

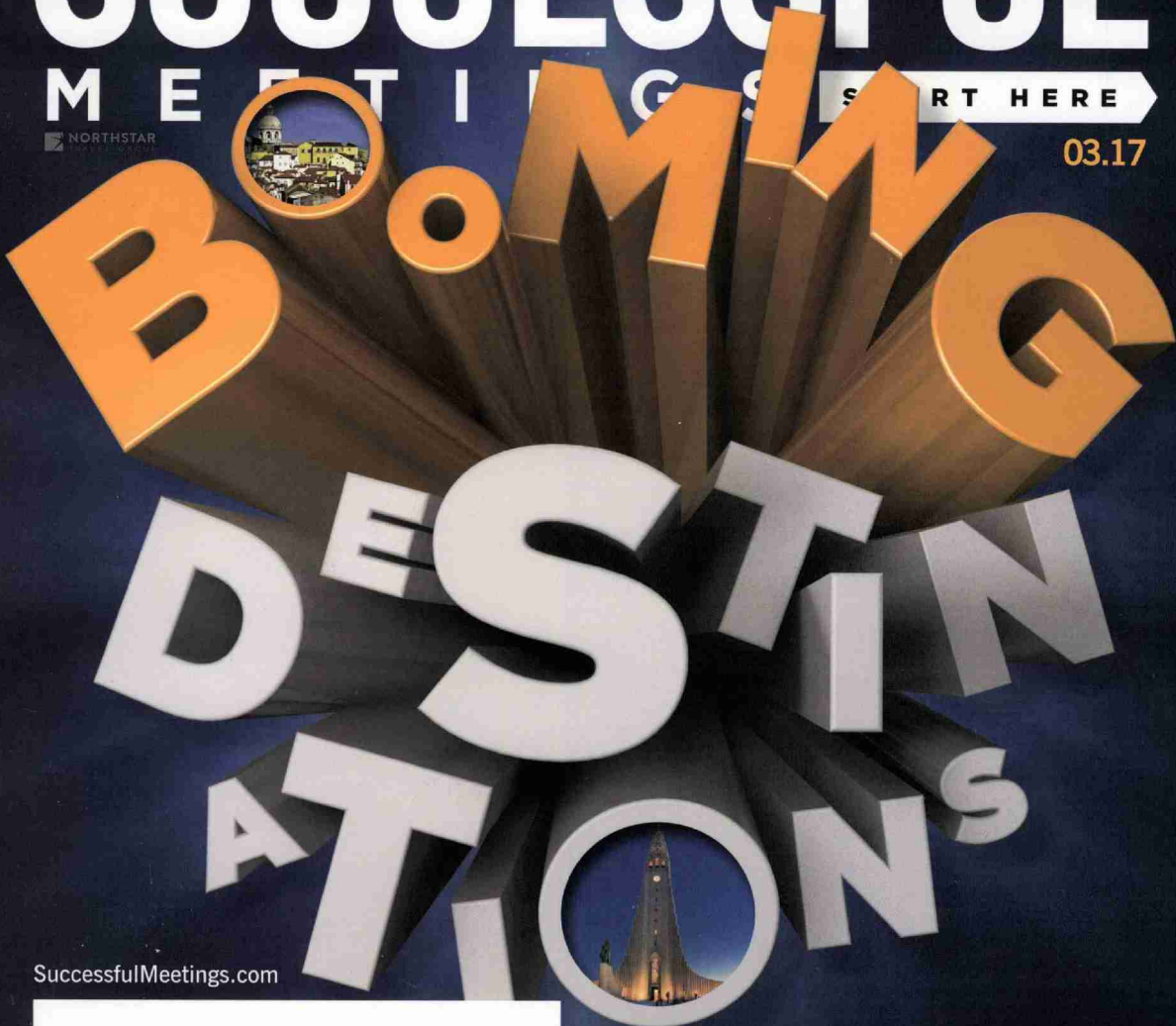
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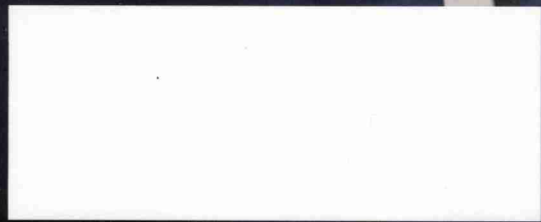
 NORTHSTAR

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BLOOMING DESTINATIONS



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Milford Sound is one of New Zealand's natural wonders

NEW ZEALAND

This bucket-list destination will exceed attendees' expectations

— BY ANDREA DOYLE —

New Zealand is a breathtaking country boasting glaciers, white- and black-sand beaches, fjords, rainforests, alpine forests, and volcanic craters. And that's just the topography. There is world-class food and wine, activities that include gold panning, skydiving, hang gliding, bungee jumping, jet boating, whitewater rafting, and exploring backcountry, not to mention unique culture.

The Maori people came to New Zealand by canoe a thousand years ago from a distant Polynesian archipelago and they have shaped the country's culture. Don't be surprised if you are offered the "hongi," a traditional greeting of the Maori considered to be the equivalent of a formal handshake. It consists of two people touching noses and foreheads.

Dee Kelly, senior project director of cievents,

a global strategic event management agency based in North Sydney, Australia, has brought incentive groups to Queenstown, surrounded by snow-capped mountain ranges on the shores of Lake Wakatipu on the South Island.

"Its scenery is stunning, there are lots of fantastic experiences and activities to offer and the food is creative, the wine amazing," says Kelly. "Every group I have taken there has loved it and most have returned year after year."

Christchurch, also on the South Island, was struck by four large earthquakes in 2010 and 2011 but is now back. The city's energy is evident wherever you go.

Another part of the country not to miss is Auckland, which is built on an isthmus on the North Island and has 48 dormant and extinct volcanic cones, stunning oceans, and

serene gulf beaches, as well as rainforests in the south and west.

Less than an hour by yacht, ferry, or boat from Auckland, Waiheke Island should not be missed. Only 12 miles long, this hilly green paradise has 60 miles of coastline. Referred to as the "Island of Wine," there are more than 40 vineyards, several with fine restaurants and breathtaking views.

Situated at the southern end of the North Island, Wellington is renowned for its arts, heritage, culture, and native beauty. One hotel that is getting good buzz here is The QT Museum Wellington, formerly known as the Museum Art Hotel, which just opened its doors after an approximately \$9 million makeover. Its new high-tech spaces blend art, design, and a dash of the absurd to reflect the culture of the eclectic city.

Four meeting spaces can accommodate up to 120. The 165-room property is a few steps from New Zealand's national museum, Te Papa.

In other hotel news, New Zealand's newest luxury destination, Helena Bay, has

been named as the best new hotel in the world by luxury global research group Luxury Travel Intelligence. The more than \$36 million luxury lodge opened last November and features three exclusive-use waterfront villas. Private and secluded, the lodge is ideal for high-end incentive groups. With all the components in place to motivate groups, this small island nation enchants. ■ *Questions or comments? Email adoyle@ntmlc.com*



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