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# ConventionSouth

The national planners' resource for Southern destinations

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ISLAND





Courtesy Waldorf Astoria Washington DC



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**On the cover:** Southernmost Beach Resort, one of our 2026 Radiant Resorts contest winners. Courtesy Southernmost Beach Resort

## Centennial Celebrations Let Groups Get Their Kicks on Route 66

### A conversation with event planner Brian Ferrell



Courtesy factor 110

**B**rian Ferrell, CMP, DMCP, founder of factor 110 | Destination Oklahoma, 110 events, and Blue Circle Productions, has built a reputation for designing immersive, high-impact events and experiences that bring destinations to life through bold creativity and operational precision. Under Ferrell's leadership, factor 110 became Oklahoma's first and only accredited destination management company (DMC), earning international recognition. Ferrell continues to shape the

industry through innovative event design, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to creating meaningful, memorable experiences.

Here, Ferrell shares how he and his team are leading the design and management of the Oklahoma Route 66 Centennial Celebrations—one of the country's most ambitious, large-scale initiatives to celebrate "The Mother Road."

#### What sets Route 66 in Oklahoma apart as a tourist attraction and historic landmark?

Oklahoma really is the heart of Route 66—we have more miles than any other state, and you feel that as you travel it. What makes it different is how real it still is. These aren't just preserved landmarks; they're places that people still live in, work in, and take pride in. You'll find everything from neon diners and vintage motor courts to Native American cultural experiences and newer attractions, all along the same stretch of road. It's not overly produced, which makes it special. Every stop has its own personality, and that's what resonates with visitors—especially groups looking for attractions and activities to help them connect with the destination.

#### How is Oklahoma incorporating the Route 66 centennial into curated group itineraries for conventions, meetings, and other events?

The centennial has given us a chance to think bigger about how groups experience Route 66. Instead of just seeing it, we're designing ways for people to be part of it. That could look like cruising to dinner in classic convertibles, hosting events in historic spaces, or adding interactive moments that tie back to the era—like drive-in-style experiences with vintage candy and popcorn. On the culinary side, we're leaning into things people associate with Route 66 in Oklahoma—fried onion burgers, chili coney, and homemade pie—but presenting them in a way that still feels elevated. Signature moments tied to the centennial—

such as Tulsa's Route 66 Capital Cruise (an official *Guinness World Records*® attempt for the largest classic car parade) and evening drone shows illuminating the skyline—are being seamlessly integrated into programs, giving groups a front-row seat to history in the making. It's a blend of nostalgia, scale, and Oklahoma hospitality that's truly one-of-a-kind.

#### How are local communities, attractions, and DMCs collaborating to create cohesive Route 66-themed programs across the state?

Route 66 belongs to everyone—it's shared, and people take pride in that. Communities, DMCs, and local partners are working together to make sure the experience feels connected from one stop to the next. At the same time, each place still brings its own identity—whether that's the Blue Whale in Catoosa, POPS in Arcadia, or a Main Street shop that's been there for generations. From a planning standpoint, it allows groups to build multi-city programs that flow. It doesn't feel like a series of separate stops—it feels like you're traveling a story.

#### What types of venues along Route 66 are being positioned for meetings, receptions, or offsite events, and how are they being adapted for group use?

One of the best parts of Route 66 is the variety of spaces we can use. We've got historic cafés and gas stations, museums like the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, outdoor spaces, and even repurposed buildings with a lot of character. What we're seeing is a thoughtful approach to making those spaces work for groups—adding what's needed from a production and infrastructure standpoint without losing what makes each place unique. We're also leaning into experiential formats—street festivals, outdoor receptions, large-scale activations, and elevated VIP experiences—where the setting becomes part of the story.

#### Apart from the centennial celebration, how is Oklahoma combining nostalgia with modern updates to design Route 66 experiences for today's meeting attendees?

People still want the nostalgia, but they want to connect to it in a way that feels current. We're keeping the core elements—classic cars, retro signage, and historic locations—and layering in modern production and experiences so the experience doesn't feel dated. That might be through lighting, sound, or the overall design. We're also making it more interactive, with barbecue smoked on site by local pitmasters, hands-on elements like custom postcards or screen printing, and small touches that guests can take as keepsakes. It's less about recreating the past and more about using it as a starting point. At the same time, we're also mindful of local sourcing, wellness, and overall guest experience. Route 66 gives us a great story—it's a road for everyone—and our job is to bring that to life in a way that still feels relevant today. 🍷

# WHERE PAST MEETS PRESENT

Historic buildings find new purpose as character-rich settings for meetings and events

By Paige Townley



Waldorf Astoria Washington DC

Courtesy Waldorf Astoria Washington DC

There's something undeniably compelling about gathering in a space that has already lived a full life. Across the South, a growing number of hotels and event venues are rewriting their stories—former train depots where passengers once hurried toward distant destinations, stately banks that safeguarded fortunes, post offices that connected communities, and government buildings that shaped civic life. Today, these architectural landmarks have been reimaged as distinctive settings for meetings and conferences. Preserved brick walls, soaring ceilings, and architectural details that hint at their past infuse meetings with authenticity and a strong sense of place, turning history into a built-in storytelling element. These thoughtfully transformed properties honor their origins while delivering the character, atmosphere, and memorable backdrops that elevate today's events.

## Trilogy Hotel Montgomery | Ala.

In the heart of downtown Montgomery, Trilogy Hotel Montgomery lives up to its name in the most literal way. The property unites three historic structures into one cohesive boutique experience, anchored by the 1851 Greek Revival Murphy House, built for prominent cotton broker John H. Murphy. Over the decades, the residence evolved with the city—serving as home to the Beauvoir Club, later the Elks social club, and eventually housing the Montgomery Water Works and Sanitary Sewer Board after preservation efforts in 1970 spared it from demolition.

Today, the restored mansion houses Kinsmith, the hotel's signature restaurant, while two early 20<sup>th</sup>-century warehouses round out the campus with industrial character. Original architectural elements remain focal points, including a preserved wooden staircase connecting meeting spaces and historic mirrors that quietly reflect the building's varied past.

With the 2,100-square-foot Tallapoosa Ballroom, rooftop spaces, and even breakout areas, Trilogy offers versatile function space that's also steps from Civil Rights landmarks and the Alabama River.

