

Cultivate Unlock the Power of Incentive Travel Gifting

How Strategic Gifting Elevates Events, Drives Motivation,
and Delivers ROI Before, During, and After the Trip





Does anyone really remember a logoed pen tossed into a swag bag?

No, but they will remember the moment they arrived and were gifted a premium pair of shades curated just for the destination. Or the personalized leather travel wallet they chose themselves before the trip ever began. Or the sleek pop-up gifting experience that made them feel like a VIP instead of just another name on the roster. That's the appeal of incentive travel done right.

Today's incentive trips are more than tropical backdrops and team dinners. They're performance drivers, culture builders, and retention tools rolled into one unforgettable experience. And gifting?

Gifting is the emotional accelerant that supercharges the whole thing.

It creates anticipation before takeoff. It fuels connection on-site. It even leaves a lasting impression long after the bags are unpacked.

Whether you're a Destination Management Company (DMC), a corporate event planner, or a sales leader planning the next big trip, here's what you need to know about the current state of incentive travel (and why companies can't afford to ignore it).



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The Power of Incentive Travel Gifting

A premium destination sets the stage. The right gift turns the entire experience into a standing ovation.

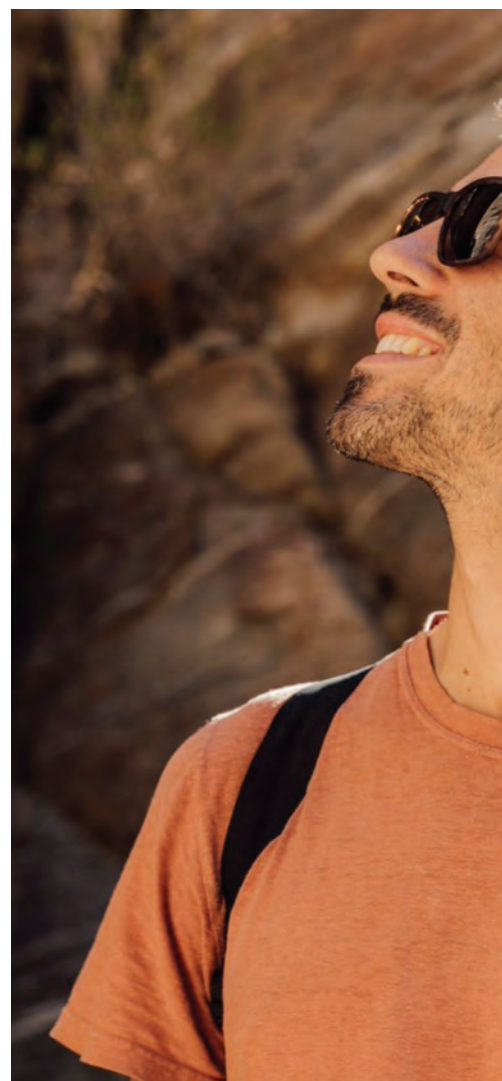
We know incentive travel works. According to the 2024 Incentive Travel Index, the top reasons companies continue to invest in these programs are to retain top talent (81%), attract new leaders (70%), and because travel is seen as a highly valued reward (68%). But here's what doesn't get enough attention: gifting as part of that incentive equation.

Thoughtful gifting boosts the emotional impact of travel programs—pre, during, and post-trip. When you build moments of choice, surprise, and delight into your experience, you're not just handing someone a reward... you're reinforcing your culture, values, and gratitude in a tangible, lasting way. Gifting should never be an afterthought—here's why:

It Drives Pre-Trip Motivation. When sales teams or employees know there's a high-end travel experience waiting—and gifts to match—it adds urgency. Teasing a premium collection in the invitation? That's a surefire way to boost RSVP rates and goal-hitting behavior. People want to qualify not just for the trip, but for the exclusive perks that come with it.

It Creates Deeper Engagement On-Site.

An on-site premium gift experience goes far beyond just a table of giveaways. It's a tailored, immersive moment that becomes part of the event itself. Attendees explore, interact, choose, try on, and walk away with something they actually want. It builds connection, not just between the gift and the guest, but between the guest and the brand.



It Extends the Impact Post-Trip. The right post-event gift becomes a reminder of the experience—and the company that made it happen. Want loyalty to last longer than the tan? Send a branded gift box to their doorstep two weeks later, filled with items that reflect the destination and the appreciation. Think: a follow-up touch that says, “We haven’t forgotten you.”



It Aligns with Changing Expectations.

