

Michael Payne reveals changes to Summit of the Americas for 2019

By **Hibah Noor** on July, 31 2018 | Associations



Michael Payne, President and CEO of the International Association of Airport Duty Free Stores (IAADFS), has detailed a number of changes to next year's Summit of the Americas, which will be held March 24-27, 2019.

IAADFS is again collaborating with ASUTIL on the 2019 edition, which will move to the Hyatt Regency Orlando hotel.

Speaking with *Americas Duty Free*, Payne said that the move to the Hyatt was based on several factors, including that the Hyatt hotel was more convenient than the Marriott, only a five-minute walk to the Port Orlando area with its restaurants and bars, and importantly offered more flexibility with its meeting space to accommodate the needs of suppliers and buyers.

Following positive feedback, IAADFS/ASUTIL will be holding the educational sessions again next year, but they will be shortened by half an hour. The sessions will start at 8:30am and the tradeshow will open at 10am.

"We have made good progress on identifying speakers, including representatives from major brands within the industry," said Payne. More details on the program will be announced soon.

"The Summit will also have a new layout in order to encourage more visitors into the tradeshow area to see exhibitors," he said. "Attendees will have to come into a trade area where the exhibit hall, meeting rooms and foyer exhibits and other activities will be in a contained area." This is expected to allay current exhibitor concerns about many meetings taking place outside of the trade floor.

Payne said the organizers were actively trying to attract more buyers from Central America, South America and the Caribbean. "There's a lot more people in the travel retail end of the business as well as duty free that should be participating."

The buyers' lounge concept, which was introduced for 2018, received good feedback overall, except for its location. "People didn't like that it was outside of the hall," explained Payne. "We can improve that and make it a more user-friendly venue next time. It was intended to be a place for buyers to go in between appointments."

He continued: "The lounge will be used on Wednesday for a few hours to help connect some attendees. This networking opportunity won't affect the exhibitors and their schedules."

Following the 2018 Summit, IAADFS organized a lunch and meeting at the new venue and invited suppliers to come. A group of a dozen or so suppliers, mainly from the larger companies, participated and gave their feedback on the planned changes, which he characterized as "very positive". "Along

with ASUTIL, we have evaluated all the survey responses, talked with our members and will continue to meet with stakeholders throughout the process.”

Payne said that as it was a new venue for some of the exhibitors, the organizers would offer other opportunities to see the location.

Suppliers showing interest

Fragrances, spirits, confectionery and sunglasses suppliers were already showing interest in exhibiting next year, he added.

“I’m receiving a lot of verbal commitments, but we won’t know final details until the September/October time frame. We’re going into it with the attitude that there will be an uptick. I think a lot of people were waiting for the switch to a new venue.”

Payne revealed that a new, online microsite specially for the Summit would be launched soon.

He added: “We’re starting to populate the exhibit trade area to start getting the supplier community focused on what spaces we have and what they want.”

In response to a question from the Publisher, Payne said the organizers would ensure everyone was welcomed, despite the generally negative publicity in some countries surrounding the evolving US immigration and visa policies.

“The welcome mat is out,” he said. “All business is welcome and we want everyone to come. People particularly from the Muslim Middle East populated countries where this [travel] ban still exists is problematic. For our show, we get some participation, but it’s the bigger perception from other countries where they feel that no one wants them here. We recognize this is an issue. Hopefully it will fix itself. It is certainly not how our industry operates nor what it represents.”

He added: “There has been some percentage decrease in the number of visitors to the US from select countries, but overall the US is experiencing a pretty good uptick.”

He emphasized that the Summit was not a US event and only based there, but is and always has been a regional event.

Program changes

In a program change for the 2019 Summit, the evening club venue will be held a 10-minute walk away from the hotel at a Cuban club, Cuba Libre.

IAADFS/ASUTIL will take over the club on Monday and turn it into Club Mojito. On Tuesday the Club will become part of its Tuesday evening event.

A big event will continue to be held on the Tuesday, but there won’t be a formal sit-down gala dinner, as before.

“We’re going to try something different based on feedback and the demographics of our group. It will start later after dinner for those who want to entertain clients but will still provide food and networking for attendees prior to the entertainment and dancing. We are trying to see if this works for the varying demographics. I think this is a smart move. If it doesn’t work, we’ll adjust but we should look at different approaches.”

He concluded: "We will encourage a more casual environment for participants, but I think that will be up to the attendees, and they will let us know how they like it or not."