## The Empress of Little Rock | Ark.

In the historic Quapaw Quarter of Little Rock, The Empress of Little Rock is one of the city's most storied addresses—a Victorian showpiece born of rivalry, ambition, and craftsmanship. Built in 1888 for saloon owner James L. Hornibrook, the mansion took six years to complete, with every uniquely shaped brick formed on site. Legend holds that Hornibrook delayed construction until a competitor's grand residence was finished, determined for his own home to eclipse it in scale and detail.

The result is a richly layered property that has served as a family residence, Arkansas' first women's college, a private home, wartime lodging, and a nursing and assisted living

Courtesy Trilogi Hotel



Trilogi Hotel



The Empress of Little Rock

Courtesy The Empress of Little Rock

facility before its restoration in the 1990s as a bed-and-breakfast and event venue. Today, the main floor remains much as it would have in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, complete with dual grand staircases, 14-foot ceilings, pocket doors that open to create expansive gathering space, and parlors ideal for executive discussions.

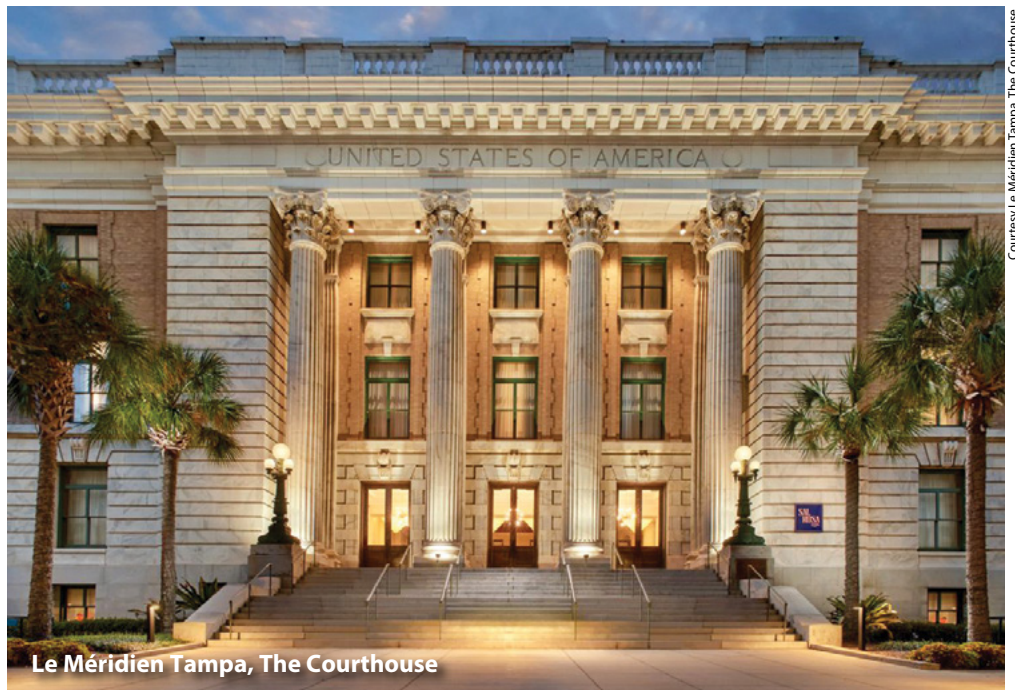
Ten guest rooms, garden space for up to 100 guests, and distinctive settings—from the formal dining room to the stained-glass poker room tucked in the attic—offer a backdrop unlike any conventional venue, where every meeting unfolds amid authentic Arkansas history.

**Le Méridien Tampa, The Courthouse | Fla.**

Set within the former federal courthouse in downtown Tampa, Le Méridien Tampa, The Courthouse, a century-old landmark, has been thoughtfully renovated into a boutique hotel. Preserving its architectural somberness while introducing contemporary comfort and technology, the transformation boasts iconic courtrooms repurposed as refined venues, lending a sense of occasion to everything from board meetings to receptions.

The property features 4,800 square feet of meeting and event space designed to balance historic character with modern functionality. At the heart of it all is the Courthouse Ballroom, restored to much of its original glory and comfortably accommodating medium to large groups. With more than 2,200 square feet of venue space, it maintains its architectural distinction: vaulted ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows, and panoramic city views, all of which create a grand atmosphere grounded in history.

Beyond the meeting spaces, its 130 guest rooms blend preserved architectural details with state-of-the-art amenities, while original



Le Méridien Tampa, The Courthouse

Courtesy Le Méridien Tampa, The Courthouse

stonework and stately proportions throughout the property serve as a constant reminder of the building's civic legacy.

**Columbus Georgia Convention & Trade Center**

Designated a national historic landmark, the Columbus Georgia Convention & Trade Center traces its story back to 1853, when the property began as an iron foundry producing kettles, brass castings, and steam engines used to power grist and lumber mills, riverboats, and cotton gins for regional commerce. Officially transformed into an event center in 1979 and later expanded in 2004—after being burned and rebuilt, twice—the convention center has grown while preserving the architectural character and industrial spirit defining it today.

Inside, such spaces as the South Hall and North Hall honor the building's working past through exposed historic iron work lining the walls, paying homage to the machinery and craftsmanship that once powered the mill. Vintage industrial details, including preserved iron wheels and an original elevator located in South Hall, remain as quiet reminders of the site's long history. The Iron Works Ballroom and Foundry spaces continue this storytelling, with exposed brick and pre-function gathering areas and balcony views overlooking the Columbus RiverWalk.

A small second-floor museum space further honors the property's heritage, displaying artifacts and historical pieces telling the story of the building and the community it has long served.

**Round Barn | Lexington, Ky.**

In the heart of Lexington is the Round Barn, a circa-1881 historic landmark. Originally designed as an exhibition hall before later serving as a harness racing stable, the four-story circular structure has been lovingly preserved and transformed into a unique event venue that carries the romance and spirit of Kentucky’s racing tradition. Today, the venue celebrates its past through thoughtful design touches, including several historic carriages from Red Mile’s racing history, helping to recreate the ambiance of a working stable while honoring the site’s storied legacy.

At the center of the barn, a cascading chandelier provides dramatic lighting that reflects off exposed wooden beams, original brickwork, and elegant drapery to create a rustic yet refined setting. The adjacent Red Mile Harness Racing Museum further connects visitors to the venue’s heritage, displaying artifacts and memorabilia chronicling the track’s long and celebrated history.

