

# From Crisis to Opportunity

## Rebooking an Incentive Trip Amid Geopolitical Turmoil



### About the Client

Our client is a leader in end-of-line packaging systems and focuses on sustainable solutions, including packaging equipment, high-performance materials, warehousing, and distribution.

### The Challenge

Our client had planned to reward its top sales achievers with an incentive travel experience in Israel. The company's owner, a Jewish immigrant, was influential in the decision to select Tel Aviv. For him it was not merely about an incentive-quality destination; at 88 years old, he saw this as a final opportunity to share his deep connection with the country, aiming to provide their 80 Canadian winners and guests with a profound cultural experience in Tel Aviv.

But, in October 2023, everything changed. There was a sudden and unforeseen attack on Israel just 28 days before our arrival, which threatened to derail months of meticulous planning.

### The Solution

Our planning team sprang into action with an urgent client call to discuss the situation. Due to the extreme level of civil unrest and uncertainty in the region - and the safety of our guests a priority - it was obvious that we quickly needed to locate a new destination. Throughout the week, our team engaged with the client, local DMCs, the hotel and other partners, to begin navigating the complex logistics of cancelling all planned arrangements.

#### Managing Existing Contracts Carefully

We maintained constant contact with our client and supplier partners while working with limited information from the Canadian government regarding travel warnings. To invoke force majeure, we needed either a travel warning from the Canadian government advising against travel to Israel or a release from our obligations from our hotel and other partners. We took great care in working with the hotel, our DMC, and all airline carriers to handle the timing of cancellation correctly to avoid invoking force majeure clauses, which could have led to legal and financial complications.

### Relocation Planning

With our duty-of-care responsibilities top of mind, every decision was focused on ensuring a seamless transition to an alternative destination that would not only preserve the essence of the incentive trip but deliver the same level of excitement and prestige for our winners. The client identified new dates in February 2024, and with just a short 4-month lead time, we began a global search (from Ireland to Hawaii to various U.S. "sun destinations"). We selected Cabo San Lucas, Mexico as a destination that would maintain the prestige and excitement originally planned, that also had the dates available and could provide the right mix of unique activities and local experiences.

#### Value and Budget Considerations

Unfortunately, there are lost costs when having to rebook a program at the eleventh hour. Mexico's VAT rebate gave us significant financial relief, providing a savings of over \$40,000 CAD. We negotiated concessions at the Corazon Cabo Resort and Spa, including complimentary site inspection rooms, food and beverage credits and complimentary function space. With strong partner relationships, our event app provider waived all fees for modifying the app specifications for the new destination, further optimizing the budget.

#### Air Travel Accessibility

Most of the group had flights booked from Canadian cities on Air Canada, and the many direct flights to Cabo on Air Canada allowed us to reuse airfare credits from the canceled Tel Aviv flights, saving costs.

#### Planning a New Program and Participant Communications

With 90% of the work of the original program completed, we designed a completely new event in 12-16 weeks (which included a winter holiday break). With a strong team in place, we sourced a new destination and hotel, designed an incentive-worthy program in Cabo, managed participant communications, rebuilt the registration website, managed all suppliers in both destinations, redesigned the mobile app, and booked new flight arrangements.

#### Creating an Incentive-Worthy Experience

The mobile app was critical in providing both real-time communication updates and as an engagement

tool. Inspired by our client's core value of One Team, we created a customized scavenger hunt. It gave this competitive group a chance to compete and connect with others, while using creativity and problem-solving skills. Photos from the hunt were uploaded into the app and were later aggregated into a memory book with other photos from the week. In addition to requested "free time", other program elements were designed around our client's core values. As a champion of environmental leadership, we offered natural wildlife activities and created a One Team football experience because our new dates fell over the "Big Game" weekend. Large screens and comfortable seating created a lively atmosphere while the Cabo coastline provided a picturesque backdrop.

### The Outcome

Our stakeholders were very pleased with how quickly we orchestrated the turnaround and began communicating with attendees to explain the changes and next steps. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive.

**Satisfaction Rates:** According to survey results, 65% of attendees rated the experience a perfect 5/5, while the remaining 35% gave it a strong 4/5. Eighty-seven percent of participants highlighted the app's effectiveness as a communication and engagement tool.

*100% of travelers rated the program very good or excellent.*

**Participant Testimonials:** Attendees appreciated the swift and effective handling of the situation, highlighting the quality of the new arrangements and the creative elements that were designed into the new program. One guest said, "I would never have guessed that this was pulled together on such short notice. A truly amazing experience. Thank you!"

**Long-Term Impact:** The successful relocation not only preserved the incentive program's prestige but also demonstrated our team's resilience and capability to adapt under pressure. Our client was very happy with the way the team navigated complex logistics and maintained high service standards even in the face of significant challenges.