



Special
IMEX
Edition

September 2026

Industry Trends

Industry Trends At-A-Glance

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- **Meet us at IMEX!** See page 28 for all the stuff we can't wait to talk about with you!



The ~~Cost~~ Value of Live Events

Rising costs are consistently ranked the #1 challenge for events. But there's another story at play: organizations keep investing in them.

Our customers are being more strategic with their event spend – not eliminating it. As event organizers we help guide them on the best way to maximize those dollars.

Since we know some decisions come down to spreadsheets, we'll share cost data in this edition (**including our new Event Price Index on slide 10**) because it provides a baseline to support realistic budgeting.

But cost is only part of the story. The more important question is:



How do events help achieve our goals in ways other tactics can't?"

We have some ideas, and in the coming months we'll share voices from client senior executives speaking to just that.

An aerial photograph of a two-lane asphalt road that curves through a dense, green forested landscape. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow that illuminates the scene. The road has a white dashed center line and a white solid edge line. A blue circular graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text "Client Landscape".

Client Landscape

Uncertain Environment Impacting Clients

Your Environment

Selective spend
Heightened focus on risk
Shift toward high-ROI programs

How It's Showing Up

Budgetary tradeoffs

Modifying program scope or shifting budgets around to accommodate inflation of airfares, rooms, F&B, etc.

Decisions and approvals take longer

More legal involvement and more scrutiny around data ownership, privacy and security

Focus on ROI, data and measurement

Desire for real-time data and measurable outcomes

Client behavior points to commitment to in-person events but constrained environment



The background image shows a man in a light blue button-down shirt and khaki pants standing in front of a whiteboard. He is gesturing with his right hand towards the board. The whiteboard is covered with various business-related content: a 'MARKETING STATISTICS' chart with a green donut chart showing 50%, 10%, and 10% segments; a 'MARKETING MIX' chart with a blue pie chart; a 'MARKETING ANALYSIS' bar chart with green bars; and several yellow sticky notes with handwritten text: 'KPI - 50%', 'PRODUCT 10%', 'Time management', and 'Yearly expenses - 70%'. There are also some hand-drawn diagrams and arrows on the board.

Inflation Update and **NEW: The Event Price Index**

UPDATED

Inflation Outlook

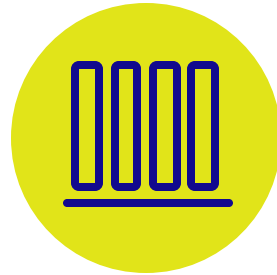
2026 has continued to see elevated prices with airfare and fuel prices a key driver since the war in Iran began.

Experts believe prices will rise less sharply in 2027 but will not fall below 2026 levels.



2026:

Substantial price increases across all categories, especially air.



2027:

Prices will stabilize but not come down.

	2026 Prices	2027 Prices
Hotels <i>*Estimates reflect hotel chain scales typically used by business groups</i>	Up 4-6%	Up 1-2%
Air	Up 10-20%	Up 1-2%
Food & Beverage	Up 5-8%	Up 3-5%
A/V & Production/ Labor	6-10%	Unavailable
Meetings/Events Cost Per Attendee	Up 6%	Up 1-2%

*Sources: Data is based on analysis across multiple sources, including GBTA & Altour 2027 Global Business Travel Forecast; U.S. Travel Price Index – August 2026; Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Cost Index; CoStar/STR U.S. ADR % Change; Maritz managed program data and supplier partner data as of August 2026

Reframing Event Costs



A photo of a 2006 grocery receipt recently went viral, sending shockwaves through the Internet. It's hardly news that food prices have gone up, but being gobsmacked with a tangible reminder cereal used to cost \$1.86 instead of \$4.97 was a next-level reality check.

Our Client Advisory Board challenged us to bring that same level of clarity to event costs by equipping planners with data that shows how the cost of common event inclusions has changed over time. Not just a percentage, but actual prices of real line items, from a gallon of coffee to motorcoach transportation and standard audiovisual equipment.

Introducing the Event Price Index



Developed using real data from real suppliers our customers use, the Event Price Index offers a snapshot of today's event cost landscape and a baseline for realistic budgeting.

INTRODUCING:

The Event Price Index

Why was this developed?

The index tracks costs for common event inclusions to inform decision making and support realistic budgeting.

What's different about it?

It uses actual price data for tangible line items associated with events. Rather than being comprehensive of all event costs, it is intended for illustrative purposes.

What approach was used to gather this data?

