

MEETINGSROI

TradeWinds Island Resorts Flexible, Friendly, Fun

An education-oriented group loves the fact that there is no need to teach the TradeWinds Island Grand how to execute a fantastic meeting.



The TradeWinds Island Resorts make sure planners can execute the meetings they have envisioned and support those needs with a flexible, can-do attitude.

The Florida Association for Staff Development has brought its Fall Leadership Conference to the TradeWinds Island Resorts in St. Pete's Beach for 25 years. The organization, which advocates for and provides professional development for teachers and other school-related personnel, brings 300 to 350 attendees to the TradeWinds Island Grand Beach Resort every year to update its members on new methods to evaluate teachers, deliver professional development to educators and, as a result, improve education for school-age children in Florida.

"We've actually held this meeting for 26 years," says the organization's current executive director Debbie Cook, who is responsible for organizing the logistics of the event. "One year we thought we would try something different, but we came right back to the TradeWinds—it's a lovely facility, they have flexibility to meet our needs and the staff is always friendly."

The flagship resort, Island Grand and boutique resort Sandpiper, are always upgrading their physical offerings for groups. The 159-room Sandpiper resort recently completed a full property renovation that refreshed the hotel's 7,600 square feet of indoor meeting and revitalized guest rooms with new furnishings, soft goods and a beach-perfect color palette. At the 584-room Island Grand resort, the 50,000 square feet of meeting space was refurbished in 2008, and the property is currently undertaking a full guest room renovation that will streamline the design themes throughout the property.

Gulf front rooms and guest suites have already been completed, and now feature the upscale, West Indies Plantation-inspired design that will transform the entire resort. New furnishings, carpeting, travertine tiles and understated color palette will make attendees feel at home. High-tech touches, like flat-panel HD televisions, will keep them on the cutting edge.

"They've done a fabulous job of renovating the rooms," says Cook. But her group is looking for more than a comfortable environment. They need great meeting spaces, a staff that understands their event needs—and a hotel partner that can accommodate them without putting up a lot of obstacles. They get that with the TradeWinds Island Resorts.

"As the executive director whose charge is to facilitate the logistics of the meeting, it's a pleasure for me personally to work with the TradeWinds because it's like going home again," says Cook. "It's not having to reorient people every time to the needs of the organization or the type of events we need to host."

The group has some standardized event structure that stays the same from year to year, but they always have concurrent sessions and the agenda can be really tight. It almost always involves TradeWinds having to turn the rooms over quickly, and Cook says she never gets pushback about the design of the event.

"They will always move heaven and earth to make it happen—even if it means facilities has to beef up the staff," she says. "In short, we don't have to design the agenda around what the property can do, TradeWinds will do what it takes to make our agenda happen." And often, Cook adds, they will go the extra mile to make it even better.

"We always theme the event to add an element of fun and really engage the attendees," she said. "One year, when the banquet staff found out the theme was Western, they petitioned the food and beverage manager to let them wear jeans and bandanas for our meal service. That's the banquet staff bringing a fun element to the event that we didn't specify. That makes you feel really important—and shows that they really care."

That kind of service and engagement goes beyond the bottom line for the Florida Association for Staff Development. "When you walk in the door at the TradeWinds, you feel like you are person that is important," says Cook. "I don't think you can put a price on that."

For more information about bringing your next meeting to the **TradeWinds Island Resorts**, contact **Mike Wagner**, **Director of Group Sales**, 727-363-2242 or mwagner@twresort.com; or visit www.tradewindsmetings.com.