Designed for versatility, the Round Barn accommodates both intimate gatherings and large-scale celebrations, offering flexible floor plans, convenient parking, and proximity to downtown hotels, restaurants, and Lexington’s entertainment district. With an adjacent lodging option for added convenience, it remains one of the Bluegrass region’s most distinctive historic event spaces.

**Hilton New Orleans St. Charles Avenue**

Along storied St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans, Hilton New Orleans St. Charles Avenue offers both 1920s grandeur and contemporary convenience. Originally constructed in 1926 as the Louisiana Masonic Temple, the building remains a presence in the Central Business District, with architectural details—including ornate ceilings, intricate moldings, and luminous stained glass—that feel distinctly New Orleans.

The hotel’s 10,119 square feet of event space spans seven meeting rooms, each infused with historic character. The largest venue accommodates up to 2,320 square feet of flexible setup space, ideal for conferences, board meetings, and receptions. Beyond the ballroom, 252 guest rooms provide comfortable accommodations within walking distance of the French Quarter, Caesars Superdome, and Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.

Outside, the St. Charles streetcar line and Mardi Gras parades pass directly by the



Columbus Georgia Convention & Trade Center

Courtesy Columbus Georgia Convention & Trade Center



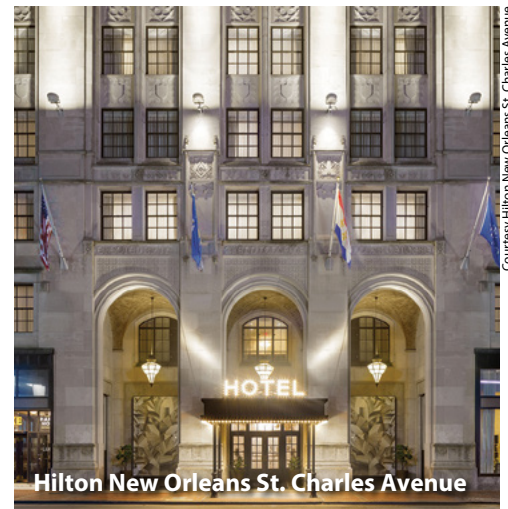
Round Barn

Becky Willard Photography/Courtesy Round Barn

hotel’s doors, offering attendees an authentic connection to the city’s pageantry and rhythm.

**Visitation Hotel | Frederick, Md.**

At Visitation Hotel in Frederick, faith, education, and community history are carefully preserved within a beautifully reimaged setting. Originally established as part of the Visitation Academy, the site’s story stretches back to 1824, when the monastery was first occupied by the Sisters of Charity, who helped establish one of the city’s earliest schools for young girls. Over the decades, the property evolved under the stewardship of the Sisters of the Visitation, becoming a cloistered academic and spiritual home that carried forward a legacy of service, learning, and resilience.



Hilton New Orleans St. Charles Avenue

Courtesy Hilton New Orleans St. Charles Avenue

Today, the hotel honors its heritage through thoughtful preservation and restoration. The historic chapel remains a defining landmark, featuring Franz Mayer stained-glass windows, a marble altar base, and an Italian oil painting titled *The Presentation in the Temple*. Renovations over the years have added architectural details, such as statues, side altars, and gold doors, helping maintain the chapel’s historic character while allowing it to function as a preserved cultural space.

With 65 guest rooms and suites, the property also offers meeting and event spaces reflective of its monastic past, including the preserved chapel space, cloistered gardens spanning 1,800 square feet, and restored interior gathering rooms, such as the 2,714-square-foot Academy Ballroom and the 978-square foot Cloister Room.

Ron Blunt Photography/Courtesy Visitation Hotel

Visitation Hotel



Courtesy Monmouth Historic Inn



Monmouth Historic Inn & Gardens

Courtesy St. Louis Union Station Hotel, Curio Collection by Hilton

St. Louis Union Station Hotel



**Monmouth Historic Inn & Gardens | Natchez, Miss.**

Set amid 26 acres of manicured gardens in Natchez, Monmouth Historic Inn & Gardens is steeped in history and architectural grandeur. Built in 1818 and designated a National Historic Landmark, the antebellum mansion serves as one of the region’s most evocative estates.

The main house, once home to prominent statesman and military leader John A. Quitman, now welcomes guests with period furnishings, museum-quality antiques, and carefully restored details honoring the 1830s era. Thirty guest rooms and suites, located in the mansion and surrounding outbuildings, blend historic character with modern comfort, ensuring a stay that feels immersive in the original time period, yet refined.

For meetings and conferences up to 150 guests, Monmouth provides an atmosphere unlike conventional venues. Gatherings unfold beneath sparkling crystal gasoliers in Restaurant 1818, in intimate parlors, such as the Quitman Study, or outdoors amid blooming magnolias and centuries-old oaks. As Natchez’s only AAA Four Diamond hotel for four decades, Monmouth pairs gracious hospitality and award-winning cuisine with a profound sense of place.

**St. Louis Union Station Hotel, Curio Collection by Hilton**

Few venues capture historic grandeur quite like St. Louis Union Station Hotel, Curio Collection by Hilton in downtown St. Louis. Opened in 1894 as the largest and busiest train terminal in the nation, the castle-like landmark—designed to echo the fortress city of Carcassonne, as a nod to the city’s French heritage—remains a designated National Historic Landmark and an unforgettable setting for meetings of every scale.

Today, the 567-room hotel offers 100,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event space, including 40 meeting rooms, expansive ballroom space, and the Midway, ideal for trade shows and large gatherings, just steps from guest accommodations. At the heart of the experience is the restored Grand Hall, returned to its 1894 glory with a soaring 65-foot barrel-vaulted ceiling, which serves as the canvas for an award-winning 3-D light show.

Beyond the meeting rooms, attendees can find themselves immersed in a destination unto

Courtesy The Foundry Hotel Asheville, a Rainier-managed hotel



The Foundry Hotel

Courtesy Fordson Hotel OKC



Fordson Hotel OKC

itself, with such attractions as the St. Louis Aquarium at Union Station and the towering St. Louis Wheel, just outside the door.

**The Foundry Hotel | Asheville, N.C.**

The Foundry Hotel offers a setting where history is not simply preserved but rather part of the experience. Located in downtown Asheville within The Block, the city’s oldest African American business district, the property traces its roots to 1915, when the Asheville Supply and Foundry Co. produced the steel and materials used in the construction of regional landmarks, including Biltmore House and Asheville City Hall.

