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Optimism on the incentive scene

MARY NGUYEN

Coming up on the final quarter of what has been a hellish year so far for the tourism industry, several key figures in the corporate meetings and incentive travel market are hopeful for the rest of 2009.

Speaking at a panel discussion at last week's Incentiveworks trade show in Toronto, Jane Wallbridge, vice-president client services for Carlson Marketing Canada said, "The trough we've gone through is probably the

lowest it's ever been but incentives and meetings are good for business and for the economy, so clients are going to come back...travel is the biggest motivator."

Offering a destination perspective, Rafael Villanueva, director of international sales for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority said that while the last year has undoubtedly been "stressful," he remains optimistic and expects to see an

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Beaches & Baseball: Florida's St. Petersburg/Clearwater region thanked industry partners last week by hosting the 7th Annual Beaches & Baseball VIP Event at the Rogers Centre in Toronto. Participants got to see a game between the Toronto Blue Jays and the Tampa Bay Rays from the comfort of an executive suite. Pictured at the game are (l-r) Mary Haban, senior manager, public relations, Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater, Karen Lumpkin of Tradewinds Island Resorts on St. Pete Beach, Paul Beeston, interim chief executive officer of the Blue Jays, Leah Irvine of WestJet, and Rosemarie Payne, director leisure travel, USA & Canada, Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater. (www.VisitStPeteClearwater.com)

Transat talks retail trends

MIKE DUNBAR

Travel agents could soon be contesting tour companies for a slice of their group action, especially in specialized niche areas. That's the bold prediction from Yves

Lalumière, network vice president for Transat Distribution.

In a frank interview with Canadian Travel Press, Lalumière was asked to identify

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Mexico deals with the issues

IAN STALKER

Some members of the travel trade may be sick of hearing about swine flu.

The illness that earlier this year sent Mexico's tourism trade into a tailspin was raised by some visitors at last week's Incentiveworks show in Toronto, but others didn't make any mention of it to the around 30 Mexican hoteliers and destination and attraction representatives on hand for the event.

That Mexican delegation, labeled "quite a large" one by the Mexico Tourism Board given the current economic climate, was only the

second sizeable one the Ontario city has seen since large tour operators earlier this year temporarily dropped their Mexico programs because of swine flu.

Several Mexican exhibitors Canadian Travel Press spoke to at the show said swine flu drew little interest from the meeting planners and others attending the event.

"I expect that people forget [about it]. Life goes on," said Oliver Schuschner, manager of the Riviera Maya's upscale Grand Velas All Suites & SPA resort, adding that only "two or

three out of dozens" of people he spoke to during the Aug. 25 and Aug. 26 show raised it.

Geraldine Rivas, international group sales executive for Cancun's ritzy Gran Melia Resort said no one at the show mentioned the illness to her, although most meeting planners she spoke to said they're only interested in sites in this country or the United States because of the current economic situation.

Veronica Villegas of Cancun DMC Tropical Incentives said she believes people realize that "it's not a Mexican thing.

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