The initial index draws on data from key suppliers in a **tier one destination** and a market that serves a broad range of clients and event types. A defined market allows us to track pricing consistently while reflecting diverse event needs.



What happens next?

Consider this a first iteration of an experiment that will evolve. The initial goal is to update this quarterly, but we will refine our approach based on feedback and changes in the environment.

AS OF SEPTEMBER 2026

Event Price Index

		Cost Pre-Covid Programs operating in 2019	Cost Last Year Programs operating in 2025	Cost This Year Programs operating in 2026	Cost Next Year Programs operating in 2027	% Change 2027 vs. 2019
F&B	Standard banquet buffet breakfast for 150 (upper upscale property)	\$50 per person	\$68 per person	\$71 per person	\$74 per person	+48%
	Standard banquet buffet breakfast for 150 (luxury property)	\$63 per person	\$102 per person	\$102 per person	\$108 per person	+71%
	Standard banquet buffet breakfast (convention center)	\$28	\$41	\$42	Being finalized	>+50%
Meeting space with A/V and coffee break	Standard coffee break for 150 (luxury property)	\$28 per person	\$42 per person	\$42 per person	\$44 per person	+57%
	Standard A/V setup for a breakout meeting room for 150 (upper upscale property)	\$5,711	\$6,630	\$6,830	\$7,030	+23%
Transportation	Sedan transfer (one way)	\$95	\$142	\$160	\$184	+94%
	Motorcoach charter (per hour)	\$110	\$190	\$205	\$214	+95%
Decor & Entertainment	Musical trio	\$3,500	\$5,000	\$6,400	\$6,700	+91%
	Standard cocktail centerpiece	\$20	\$25	\$35	\$40	+200%
Staff	Hospitality staff rate (upper upscale property)	\$37.50	\$56	\$65	\$70	+87%
Activities	Boat tour	\$140 per person	\$155 per person	\$175 per person	\$225 per person	+61%
	Offsite city block party	\$245 per person	\$380 per person	\$410 per person	\$475 per person	+94%

*Data is based on a sample of common event inclusions provided by hotels, DMCs and DMO in a tier one city and should be considered illustrative in nature. Taxes and service fees not included.

AS OF SEPTEMBER 2026

Event Price Index

2027 VS 2019



F&B

+56%



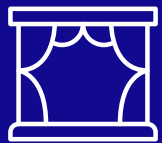
Meeting

+40%



Transportation

+95%



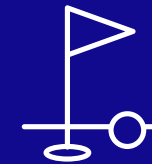
Décor &
Entertainment

+146%



Staff

+87%



Activities

+78%

*Data is based on a sample of common event inclusions provided by hotels, DMCs and DMO in a tier one city and should be considered illustrative in nature. Taxes and service fees not included.

Some Closing Thoughts

Event pros are increasingly asked to defend budgets and measure results. Industry research offers evidence that events build trust, accelerate pipelines and generate ROI. But proving that an event delivered a return is only part of the conversation.

Executives are also asking a broader question:

“Do events generate a better return than other vehicles?”

Executives are evaluating every lever available to achieve business goals, especially as AI reshapes how organizations engage, market and sell.

Rather than looking at events in a vacuum, we look outside the industry to see what experts are saying about the future role of human connection in a world of AI. One insight remains clear: while technology will continue to evolve, trust and human connection will only become more important.

On average, buyers use 10 channels during the purchase journey (McKinsey)

Early on, AI tools offer efficiency and convenience. As buyers engage more deeply and the stakes rise, they seek the trust fostered by human interaction (Gartner)

Gartner predicts 75% of B2B buyers will prefer sales experiences that prioritize human interaction over AI by 2030

A man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark blue quilted vest over a white long-sleeved shirt, is looking down at a tablet computer. He is in a modern office or public space with large windows and other people in the background. A large dark blue circle with white text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