After decades of dormancy, the former foundry reopened in 2018 as an 87-room

boutique hotel, blending three historic buildings with two modern additions.

Today, exposed beams, steel star fastenings, industrial-style windows, and the original pulley elevator create an authentic architectural backdrop for gatherings. The hotel features more than 3,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor event space, including the spacious Event Lawn, ideal for larger al fresco events, and the light-filled Savoy Ballroom, for smaller receptions and executive meetings.

**Fordson Hotel OKC | Oklahoma City**

In Oklahoma City’s West Village District, Fordson Hotel OKC is a consistent reminder of the city’s industrial roots and entrepreneurial spirit. The property occupies the former Ford

Motor Co. Assembly Plant, a landmark facility designed by renowned industrial architect Albert Kahn and long associated with local automotive leader Fred Jones. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the building reflects more than a century of manufacturing heritage, which helped shape Oklahoma City’s growth during the height of the Industrial Revolution.

Today, that legacy is preserved in the 135-room hotel’s architecture, where vintage fixtures, high ceilings, and expansive industrial windows nod to the structure’s assembly-line past. Original materials and design elements remain integral to the aesthetic, yet, within those historic walls, guests find contemporary comfort and hospitality.

For meetings and events, Fordson Hotel OKC boasts 14,000 square feet of flexible breakout rooms, indoor and outdoor venues, a private dining room, and a 5,400-square-foot penthouse with patio.

**The Lantern | Columbia, S.C.**

In the heart of the Vista District in Columbia, The Lantern brings new energy to a storied setting. Spanning three historic buildings, including the framework of the city’s original firehouse, the boutique hotel layers the historic space with polished mid-century modern interiors.

The former Ladder 13 fire station now houses a Mediterranean-inspired restaurant and bar, where brick walls and architectural remnants nod to the property’s past while setting the stage for memorable welcome receptions and post-session gatherings. For planners seeking an off-the-grid board retreat or leadership session, the hotel’s intimate scale—59 thoughtfully designed rooms and suites—allows groups to feel fully immersed. Clean lines, calming tones, and custom details offer a sophisticated counterpoint to the building’s industrial bones. The standout Fire Tower suite delivers sweeping views of Columbia’s skyline, ideal for VIP stays or small executive conversations with perspective.

Beyond the hotel, attendees are steps from the University of South Carolina campus and the Statehouse, as well as the Vista’s galleries and dining scene.

**The Union Station Nashville Yards | Tenn.**

Distinguished by its Gothic Revival architecture and storied past, The Union Station Nashville Yards is one of the city’s most architecturally significant event destinations. Opened in 1900 as a bustling terminal on the L&N Railroad,

Courtesy City Social

The Lantern



The Union Station Nashville Yards



Courtesy The Union Station Nashville Yards

the Gothic landmark—complete with turrets, towers, and heavy stone Richardsonian-Romanesque detailing—was an architectural marvel of its era. Today, the former train station is a member of Historic Hotels of America and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

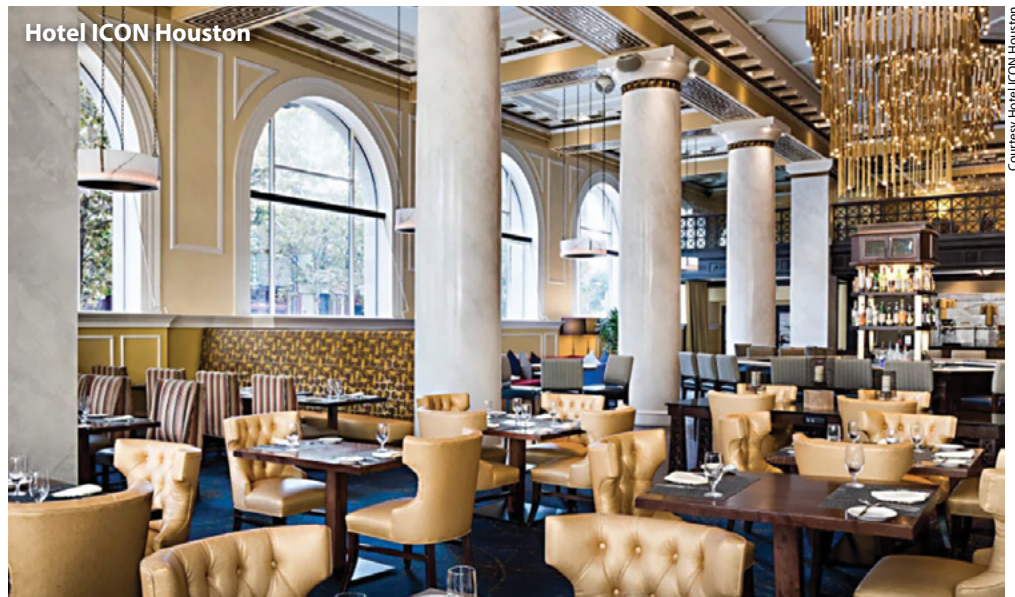
The Grand Lobby serves as the crown jewel for receptions and celebrations. Beneath a 65-foot stained-glass, barrel-vaulted ceiling adorned with gold-leaf medallions and bas-relief angels, up to 300 guests can gather in the space. Nearby, the South Wind and Hummingbird meeting rooms showcase original stained glass and 22-foot ceilings, while the Montfort boardroom provides an executive retreat overlooking the dramatic lobby below.

For open-air events, The Trestle, tucked beneath the Broadway Bridge, delivers industrial edge with historic character, while the Veranda offers a refined, weather-ready setting for up to 250 guests. With 125 guest rooms and suites completing the experience, The Union Station Nashville Yards frames every meeting with Nashville’s storied past.