According to IRF's 2025 Trends Report, planners are rethinking that one-size-fits-all approach. Attendees—especially Millennials and Gen Z—crave personalization, authenticity, and experiences that reflect their preferences. That's why choice-based gifting and bespoke collections are trending up, while generic swag is phasing out.

It Reinforces Company Values. Gifting can quietly communicate what you stand for. Whether it's wellness-focused items, sustainable packaging, or branded pieces that reflect a high-performance culture, these details tell your attendees: this company gets it—and they see me.



Gifting is a Motivational Tool

The trip might be the destination. But the gift? That's the fuel.

You already know incentive travel works wonders for motivation. It taps into your team's desire for recognition, adventure, and status. But what really supercharges that motivation—and sustains it through the qualification period—is strategic gifting.

This isn't about throwing in a freebie at the end. It's about building anticipation from the very beginning. Done right, gifting becomes your secret weapon for driving performance before the plane even leaves the tarmac.

Gifts Build Buzz. Big Time. A well-timed teaser gift isn't just thoughtful—it's tactical. Sending a sleek, branded luggage tag or a curated destination-inspired gift before the trip reminds people what's on the line. It turns an abstract "trip" into a tangible goal. Think: SPF skincare kits for Cabo, insulated tumblers for Colorado, or a preview of the gift collection they'll choose from if they qualify. It builds excitement, keeps your trip top-of-mind, and quietly reinforces the behavior you want to see.

The Promise of Choice Drives Action. According to the IRF, merchandise is still one of the most motivating non-cash incentives, especially when it's part of a recognition moment attendees can personalize. Letting top performers know they'll get to choose from premium brands on-site (or via Cultivate's Online Gifting platform) adds emotional currency. This isn't just about gifting—it's about autonomy, validation, and earning something that feels uniquely theirs.



Gifting Keeps the Energy Up Pre-Trip. Qualification periods can stretch out. People can lose steam. But adding a small milestone gift partway through the qualifying window? That reignites the drive. A “You’re halfway there!” package, complete with branded gear or an item tied to the trip, lets them know you’re watching—and cheering them on.

Strategic Gifting Increases RSVP Rates. There’s nothing worse than planning a dazzling incentive trip and watching people ghost the RSVP. Smart companies bake the gifting experience right into the invitation. “Join us in Barcelona—and choose your gift from our premium collection on-site.” It’s compelling and wildly effective. Why? Because people don’t just want to be invited. They want to feel excited about what’s waiting for them.

Recognition Is More Motivating Than Cash. According to the IRF’s Driving Growth Through Total Rewards report, non-cash rewards consistently outperform cash bonuses when it comes to lasting motivation and emotional impact. Why? Because unlike cash, which gets absorbed into bills and budgets, a personalized gift is remembered, talked about, and felt. It’s proof you were seen, valued, and celebrated—not just compensated.

Incentive trips might be about the destination, but the journey starts months before. And gifting? That’s what keeps people focused, fired up, and moving forward. But what happens when the trip is over? The impression you’ve made still lingers.

Spoiler: The right gifting strategy doesn’t just create momentum. It creates memory.

The Long-Term Impact of Incentive Travel Gifting

The trip may end. The plane lands. The inbox refills. But the right gift? That sticks around. Incentive travel gifting isn't just about the moment on-site—it's about what happens after the trip. The glow. The gratitude. The loyalty. When done well, your gifting strategy can ripple long after the event's over, creating emotional residue that strengthens bonds, reinforces values, and boosts retention in real, measurable ways. But how exactly does that look in practice?



It Strengthens Loyalty.

A memorable gift, especially one that attendees got to choose themselves, becomes a lasting reminder of the experience they earned. It sits on a desk, gets worn on weekends, or becomes their go-to carry-on. It's tangible proof that their effort mattered.

IRF's 2025 report shows 81% of companies use incentive travel as a retention tool, and gifting plays a significant role in why that strategy works. It deepens the emotional connection between your people and your brand.



It Boosts Productivity Post-Trip.

When you return from an incentive trip, it's easy to expect a post-vacation slump. But pair that trip with a thoughtfully chosen, high-value gift, and it flips the script. Your people come back energized. Recognized and motivated to earn it all again next year. Especially when the post-trip follow-up includes a bonus appreciation touchpoint, like Cultivate's Online Gifting platform that makes it easy to send a second surprise weeks later. That's what we call "multi-touch appreciation"—and it works.

It Reinforces Culture Through Storytelling.

An incentive gift isn't just a souvenir. It becomes a story. Every time someone shares that story, they're reinforcing your company's culture of appreciation. They're telling others: "My work matters here." And that story travels—back into the office, onto the sales floor, and into the minds of people who now want to earn their own story next year.