The Latest Registration Data

2026 REGISTRATION VOLUME

Slight Erosion

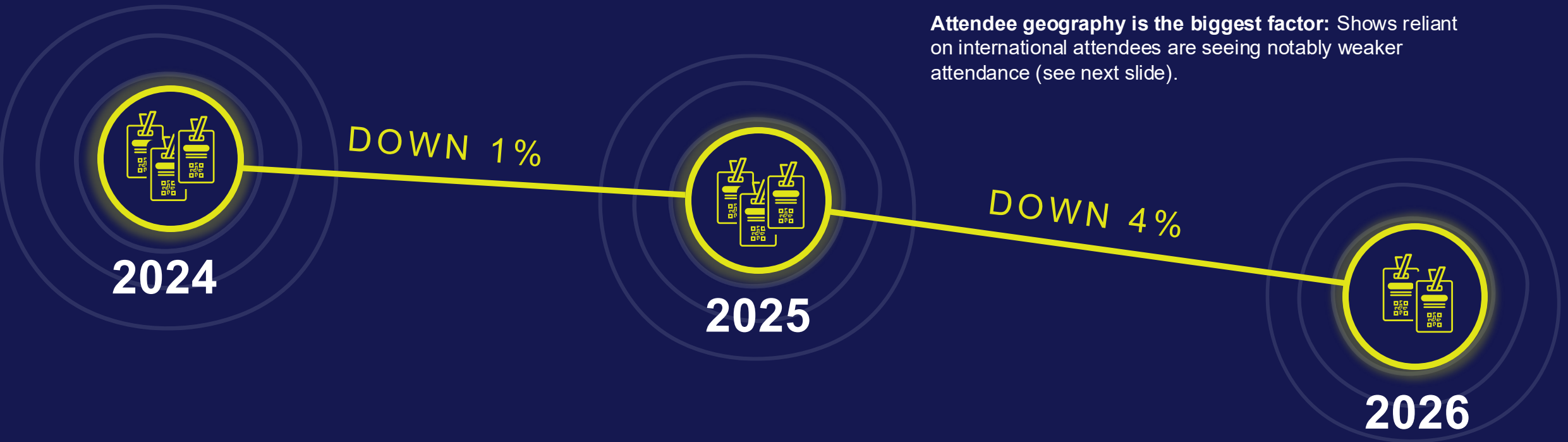
Registration volume has continued to be slightly soft in 2026 due to the general economic and geopolitical environment – though many events are still holding firm or growing.

Which events are seeing the strongest performance?

Very large trade shows are outperforming smaller association events, though not across the board.

Industry sometimes plays a role, particularly in hard-hit government-funded sectors like scientific research and academia whose audiences are affected by funding cuts.

Attendee geography is the biggest factor: Shows reliant on international attendees are seeing notably weaker attendance (see next slide).



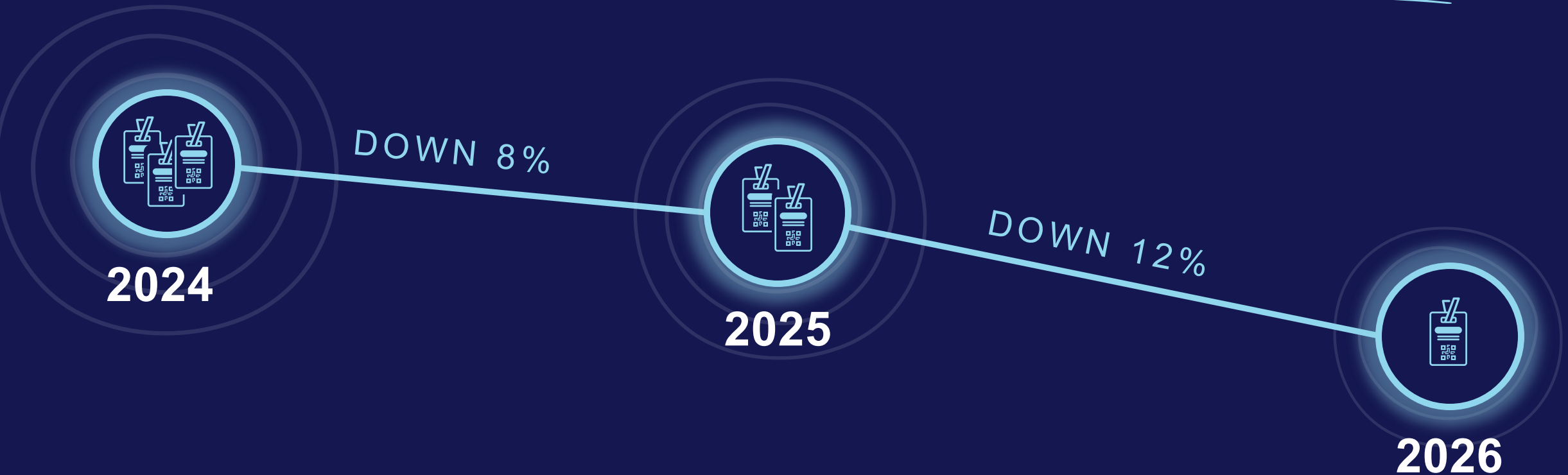
*Source: Maritz client data comparing attendee registrations at association and trade show events taking place in 2026 to the same set of events in previous years. Data includes events taking place September 1, 2026 or earlier. (n=156 for 2026; n=165 for 2025).