**Hotel ICON Houston**

Originally constructed in 1911 as the landmark Union National Bank building, the neoclassical

Hotel ICON Houston



Courtesy Hotel ICON Houston

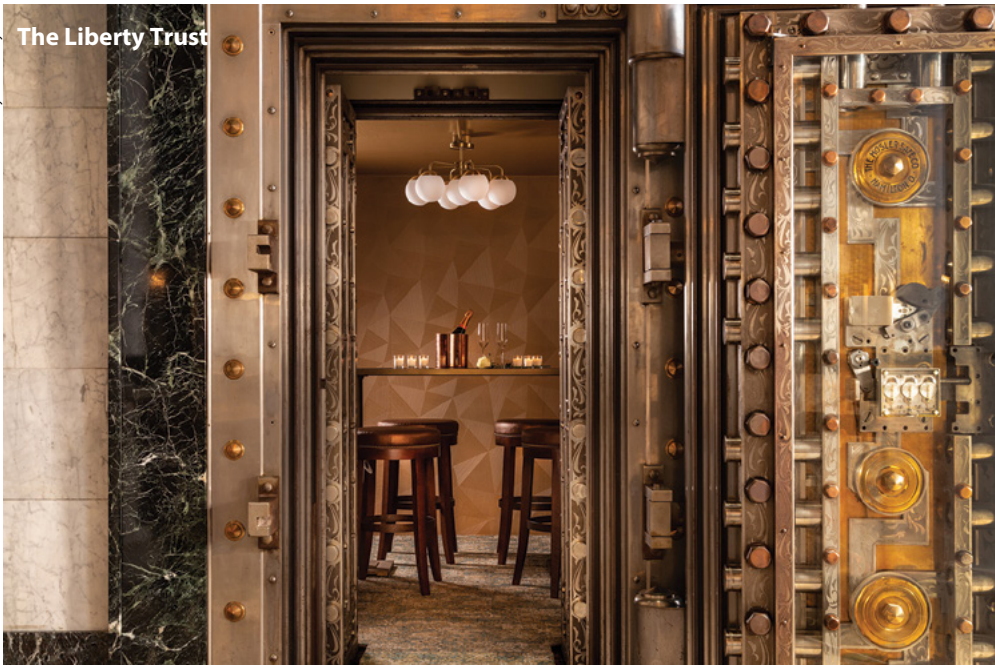
structure that is Hotel ICON Houston has long stood as one of the city’s most architecturally distinguished addresses. Today, as part of the Marriott Autograph Collection, the hotel preserves its period detailing, from the ornate moldings and grand columns to, most notably, the original bank vault, which now serves as a dramatic focal point in the lobby.

For meetings and events, Hotel ICON Houston delivers 8,080 square feet of flexible

event space across seven distinct venues. The Aventine Ballroom, the crown jewel of the collection, features 2,363 square feet with 11.7-foot ceilings, accommodating up to 250 guests theater style or 150 for banquets. More intimate gatherings find an executive setting in the refined Executive Boardroom, while the Private Wine Vault offers a truly unique backdrop for private dinners and VIP events.

Courtesy The Liberty Trust

**The Liberty Trust**



With 54 thoughtfully appointed guest rooms, many overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains and the iconic Roanoke Star, the hotel creates an intimate, walkable retreat in Virginia’s Blue Ridge.

**Waldorf Astoria Washington DC**

Few addresses in the nation carry the gravitas of Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, and few meeting venues rival the sense of occasion found at Waldorf Astoria Washington DC. Housed within the magnificently restored Old Post Office, the 263-room hotel stands between the White House and the U.S. Capitol, offering planners a setting framed by the monuments and museums of the National Mall.

The building’s Romanesque Revival architecture, soaring clock tower, and monumental public spaces have been transformed, preserving its history while introducing refined service. For meetings and events, the hotel presents nearly 39,000 square feet of event space, including the Grand Ballroom, where gilded detailing and dramatic scale create a backdrop for conferences and gala receptions alike. More intimate gatherings find distinction in the historic Lincoln Library and Franklin Study.

**The Schoolhouse Hotel | White Sulphur Springs, W.Va.**

In the heart of White Sulphur Springs, community heritage meets forward-thinking design at The Schoolhouse Hotel. Once the town’s historic high school, the building has been converted into a full-service boutique hotel, preserving its academic character while introducing a fresh chapter as a gathering place.

Original architectural details nod to the property’s past, while 30 uniquely appointed guest rooms incorporate subtle scholastic touches that honor its former life. What distinguishes The Schoolhouse Hotel, however, is its commitment to accessibility. Recognized as the world’s first fully accessible hotel, every guest room and public space exceeds ADA standards, creating an environment where comfort and inclusion are seamlessly integrated into the design.

For meetings and events, the hotel’s flexible ballroom accommodates up to 400 for conferences, retreats, and social gatherings, complemented by The Teacher’s Lounge, a more intimate conference space that’s a great canvas for board meetings, private business dinners, or all-day small team meetings. 🍷

Courtesy The Schoolhouse Hotel

**The Schoolhouse Hotel**



With 135 guest rooms and 18 suites, and a prime location near Houston’s business and theater districts, the hotel pairs convenience with character.

**The Liberty Trust | Roanoke, Va.**

Rising seven stories above downtown Roanoke, The Liberty Trust offers a refined boutique setting within the beautifully restored First National Bank Building, originally completed in 1910. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places and recognized as a Virginia Historic Landmark, the structure reflects Greek Revival and French École des Beaux-Arts influences, an architectural statement that once symbolized the city’s

progress and prosperity, and now frames gatherings with timeless distinction.

Inside, the former marble-lined bank lobby sets the tone with soaring ceilings and grand columns, while original copper doors—preserved at the entrance and adorning each guest room—serve as subtle reminders of the building’s financial legacy. The Mezzanine Board Room provides 400 square feet of function space, accommodating up to 30 guests for receptions or 15 classroom style, making it ideal for executive meetings and strategy sessions. For receptions and private dinners, The Vault, housed within the former bank lobby, offers a dramatic backdrop defined by historic detailing.



# The Heart of the Deal

**Strong relationships help planners secure the right venues and score key concessions for events**

By Matt Swenson

**B**renda Glass, an independent meeting planner who specializes in site selection, has built her 30-year career on pleasing the smartest people in the room. One of her secrets to success is learning clients' preferences, especially their non-negotiables. For example, while the brain surgeons she represents are willing to spend big on their events, they insist their host hotels provide shuttles to and from the airports.

"They don't like renting cars," Glass says. They also don't like making "house calls" to the same host hotel/destination. As Glass scours the country looking for potential host venues, these preferences guide her in securing specific concessions and perks.

In addition to planning events for brain surgeons, Glass secures venues and negotiates contracts for a variety of events, including board meetings, state government associations, federal meetings, and niche social groups. The secret to her longevity, she says, is getting to

know the people she works with—both clients and suppliers. As Glass explains, prioritizing her group's wishes and understanding what the venue values most allows her to strike equitable deals, foster strong relationships, and build a reputation. "You've got to walk away from the table with both sides thinking that they have won," she says.

