means a \$120 million overhaul of key resorts in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Central America and Aruba.

Cultural immersion is top of mind at **Barcelo Bavaro Grand Resort**, which includes the Barcelo Bavaro Palace and Barcelo Bavaro Beach – Adults Only properties, in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. Here, attendees can take traditional Bachata dance lessons or venture off-site to visit some of the local cigar factories.

"Additionally, the resort's annual 'Culinary Week' is a great way for groups to experience authentic cuisine from different regions via interactive activities and events such as cooking demos, mixology classes and tastings," says Perez Sosa.

You don't have to venture far from the 764-room **Occidental at Xcaret**





Above (l-r): Paradisus Playa Del Carmen; Club Med Punta Cana



## A Resort That Includes Spa Treatments in the Room Rate

Turning the all-inclusive concept on its head is the new, adults-only 448-room **Unico 20°87° Hotel Riviera Maya**. Here, groups will find destination-rich experiences such as mescal tastings, live acoustic music performed by local talent and tapestries made by local artisans in each guest room. Traditional butler service has been replaced with *anfitriones*, or local hosts that arrange hard-to-get reservations and trips to the area's best-kept secret spots such as snorkeling on the Los Canones reef and house calls to a local shaman.

Spa treatments are included in the room rate, and Kevin Edmunds, the property's VP of meeting and incentive sales, says culinary is also a major touch point.

"Each restaurant has its own individual kitchen and a completely different design and dining experience, which allows us to elevate the quality of the food and service. Not to mention, our rotating-chef restaurant by celebrity chef Christian Bravo sets a whole new standard for all-inclusives."

[unicohotelrivieramaya.com](http://unicohotelrivieramaya.com)

**"Themed coffee breaks are being presented by our guest experience team. Attendees can visit a rainforest while sipping coffee or munching on a pastry amid an indoor tropical oasis."**

that are unique to the area, according to John Iannini, CIS, CTC, VP, Meetings & Events America for Melia Hotels International. One such example is the new Don Julio corner addition to the **Paradisus Playa del Carmen** in Mexico, where attendees can sip 12- to 70-year-old tequila while learning about the history of the tequila brand from an on-site expert.

"Themed coffee breaks are also being presented by our guest experience team. Attendees can visit a rainforest while sipping coffee or munching on a pastry amid an indoor tropical oasis created exclusively for your group," Iannini says. "Or groups can try our transportation theme that incorporates a variety of vehicles from the last 30 years set on a man-made roadway with mileage signs to destinations that attendees originate from."

### FIESTA AMERICANA

Grupo Posadas is celebrating its 50th anniversary with plans to double its resort offerings by 2020. Two new properties—**Live**

Below: Trattoria at Fiesta Americana  
Condesa Cancun All Inclusive

**Aqua Urban Resort San Miguel de Allende** and **Grand Fiesta Americana Oaxaca**—are set to open next year to this regard. Last fall, the hotel company transformed its Fiesta Americana Resort Collection into La Coleccion, which emphasizes authentic experiences at 12 of the hotel company's most popular resorts. One such property, **Fiesta Americana Condesa Cancun All Inclusive**, recently underwent a major renovation to its 500 guest rooms, featuring decor that uses local materials such as *conchuela*, a compacted marine shell that keeps a room's temperature cool, as well as wooden furniture.

"Fiesta Americana Condesa Cancun's renovation had meeting attendees in mind every step of the way, which is why the resort enhanced its WiFi capabilities, allowing meeting planners to be more productive during their stay," says David Manzella, senior VP of sales and marketing for Grupo Posadas. "The resort also enhanced its culinary options, featuring authentic cuisine that will entice groups."

Its entertainment center also provides culinary team building activities, as well as 10 different nightly shows from local professionals. Other experiences for groups include snorkeling, scuba diving and fishing tours that depart from the nearby marina, AquaWorld.

Explorean by Fiesta Americana properties—also part of La Coleccion—offer a wide variety of activities that allow groups to be more in touch with nature in a quiet and secluded setting, according to Manzella. At the **Explorean Kohunlich**, which has 38 bungalows and two cabanas, attendees can bike through the Mayan rainforest to visit archaeological wonders at Kohunlich, rappel down high walls in the jungle and kayak through the Bacalar lagoon. The 56-room **Explorean Cozumel** offers groups dune buggy adventures, as well as water sports such as diving, kayaking, paddleboarding and snorkeling.

### BAHIA PRINCIPE HOTELS & RESORTS

Last fall, Bahia Principe Hotels & Resorts debuted its 14th property in the Dominican Republic: the 512-room **Luxury Bahia Principe**

## Fiesta Americana

For more on Grupo Posadas' new La Coleccion brand, visit us at [prvue.me/la-coleccion-adventure](http://prvue.me/la-coleccion-adventure)





Above: Luxury Bahia Principe Samana Don Pablo Collection

## The Experts Weigh in on All-Inclusive Trends

**On F&B:** "One of the biggest trends we are seeing is that all-inclusive hotels are making their menus more local, utilizing regional ingredients and cooking methods. Hotels are also catering to the family market and including complimentary on-site activities for guests to enjoy. La Coleccion properties have gotten on board with these trends, adding a traditional taco stand at Grand Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta All Inclusive."  
—David Manzella, Grupo Posadas

**On a Curated Itinerary:** "It truly is not just about a known destination or a big name property anymore. It's about being thrown into the culture and living that true meaningful experience. Whatever travel plans are selected, a curated itinerary is being planned just for you and your group. Individuals are searching for that Instagram or Facebook moment."