Geopolitical Impact

International attendance at U.S. events has seen further erosion in 2026, exacerbated by rising travel prices, economic and geopolitical uncertainty and consumer perceptions.

Understanding the Issues

The trend toward softer international attendance at U.S. events reflects broader dynamics in visitation to the U.S. since 2025. Additional information can be found [here](#).



*Source: Maritz client data comparing international attendee registrations at association and trade show events taking place in 2026 to the same set of events in previous years. Data includes events taking place September 1, 2026 or earlier. (n=37 for 2026; n=48 for 2025).



2025-2027 Incentive Benchmarks

Trending destinations,
average spend and more

Source: Maritz Travel managed programs and
program budgets for Incentive programs
operating between 2025 and 2027

Incentive Trips

At-a-glance 2025-2027



\$6,900

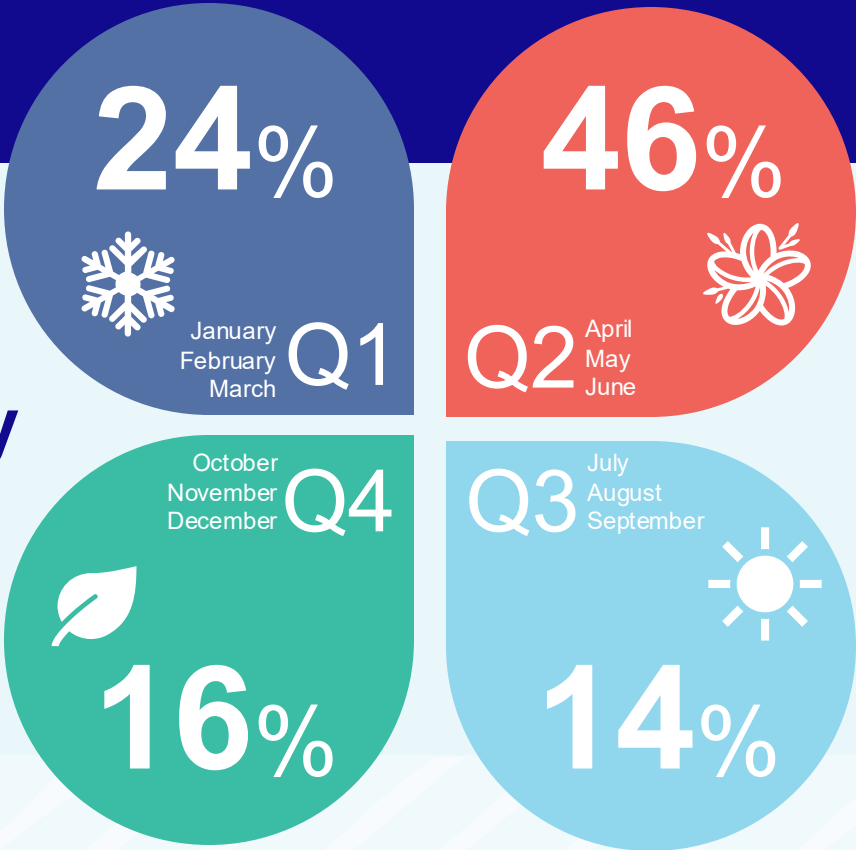
average spend per person
(excluding air)



... a **28% increase**
from 2024.

