

Glamping

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THE RISE AND RISE OF OUTDOOR EVENTS

BY TODD WYNNE-PARRY

The lifestyle and work-life balance embraced by Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z has forced the hospitality industry to adjust their approach to both hotel design and accommodating events. This adjustment was happening long before Covid-19 created an unprecedented demand for outdoor events. For decades now these generations have been pushing traditional hotels and resorts to offer alternatives to stuffy ballrooms and golf. Their lust for the outdoors and non-traditional outdoor activities has given rise to a new era of outdoor hospitality in the US and globally. Along with the growth in demand for glamping accommodation has been a parallel rise in the demand for outdoor events. This is an important market segment for any glamping destination and its continued growth is inevitable.

OUTDOOR EVENTS

Events at a glamping destination fill slower. Weekday and low season rooms can be the difference between a profitable or unprofitable year. Events also generate incremental revenue from catering, merchandise, and guided experiences. Events can be sold as “buy-outs” where the entirety of available accommodation is purchased for the duration of the event or sold as just a portion of available accommodation. Buy-outs pose their own unique challenges, but they do allow for operational efficiencies given tight check-in/check-out times and a pre-determined activity schedule. Guest experience issues can arise when events take only a small part of your room inventory. The presence of a group on property can negatively affect the experience for the independent couple or family staying at a small- or medium-sized destination. The group can dominate all the public spaces or F&B outlets and inadvertently make the non-group guests feel unwelcome or overwhelmed. The potential of this situation should be addressed through space planning in the pre-development stage of a glamping destination.



To better understand the market for events, let's break down the segment. Outdoor events can generally be categorized into three sub-markets including weddings, corporate retreats and social occasions. Let's look at each of these sub-markets individually.

OUTDOOR WEDDINGS

This is a sub-market that is extremely popular. The demand for outdoor wedding venues has outstripped supply for many years. The effect of Covid-19 has now created pent-up demand as potential newlyweds delayed their nuptials until just recently. While this pent-up demand should be absorbed over the next year or two, the underlying demand for outdoor weddings





should continue to grow unabated. Currently, weddings seem to hover around the 150-person mark and book generally a year in advance. They are typically buy-outs and for many destinations this forces a need for additional accommodation to augment the standing supply. This additional accommodation is being provided by local area lodgings, bringing in rented glamping tents or providing RV camp sites. Outside catering, large reception tents and additional sanitation facilities are also typically required. The weddings business for most glamping destinations today is considered a solid demand base that can literally occupy every high season weekend if needed. Most glamping destinations are more likely to limit their wedding demand to allow for independent couples, families and small groups to experience the peak weekends. I often advise my clients in the pre-development stage to invite a few destination wedding planners to their site to get direct input on site layout. In particular, input should include placement of the actual ceremony area and seating, catering services ingress and egress, foul weather back up areas and bridal suite or bridal party preparation space. These key facility and design elements can serve equally the wedding demand as well as the corporate retreat and social occasion sub-markets.

CORPORATE RETREATS

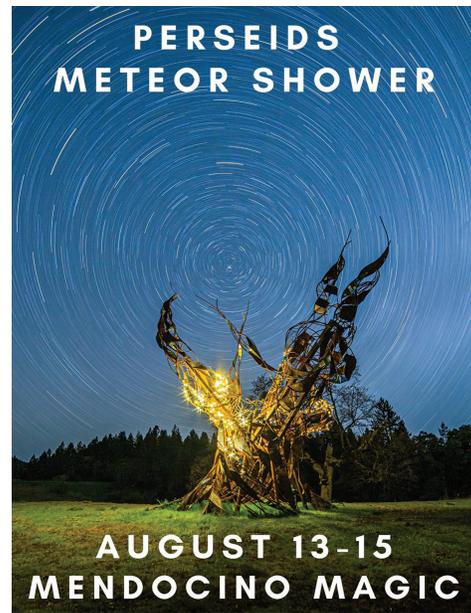
Corporate retreats can be either buy-outs for the entire company or smaller groups of teams. Some glamping brands employ dedicated sales teams to secure this lucrative business. In speaking with event organizers from mid-size private corporations and event companies, a few event trends are emerging in the post Covid-19 corporate world. Most of these trends are generated by the major shift in office use. Most firms are moving either to a fully remote or hybrid office situation (2-3 days in the office). In either case, the amount of a company's in-person time or direct team interaction will continue to decline. This has changed how companies look at their off-site meetings and retreats. Almost unanimously companies consider outdoor destinations as a top priority over primarily indoor options. They also are planning for both the number of events annually to increase and the length of stay for

events to extend. This surge in demand currently has extended the booking window from 3-6 months to 9-12 months or more. Event glamping tent supplier Kelsey Sheofsky of Shelter Co noted: "not only are we seeing strong bookings now through to late 2022, but several repeat corporate bookings are now confirming for 2023". For both the buy-out style corporate meetings of say 80-120 persons or the smaller meetings of 15-30 persons, dedicated indoor or outdoor meeting space is generally required. Unique and authentic experiences or local entertainment will be sought after in most instances.

SOCIAL OCCASIONS

This category is really a catch all for events that include family reunions, special birthdays, sporting events or any other group event that is not a wedding or corporate retreat. Many glamping destinations will augment their group business by creating their own specific locally inspired social events. For instance, Mackenzie O'Donnell of Mendocino Magic, located in Mendocino, California has created the "Annual Perseids Meteor Shower Campout" event. This popular occasion generates strong revenue, repeat business and a memorable experience for all attendees. Other glamping destinations will create accommodation packages around locally promoted sporting or social events that create strong demand peaks or destination-wide sell-out periods. These events provide a great way to package multi-night stays and highlight the destination's facilities and the area's points of interest.

The ever growing and changing demographics of people wishing to experience nature either by camping or glamping was evident prior to Covid-19 and the recent spike in this growth does not appear to be waning. Keeping right in step with this growth is the demand for outdoor events. It is strong now and all indicators point to this demand to continue to rise. The challenge for this burgeoning outdoor hospitality industry is to effectively capture this demand, manage its effect on the overall guest experience and of course maintain positive or neutral impact on our local communities and environment.



About Todd G. Wynne-Parry

A seasoned leader in the hospitality industry, Todd has over 30 years of hotel development experience, having held senior leadership positions at several major hotel brands and most recently AutoCamp and Two Roads Hospitality. A dual-citizen of the US and Australia, Wynne-Parry has lived and worked in the U.S., Asia, Australia and the United Kingdom. He was instrumental in the development efforts for IHG, Starwood and Marriott in the Asia Pacific region and for Two Roads Hospitality globally. He began his career as a hotel consultant in the San Diego office of Laventhol & Horwath, the predecessor to Horwath HTL. He is now Managing Director of Horwath HTL and leads the Outdoor Hospitality practice for North America. Horwath HTL is the largest independent hospitality consultancy with 52 offices worldwide.

Todd earned an MBA from Thunderbird Graduate School of International Management and sits on the advisory council of the American Glamping Association. In his spare time, Todd enjoys fly fishing and exploring the western US in his 1953 Airstream.