—Kevin Edmunds, Unico 20°87° Hotel Riviera Maya

**On Upscale Experiences:** "Looking ahead, our brand will see an increased focus on luxury and upscale experiences while expanding our urban and beach presence. Travelers expect a higher level of service more than ever before; but excellent service no longer means just white-glove restaurants."

—Juan Perez Sosa, Barcelo Hotel Group

**Fantasia Don Pablo Collection** in Punta Cana, offering an abundance of entertaining activities for groups. Two of three on-site castles house the Garden Circus restaurant and Kokoro sushi bar in addition to nightly entertainment that includes a stimulating audiovisual show. The all-inclusive experience also features one free hour of non-motorized water sports such as paddleboarding, snorkeling and kayaking. Even more: attendees staying here will have access to facilities and services at other Bahia Principe properties within the Bavaro Beach complex.

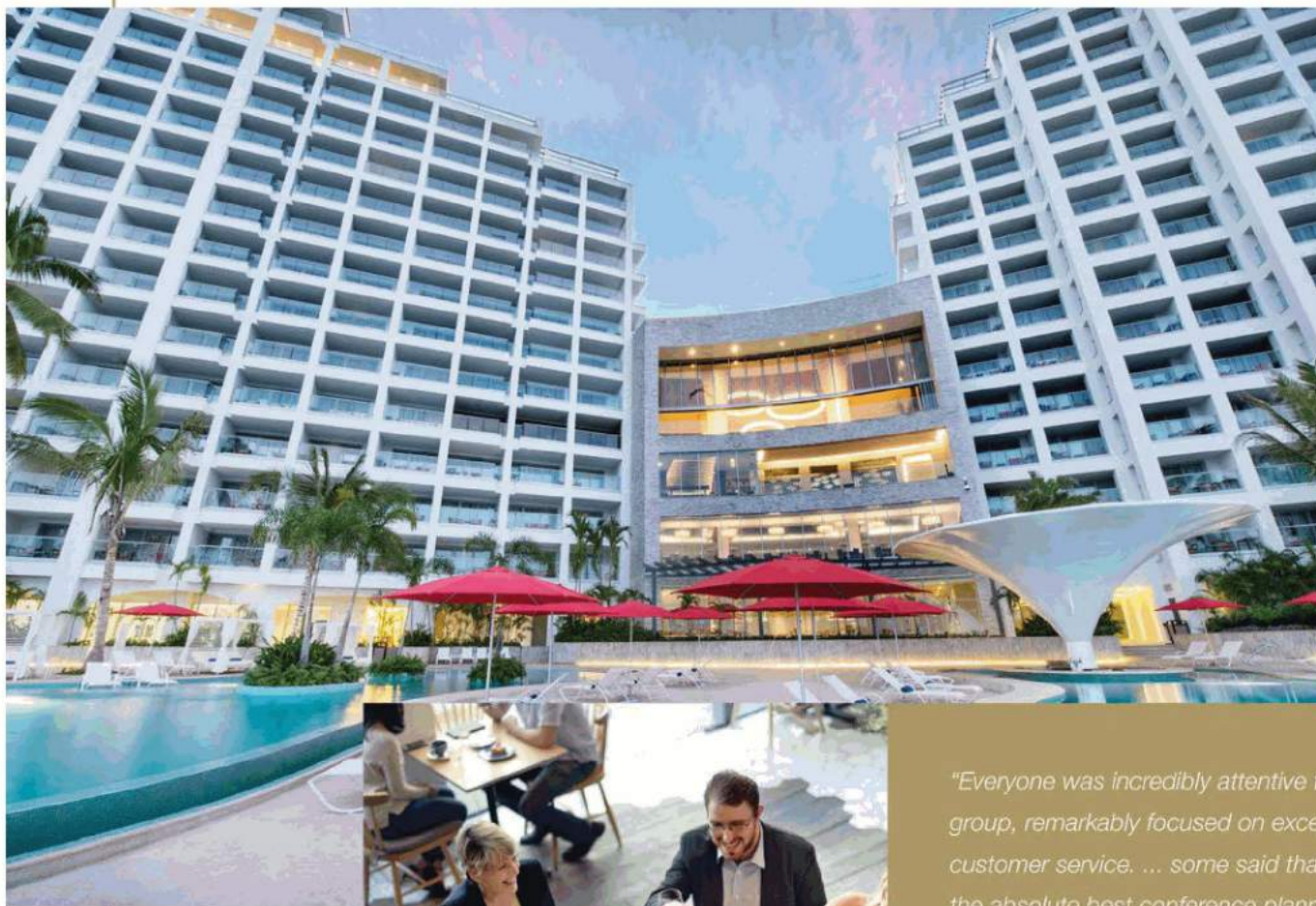
**Luxury Bahia Principe Samana Don Pablo Collection** helped put the Dominican Republic's Samana Peninsula back on the map for meetings a few years ago. The 149-room property offers an adults-only oasis for groups truly looking to escape the hustle and bustle.

The recent launch of the property's WE Wellness Experience encourages attendees to achieve work-life balance through Zen Yoga, meditative sessions and anti-stress coaching.

For more athletic attendees, activities range from martial arts to total fitness classes, with the option to seek sports nutrition advice also available. Menus at the resort's five restaurants even cater to health-conscious attendees, with a WE seal that designates the most nutritious F&B choices. Many groups also find wellness in simply exploring the Samana Peninsula via hiking, horseback riding or whale watching.

[barcelo.com](http://barcelo.com); [melia.com](http://melia.com); [bahia-principe.com](http://bahia-principe.com); [clubmed.us](http://clubmed.us); [palaceresorts.com](http://palaceresorts.com); [posadas.com](http://posadas.com)

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-Diamond Residential Mortgage Corporation

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