Program Seasonality

Average across regions



4.3

Average nights per
Incentive Trip

Down from 4.6 nights in 2024,
as companies seek to control costs

Transocean
Outside North America

5.6

Caribbean **4.6**

Hawaii **4.4**

Mexico/ Cen America **4.3**

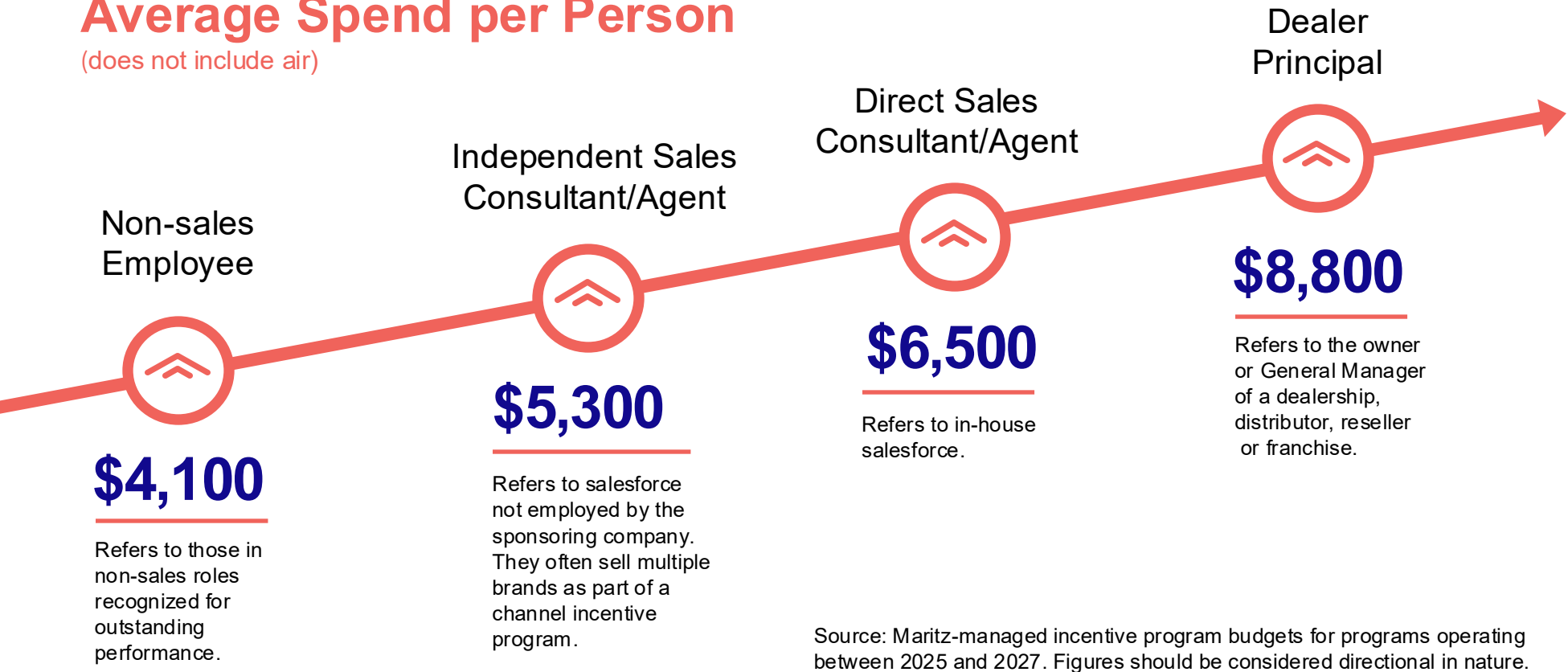
U.S./ Canada **3.4**

Spend Per Participant, By Audience Type

Consistent with past data, companies spend the most on Dealer Principals and the least on non-sales employees.

Average Spend per Person

(does not include air)



Source: Maritz-managed incentive program budgets for programs operating between 2025 and 2027. Figures should be considered directional in nature.



\$6,900

average spend per person
(excluding air)