Sometimes, that is easier said than done.

Tyra Warner, Ph.D., Esq., CMP, is an attorney and professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management at the College of Coastal Georgia in Brunswick. In addition to teaching courses in law, crisis management, and meetings and events, Warner regularly consults with planners and industry organizations, including the Events Industry Council and Meetings Professionals International. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Warner says planners have been at a disadvantage negotiating with hotels and venues. "It seems to be a seller's market, with no visible end in sight."



While digital tools are available for researching venue specifications, FAM trips and site visits allow planners to see for themselves if a venue's space can accommodate their group's size and meeting requirements.

Planners who walk into negotiations prepared can still claim victory. While finding the right venues and negotiating favorable rates are among the top priorities, so is protecting the event from problematic contract clauses that could lead to financial damages. Here, we explore how planners can best represent their events, from start to finish, when sourcing venues.

### The state of negotiations

While hotels and venues are generally operating from a position of power, as Warner notes, there has been noticeable turnover in the hospitality field. In fact, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the leisure and hospitality industry has some of the highest job separation rates of any industry in the United States. Frequent turnover means planners are rebuilding relationships at trusted venues.

Michele Stephenson, CEO and founder of MDS Events, has been pleased with recent venue dealings. "One of the biggest shifts I'm seeing is that while hotels are more open to concessions, they are also being more protective in their contract language," she says.

The timing coincides with several challenges facing planners. According to a Cvent study, 65% of planners say F&B costs are higher than

expected, while 61% say higher accommodation rates are an issue when sourcing.

Meanwhile, international travel to the United States decreased by 6% last year, which directly affected international events. The U.S. Travel Association is among the organizations bemoaning long waits to obtain visas and other travel documents. Science-based conferences have also faced challenges due to the revocation of research funding. Late last year, an extended government shutdown also affected events, which had to find new venues or cancel.

Rob McCulloch, senior vice president of operations for ConferenceDirect, a leading third-party event planning agency that procures and plans thousands of meetings across the country each year, says hotels are starting to feel the pinch from the cuts. "Given the softening that we have seen in international inbound travel, government spending, and individual leisure spending, hotel room rates have been flattening and coming down, when adjusted for inflation," he says. "This trend is in large cities and mid-sized cities alike."

To mitigate risks when hosting conventions and meetings, hotels add attrition clauses to contracts to protect themselves if they are unable to fill rooms originally assigned to events. Some venues are taking more aggressive

steps. For example, while working on a contract for a client's event at a prominent resort, Warner inquired about extending the group rate or receiving credit for rooms booked immediately before or after the event—for attendees who wanted to bring their family for a leisure experience, which is a common practice in business travel. According to Warner, the resort refused both requests unless those rooms were charged to the group's master bill.

"Because this issue wasn't key to the group's meeting arrangements, the group conceded the issue," Warner says, adding, "I imagine their attendees were not very happy about it. This is an example of a hotel flex that would be less likely to occur in a buyer's market."

### Getting in with the locals

While technology has greatly expanded the ability to research and even tour venues online, familiarization (FAM) tours remain valuable for sourcing events. "It's critical to see the property in person, understand the layout, and get a feel for the service, meeting space, and overall guest experience," Stephenson says. "You really can't fully evaluate a venue without seeing it firsthand."

Being on the property and in the city also gives you valuable face time with the staff who will support your event. This includes meeting with members of the local convention and visitors bureau (CVB).

In many ways, the CVB can come to a planner's rescue when faced with difficult negotiations.

Stephenson recently booked an event in Greenville, S.C., totaling approximately 1,500 room nights, including all of the hotel's meeting space, F&B, and an offsite event. Because it was for a government organization, there was a high degree of scrutiny on the budget. The Greenville CVB stepped in, contributing \$20,000 toward the event, which Stephenson allocated for audiovisual costs. "It made a huge impact and was a great example of how valuable those destination partnerships can be," Stephenson says.

Likewise, Glass has secured CVB incentives ranging from \$5–\$12 per room night, for up to \$10,000. "Even if I know the hotel we're going to book, I always route RFPs through the CVB to secure incentives," she says.

Glass adds another way to foster relationships with venues and CVBs by attending industry events, such as *ConventionSouth's* annual *Rendezvous South*. The boutique hosted-buyer



Typically among planners' largest budget items, F&B can be used as a negotiating tool to lower costs for other amenities.

Courtesy: ConferenceDirect

conference allows planners and suppliers to lay the foundation for future business during pre-arranged appointments and networking sessions. “This industry is all about relationships,” Glass says.

### Talking points

While the goal of venue negotiations might be to achieve equitable terms that benefit both sides, planners need to come in with the right mindset, Warner says. Events help hotels book rooms that might otherwise remain unoccupied, particularly midweek, but they also incur other charges that hotels can bank on when contracts require groups to use in-house audiovisual and meet a minimum F&B order.

Warner suggests planners emphasize the value of their business, using figures from the previous event to counter some of the venue’s demands. She encourages planners to show how their event is a can’t-miss opportunity for the hotel. “Stress the positives of the meeting, especially the intangibles that may not be apparent in writing,” Warner says. “News coverage, high-profile speakers, and such can be a leverage booster, just as a big room block and strong F&B program.”

Flexibility is also a bargaining chip. Glass tries to align conferences with a destination’s

offseason, like going to the Florida Panhandle in winter and to south Florida in summer. Venues are more likely to offer lower rates when there’s less of a guarantee they can fill rooms with leisure travelers, Glass notes.

No matter how promising a venue might seem, Warner suggests planners keep their cards close to the vest and also have a backup in mind. “If a hotel knows the planner is already set on holding their meeting there, the planner has lost their leverage,” she says.

Notably, Cvent finds that 97% of planners indicated they would switch from a preferred venue to a second choice for a cost savings of 20 percent or less.

Before negotiating deals and signing a contract, there is a basic step all planners need to take: sourcing. No matter how good the deal is, if the venue won’t work for the group’s needs, Stephenson says you need to look elsewhere. She has a three-point checklist to make sure the venue is the right fit: “First, consider how the space actually works for the program,” Stephenson says. “Second is the hotel team itself; having a responsive, experienced, and solution-oriented team makes a huge difference in the success of the program. Third is the contract—making sure the terms protect my client while still delivering strong value and flexibility.”