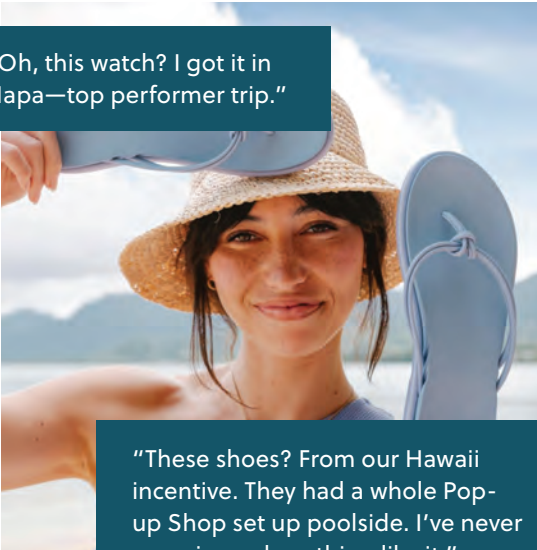
It Encourages Advocacy and Positive Word-of-Mouth.

People talk. Especially when they feel celebrated. When incentive gifting is done well, it turns attendees into brand advocates. They share pictures. They post on LinkedIn. They tell new hires or peers from other teams about how much fun they had, and how great the gifts were. That buzz builds your brand's reputation as a place that values its people and celebrates success in style.

It Makes a Strong Case for Reinvestment.

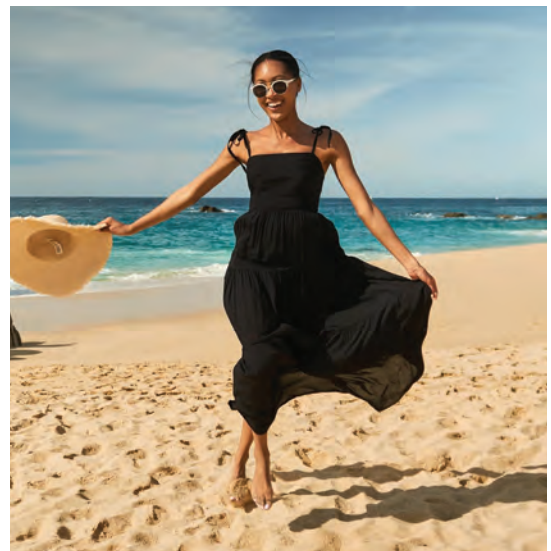
Incentive travel gifting delivers more than smiles—it delivers Return on Appreciation™. When employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention go up, your bottom line benefits. And when leadership sees how those results tie directly to gifting moments, it gets easier to justify future budgets. That's why Cultivate helps clients measure redemption data, engagement metrics, and impact over time—to make sure every gift pulls its weight.

Bottom line? The trip ends. But the impact of strategic, personalized gifting doesn't. In fact, it often begins after the luggage is unpacked.



"Oh, this watch? I got it in Napa—top performer trip."

"These shoes? From our Hawaii incentive. They had a whole Pop-up Shop set up poolside. I've never experienced anything like it."





How to Measure the ROI of Incentive Travel Gifting

Gifting gets a bad rap when budgets tighten. It's often the first line item on the chopping block—misunderstood as a “nice-to-have” instead of what it actually is: a proven business tool that drives real results. [That's why tracking ROI—or as we like to call it, ROA™ \(Return on Appreciation\)—isn't optional. It's essential.](#)

The good news? You don't have to guess. Here's how smart teams are measuring impact and making the case for continued investment:

Redemption and Engagement Metrics

If you're using Cultivate's Online Gifting platform (or better yet, combining it with an on-site experience), you can track how many recipients redeem their gifts, how quickly they engage, and what they choose. That data tells a story—about what resonates, what feels valuable, and what's worth repeating. High redemption rates? That means you're hitting the mark. Bonus points for high-value items that align with your brand values and audience preferences.

Employee Satisfaction and Feedback

What is the best way to know if your gifting program worked? Ask! Post-event surveys are gold. Use quick pulse surveys to capture sentiment, track Employee Net Promoter Scores (eNPS), or gather anecdotal feedback. Did the gift make them feel recognized? Would they want to qualify again? Did they post about it? Save that praise and share it with stakeholders, because stories back up stats.

Productivity and Retention Metrics

Motivation isn't just a vibe—it's measurable. Track performance metrics pre- and post-trip. Look for spikes in sales, increased goal attainment, or higher employee retention rates among qualifiers. If fewer top performers are leaving, your gifting program is doing its job.