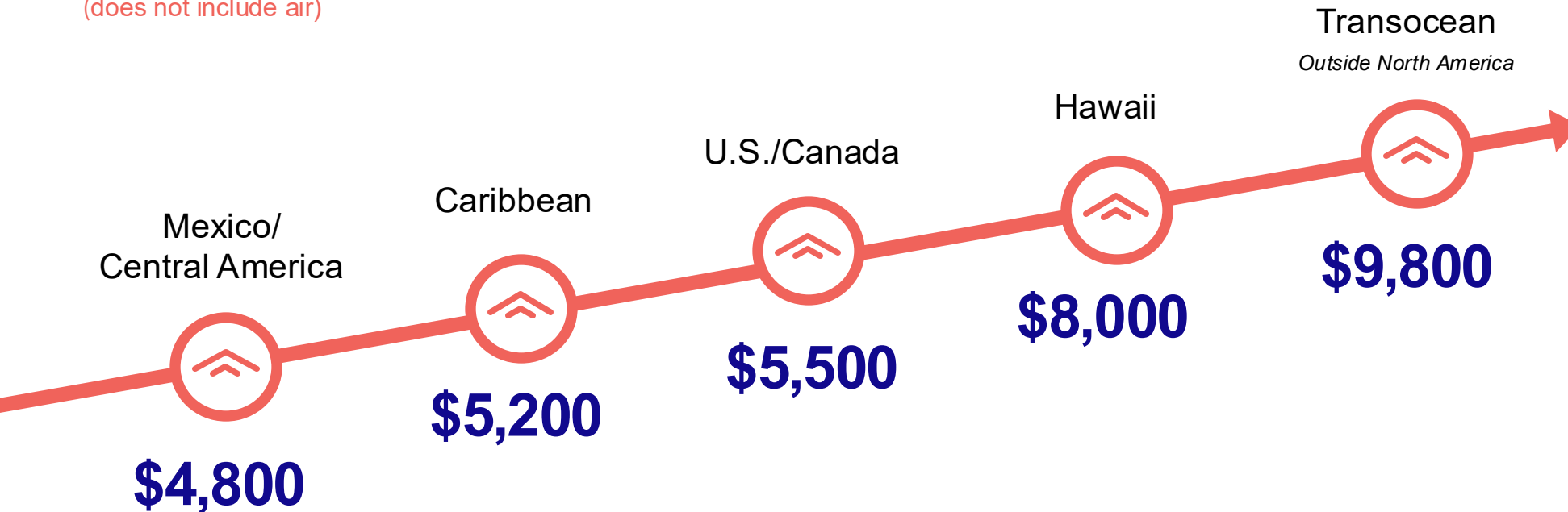
... a 28 percent
increase from 2024

Spend Per Participant, By Destination

Average client spend per person is twice as high overseas (\$9,800) compared with Mexico/Central America (\$4,800) – though this is partly due to differences in trip length, hotel audience and hotel product used.

Average Spend per Person

(does not include air)