McCulloch says it is equally important to understand your client’s budget and needs, and if they align with the venue’s fee schedule. “In this day and age, when audiovisual costs may be the same as your F&B budget, or even higher, it’s critical to discuss every line item to determine if a venue is even worth recommending to the client.”

### Make your concessions count

In her experience, Glass has found some groups more willing to pay for certain line items and uncompromising on others, like the brain surgeons’ insistence on transportation to the airport.

Working with hotels to juggle funds around allows both sides to walk away satisfied. Many organizations and their planners are averse to paying a meeting room rental fee, Warner notes, but might be willing to pay the same amount, say \$1,500, above the F&B minimum. In such cases, Warner says there usually are few complaints from either side.

“It’s about building the right overall package that makes sense for the client,” adds Stephenson, who tries to secure room upgrades and comps for staff when pushing back on hotels.

Warner advises planners to read the fine print. She’s seen some venues try to pass off

**Meeting planners seeking flexible space for group yoga, networking happy hours, and other functions might consider pushing back against rental fees in exchange for one of the hotel's true non-negotiable line items.**



standard services as concessions to make the contract seem more planner-friendly than it really is. “The planner has to make sure all the concessions are meaningful,” she says.

Another smart tactic to get more from the venue is to book as early as possible. Glass has booked events through 2032, securing venues at today’s pricing.

McCulloch says the more lead time his team has, the more likely they are to find destinations that match their cost, fit, and location needs. “If you look at the industry trends, the majority of events are contracted within 12 months,” he says. “If we could start to look for venues six or three months sooner, we would not be competing with as many other customers for limited hotel group inventory.”

### Protection planning

The most common threats to pulling off an event at full capacity—or, in the worst cases, to pulling it off at all—are bad weather, civil unrest, and government policy. Planners need to protect themselves, their clients, and their events from such uncontrollable factors.

According to Warner, there are key contract clauses to evaluate, which she refers to as “the big four”: attrition, cancellation, force majeure, and indemnification. “They have the biggest financial impact on the meeting organizer and apportion risk between the parties, so they will always be among the most important,” she says.

Warner advises planners to never take anything for granted, especially as it relates to force majeure. While force majeure clauses are intended to release parties from liability in the event of uncontrollable, unforeseen disruptions—such as a natural disaster, war, or pandemic—the sides don’t necessarily see eye to eye on what qualifies.

“Planners will never be able to list every possible force majeure event that could happen,” Warner says. “I prefer force majeure contracts to include three measures: illegal, impossible, or commercially impracticable. It gives both parties broader coverage. Yes, it means having to interpret the gray areas, but that’s the nature of contracts for you.”

Attrition can be even more contentious. Glass recommends an 80% attrition rate for groups with a strong track record and 70% for

## Planners’ Checklist

- Visit the venue in person on a FAM or site visit
- Reach out to the local convention and visitors bureau to seek out incentives or other deals
- Research your event’s attendance and room block history for leverage
- Be flexible on dates, if possible
- Book as early as possible to lock in rates
- Find a bargaining chip (like going over the F&B minimum) to offer as a trade to avoid one of your dealbreakers
- Strive for an 80% attrition rate
- Make sure you get credit for all achieved room nights
- Seek an expanded force majeure clause to cover government-related disruptions
- Read the fine print

events lacking an established history. Glass has been fortunate to have only one attrition claim in 30 years.

“One thing that is important is making sure the meeting organizer gets credit for all room revenue-generating activities—making sure that no-show fees, early departure fees, etc., are counted toward the group’s pick-up for purposes of calculating room attrition,” Warner says. “Another best practice is making sure attrition and cancellation fees are based on lost profits rather than lost revenue. The hotel is not entitled to a windfall in an attrition or cancellation situation.”

If a group pays attrition damages for underperformance, they shouldn’t also lose concessions, Warner adds. “That’s double dipping.”

Glass recommends planners have a lawyer review all contracts to identify any red flags and ensure their organization’s and/or client’s bylaws and other standards are met.

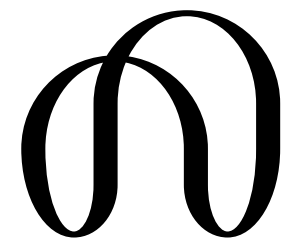
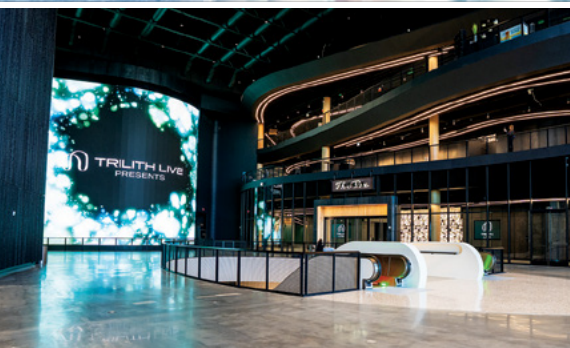
Despite the potential pitfalls, Glass believes things can work out well if you have a cooperative attitude toward venues. She resolved the aforementioned attrition case by rebooking the same event for another time.

According to Stephenson, it pays to play nice with others. “Build strong relationships with CVBs and hotel partners,” she says. “Come prepared, understand the value of your group, and don’t be afraid to ask for concessions. Having those relationships and knowing the market makes a huge difference in negotiations.” 🌱

# Space that elevates collaboration



Located in South Metro Atlanta, Trilith LIVE offers a fully tailorable venue with theater capacity for up to 2,800 guests, 150,000 sq. ft. of support space, and flexible meeting rooms. It's the perfect setting for off-sites, conventions, and more. With gourmet on-site catering by Hanna Brothers, convenient parking, and a full-service Marriott Guesthouse Hotel, it's everything your event needs, all in one place.



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# RESORT RETREATS

Readers crown their favorite Southern meeting resorts



**C**onventionSouth's annual Radiant Resorts contest highlights some of the South's top destinations for meetings and events, as voted by readers and industry professionals. Always an audience favorite, the annual contest recognizes resorts that stand out for both their settings and ability to deliver strong group experiences.

This year, voters chose their favorites from 70 nominated properties across the region. From

beachside escapes to mountain retreats, each resort earned attention for its mix of meeting space, amenities, service, and overall appeal.

While a select group rose to the top, all of the nominated resorts offer solid options for planners looking to host memorable events. *ConventionSouth* thanks its readers for taking part and supporting the properties featured here.