Recruiting and Brand Advocacy

Great gifting creates internal buzz—and external FOMO. Monitor mentions on LinkedIn, track social shares, and look for references to incentive travel and gifting during onboarding interviews. If candidates mention the trip or the company's culture of appreciation, you know you're on the right track. Gifting isn't just retention—it's recruitment, too.

Event ROI and Total Program Impact

Combine all these data points—redemption, engagement, performance, sentiment—and layer them over your total investment. If the gifting program helped drive attendance, boost performance, or increase long-term loyalty, then that spend wasn't just justified. It was strategic.

At Cultivate, we believe appreciation should pull its weight. That's why our teams work hand-in-hand with clients to define what success looks like before the gifts ever ship out.

From curating the right collections to setting up post-event tracking, we ensure every moment of appreciation is measurable and meaningful.



What's Next for Incentive Travel Gifting?

If you thought the golden age of incentive gifting peaked with monogrammed duffels and Bluetooth speakers, think again!

In 2025, incentive gifting isn't just about the "what." It's about the "how," the "where," and most importantly—the why. Because today's top performers expect more than a transactional reward. They're looking for something that feels personal, curated, and reflective of who they are and how they show up. So, what's trending—and what's coming up next?



On-Site Design Experiences Are Stealing the Show: Gifting meets luxury retail. Attendees don't just receive a gift—they experience it. Whether it's leather goods embossed with initials on the spot or choosing the perfect pair of sunglasses with help from a brand expert, these elevated pop-up moments redefine what a gift experience can be. They're interactive and immersive. We've found they're endlessly unforgettable.



Personalization That Goes Beyond the Name Tag: We're not talking "pick your polo size" personalization. We're talking curated gift collections based on lifestyle, interest, and occasion. A wellness enthusiast gets HigherDose. A travel junkie? Calpak. With Cultivate, you can tailor options for different personas and let recipients choose what fits. It's personalization at scale—without the logistical headache.

Strategic Tie-Ins With Recognition Programs:

Gifting isn't siloed anymore. The most effective companies are integrating gifting into larger recognition efforts—tying incentive travel rewards to peer-nominated accolades, cultural milestones, and employee appreciation moments throughout the year. And according to IRF, that holistic approach matters. When rewards are part of a broader recognition strategy, they don't just motivate—they inspire loyalty.

Broader Inclusion in Who Gets Rewarded:

Salespeople used to be the stars of the incentive travel show. But in 2025, that spotlight is expanding. Companies are now including high-potential non-sales employees, culture champions, and behind-the-scenes contributors in their travel programs. The result? A more engaged, well-rounded team—and a company culture that feels genuinely appreciative.

Smarter, Flexible Budgets That Still Wow: While some budgets are tightening, the best planners are getting creative, not cheaper. Think moderate price-point items paired with luxe experiences. Think fewer gifts with more impact. Think intention over inventory. IRF data shows the \$50–\$100 range is gaining traction, but the magic lies in how the gift is delivered, not just how much it costs.

Pre- and Post-Trip Gifting for Full-Circle Impact:

Want to build anticipation and extend the afterglow? Send a pre-trip teaser gift to spark excitement—maybe a branded travel kit or climate-specific gear. Then follow up with a post-event keepsake that says, “thank you,” “remember this,” or “can't wait for next time.” Cultivate's Online Gifting platform makes both a breeze to execute—and just as meaningful as the moment itself.





Show Real Appreciation: It's Time to Rethink Gifting on Your Incentive Trips

When it comes to incentive travel, the trip is just the start. The experience is what people remember. And the gift? That's what makes it personal.

With the right gifting strategy, you're not just rewarding performance. You're building connection. Sparking joy while reinforcing your values. It's a great way to drive momentum that lasts long after the plane touches down.

And when you do it right, when your team feels truly appreciated? That's Return on Appreciation™. The kind you can see in performance metrics, retention stats, and wide-eyed "I-can't-believe-this-is-for-me" reactions on-site.

At Cultivate, we make those moments happen. From On-site Gifting that turns heads to Online Gifting that scales seamlessly, our team of Gifting Experts is here to help you elevate every experience, from RSVP to thank-you note.

Let's make your next incentive trip *unforgettable* for all the right reasons.

Appreciation isn't just part of the program—it is the program.

Connect with Cultivate to start planning your incentive travel gifts and inspire your top performers before they even pack their bags.

[Talk to a Gifting Expert](#)