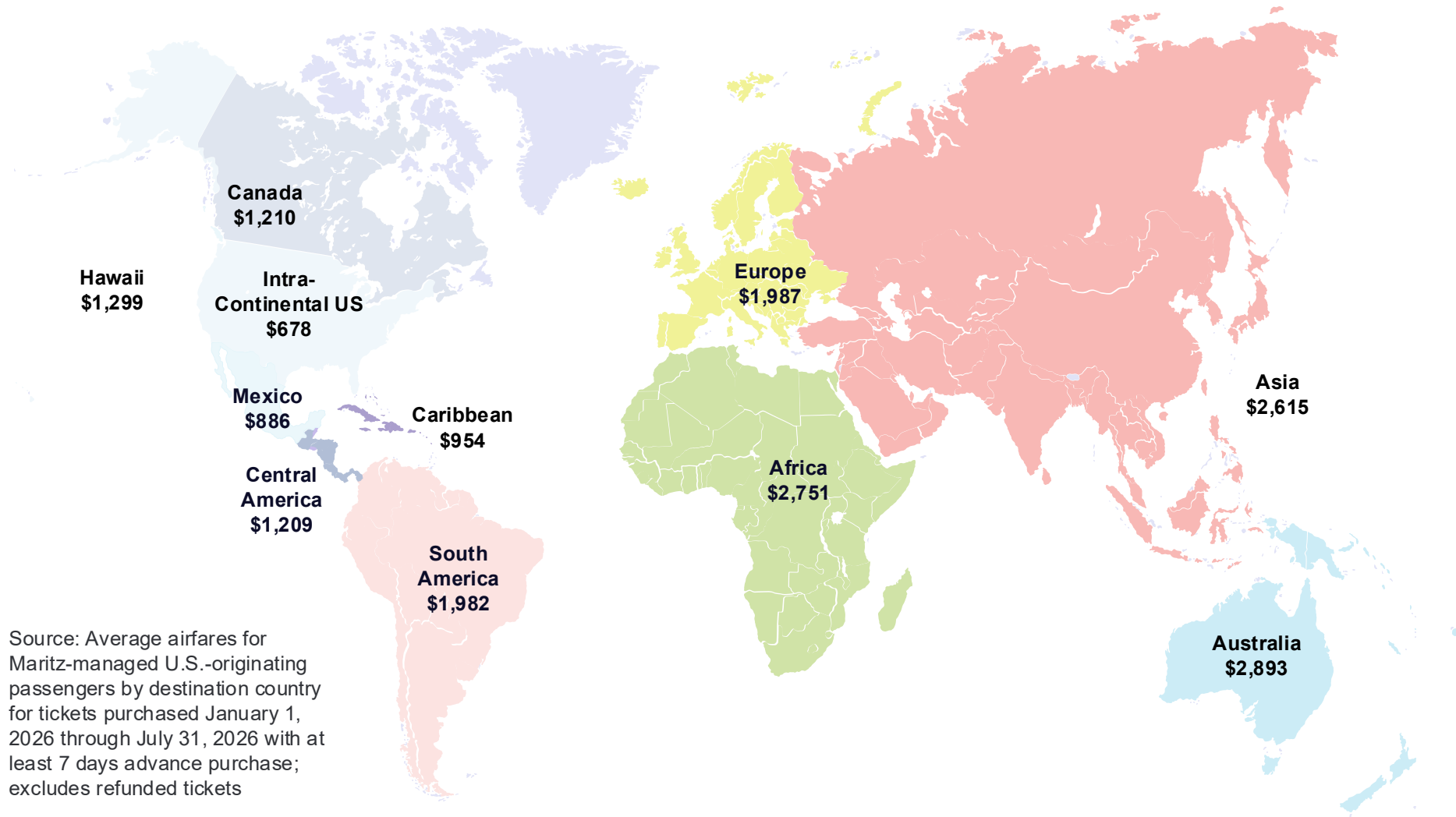
Not apples-to-apples

Mexico trips tend to be shorter and more likely to use all-inclusive properties. Long-haul overseas trips tend to be lengthier and targeted toward well-compensated sales professionals and dealer principals.

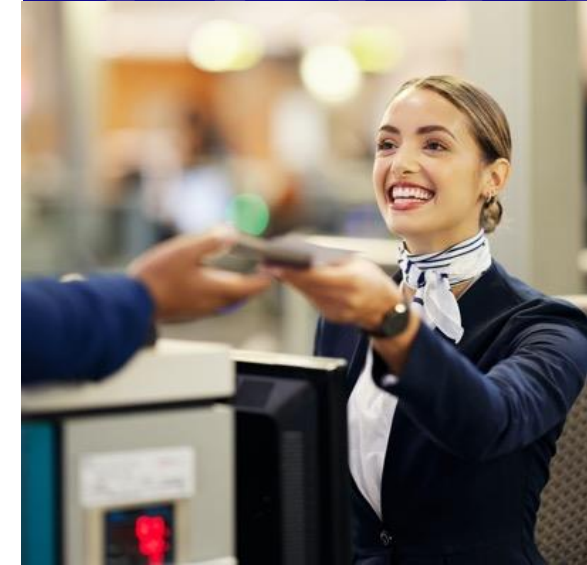
Source: Maritz-managed incentive program budgets for programs operating between 2025 and 2027.

Average Airfare by Destination

Airfares have risen in nearly all regions, particularly for long-haul routes.



Source: Average airfares for Maritz-managed U.S.-originating passengers by destination country for tickets purchased January 1, 2026 through July 31, 2026 with at least 7 days advance purchase; excludes refunded tickets



Fares will stay high

High jet fuel costs, reduced flights and strong demand lead experts to believe fares will remain elevated.

Incentive Destination Trends

What's driving destination choice now?

Participants are eager to experience unique destinations – getting there is another matter. Fewer flight routes plus budget constraints are causing some companies to select locations in or easily reached from the continental U.S.

Safety and Duty of Care is also top of mind, with corporate security departments having a larger say in which locations are in – and out.

Which destinations make the cut?

Locations that are seen as novel or aspirational – while still being easy to get to and safe. We see strong demand for Hawaii, Canada, the Caribbean islands and Costa Rica. We also see interest in European locations that are more unique, such as Portugal, Vienna, Prague, Scotland and Switzerland, as well as less explored parts of major European countries (e.g. Sorrento, Italy).

The bottom line

The winners for 2027 will be locations that balance safety, accessibility, novelty and experience.

Clients typically aren't as willing to choose destinations with air routes that require more than one connection for most of their guests.

Top Client-Booked Incentive Locations

U.S. & Canada – Hawaiian islands, Park City, New York, Whistler, Palm Beach, Colorado Springs

Mexico & Caribbean – San Jose del Cabo, Punta Cana, Playa del Carmen, Punta de Mita, Nassau, Grand Cayman

Europe – Vienna, Florence, Dublin, London



Incentive Trends



Tighter wallets

Companies are finding ways to manage costs while still delivering meaningful experiences. Common strategies include reducing the number of qualifiers, shortening trip lengths, selecting more budget-friendly destinations and scaling back gifting. Some are also building in more leisure time, allowing attendees to take advantage of resort and destination amenities.



Geopolitical climate looms large

Duty of Care concerns are prompting some corporate security teams to avoid certain destinations, sometimes driven as much by perception as reality. As a result, clients are seeking greater support from destinations, including guidance on safety, entry requirements and available financial incentives.



Splitting into waves

In rapidly growing organizations, large groups restrict the number of properties that can accommodate them. Some are responding by splitting the program into waves.

Incentive Trends



Conscious gifting

Budget-based gift galleries continue to grow in popularity, giving attendees more choice while helping organizers manage costs. Locally sourced gifts that reflect the destination are also gaining traction, creating a more authentic and memorable experience.

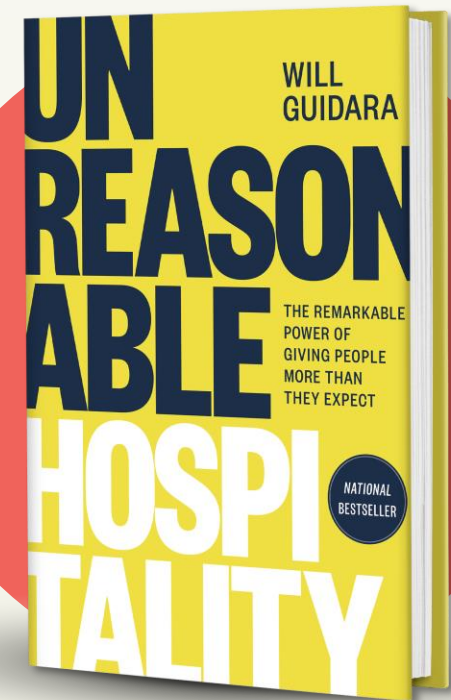


Shifting audience needs

Some are looking to appeal to a more diverse group of qualifiers, with participants increasingly skewing younger, more female and more diverse in background compared to the past, causing planners to rethink traditional trip structures and offerings. **One example: some are moving away from requiring the winner's +1 to be a spouse or significant other.**

You asked: How can we add impact without adding dollars?

Thoughtful touches like having executives meet attendees at the airport to thank them for their hard work go a long way. Maritz's Dreamweaver program, inspired by Will Guidara's *Unreasonable Hospitality*, looks for opportunities to add small touches that leave a big impression. Check out some examples [here](#).



Incentives Work

95%

agree the opportunity
to earn the trip
encouraged them to
increase their efforts in
the award program

95%

are more committed
to helping the
company succeed
having attended
this event

98%

will definitely
strive to earn an
experience like
this again

Source: Maritz guest experience survey, 2025 results

Idea Spotlight

You asked – we answered.
By client request, each time
we'll share an idea or
story that caught our eye.

Attracting ~~More~~ the Right Attendees

We often share registration and attendance data because they provide a useful indicator of industry health and are tied to critical near-term revenue goals for many organizers.

But attendance alone tells only part of the story. Organizers and exhibitors are increasingly focused on attracting the right attendees – not just more of them. As data and technology become more sophisticated, investments are shifting toward building relationships with high-value audiences.

To support that effort, we'll share an Audience Growth Blueprint tool for using data to attract and engage the audiences that matter most.



Audience Growth Blueprint Tool



Imagine a brand trying to be everything to everyone. Its message would become diluted, and it would risk losing the people who matter most.

Yet when it comes to events, organizers often design for an imagined “average attendee” rather than the audiences they most want to attract and engage.

The Audience Growth Blueprint Tool is designed to change that. It's a practical thinking tool designed to help organizers gain clarity about who to design for, what they care about and how to measure success.

Check it out here:

[Audience Growth Blueprint Tool](#)

Interested in applying this approach to your own event? We'd love to talk! Contact your Maritz representative or [reach out to us here](#).



Meet Us At **IMEX**

LAS VEGAS OCTOBER 13-15 2026

Motivating Gen Z: The New Rules For Designing Incentives

Tuesday, October 13

2:00 – 3:15 PM

Thursday, October 15

10:45 – 11:30 AM

Claire Lester

Know Them, Grow Them: From Audience Acquisition to Event Advocacy

Tuesday, October 13

1:30 – 2:00 PM

Wednesday, October 14

3:00 – 3:30 PM

Thursday, October 15

12:00 – 12:30 PM

Jennifer O'Grady

Rethinking Networking

Tuesday, October 13

12:00 – 12:30 PM

Wednesday, October 14

12:30 – 1:00 PM

Claire Lester



www.maritz.com