Congratulations to the Top 15 resorts in the 2026 Radiant Resorts contest!

## Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa Bonita Springs, Fla.

Set on 26 acres in Bonita Springs, between Naples and Fort Myers, Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa offers a relaxed Gulf Coast setting with plenty to keep guests engaged. The 462-room resort includes private balconies and easy access to a mix of leisure amenities, from a lazy river and multiple waterslides to separate adults-only and family pools. Guests can spend time at nearby Big Hickory Island beach, book dolphin-watching tours or sunset cruises, or play on the Raymond Floyd-designed golf course. A full-service spa and several dining venues, from Southern-inspired cuisine to seafood and casual poolside fare, round out the experience.

For meeting planners, the resort provides more than 82,500 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space, including ballrooms, lakefront venues, and naturally lit meeting rooms. Dedicated planning support, built-in audiovisual capabilities, and flexible layouts make it well-suited for conferences, incentive trips, and social events. Its location within 20 minutes of Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) adds convenience for groups traveling from across the country.

## Southernmost Beach Resort Key West, Fla.

Located at the quieter southern end of Duval Street, Southernmost Beach Resort offers a modern, coastal-chic retreat in Key West's Historic District. The recently renovated property features 293 guest rooms across eight buildings and four guest houses with city, pool, and ocean views, blending contemporary design with classic island charm.

Meeting planners will find versatile indoor and outdoor spaces, including the Tranquility Room for board meetings and luncheons, the South Beach Room for classroom-style sessions, and 2,488 square feet of lush outdoor space ideal for cocktail receptions or awards ceremonies. The resort's private beach can accommodate 25 to 200 guests, while onsite catering from Southernmost Beach Café ensures seamless events.

Guests can unwind between sessions at three palm-fringed pools with private cabanas, the full-service spa, or with group fitness classes and unique programming, such as cocktail tastings and painting workshops. Dining highlights include oceanfront cuisine at Southernmost Beach Café and handcrafted cocktails at two bars.

Just 15 minutes from Key West International Airport (EYW) and steps from local attractions, the resort offers a tranquil yet accessible setting. Southernmost Beach Resort delivers a perfect blend of productivity, leisure, and island elegance, making it an ideal destination for meetings, retreats, and special events.

## Disney's Coronado Springs Resort Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

This lakeside oasis boasts a mix of Spanish, Mexican, and Southwest American culture, from the property's 15-story Gran Destino Tower to its themed restaurants and lounges throughout the resort. Guests are greeted by a two-story lobby with Moorish lanterns, bronze screens inspired by Spanish tiles, and dramatic lighting that highlights the resort's signature arches.

Villa del Lago, the resort's central hub, links the hotel via three bridges over Lago Dorado and offers lakefront dining, bars, and recreational spaces celebrating the art, lore, and culture of the Americas. The Dig Site Pool features a 50-foot Mayan pyramid, cascading water, a jaguar slide, and the largest outdoor hot tub at Walt Disney World Resort.

For planners, Coronado Springs Resort offers 228,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor space, including an 86,000-square-foot exhibit hall and a lakeside beach for events. With complimentary transportation to Disney Springs and all four theme parks, the resort combines striking design with practical amenities for conferences, retreats, and special gatherings.



Courtesy Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort &amp; Spa

Courtesy Southernmost Beach Resort

© Disney

Courtesy voco Sandpiper All-Inclusive Resort



## voco Sandpiper All-Inclusive Resort

### Key West, Fla.

Positioned along Florida's scenic Treasure Coast, voco Sandpiper All-Inclusive Resort offers a vibrant, riverfront retreat ideal for work, play, and relaxation. The resort features 249 newly updated guest rooms and suites, including spacious two-bedroom family suites with private patios or balconies and walk-out access to the riverfront beach, combining comfort and flexibility for groups of all sizes.

Dining at voco Sandpiper blends convenience with culinary variety. Riverside Market features global flavors and live-action stations; Solara offers fresh plant-forward dishes; and Lucie's delivers bold beachside bites. Poolside and riverfront bars, including The Hideaway and Sunset Bar, provide social spaces for networking or unwinding.

Meeting planners can take advantage of versatile indoor spaces and scenic outdoor lounges for board meetings, teambuilding sessions, or cocktail receptions. The resort's amenities—including tennis, pickleball, basketball, beach volleyball, kayaking, and paddleboarding—offer opportunities for group engagement and wellness. A fully equipped fitness center and daily fitness classes further support an active, balanced itinerary.

With a serene riverfront setting, flexible event spaces, and all-inclusive dining, voco Sandpiper transforms corporate travel into a seamless, memorable experience.

Courtesy Amrit Ocean Resort



## Amrit Ocean Resort

### Riviera Beach, Fla.

Set on seven acres of pristine beachfront on Singer Island, Amrit Ocean Resort maintains a private island feel, yet is just minutes from West Palm Beach's dining, shopping, and entertainment.

The resort offers executive conference facilities for up to 200 attendees across 12,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor event space. Wellness is central to the experience, with programs built around five pillars: nutrition, fitness, mindfulness, sleep, and relaxation. Planners can incorporate oceanfront spa treatments, hydrothermal therapies, and group wellness sessions into the agenda to enhance productivity and engagement.

Guests can enjoy the resort's water-view rooms and suites, five dining venues, a private beach with cabanas, and a robust fitness program. With full-service catering, concierge, and modern audiovisual capabilities, Amrit Ocean Resort delivers both elevated meetings and memorable stays.

Courtesy Chateau Élan Winery &amp; Resort



## Chateau Élan Winery & Resort

### Braselton, Ga.

Nestled in the foothills of north Georgia, Chateau Élan Winery & Resort offers meeting planners a Four Diamond resort experience approximately 40 minutes from Atlanta. The 3,500-acre property includes a 40,000-square-foot conference center with three ballrooms, 20 meeting rooms, two boardrooms, a tiered auditorium, and other venues, such as a winery, an event pavilion, and outdoor space.

The French-inspired chateau anchors the resort, combining traditional design with modern amenities. Attendees can take part in winery tours and tastings, dine at Marc chophouse while enjoying vineyard views, or spend time on the golf course or at the spa. A culinary workshop adds another option for group programming.

With a range of meeting spaces and onsite experiences, Chateau Élan supports both focused events and time outside the agenda.

## Lanier Islands Resort

### Buford, Ga.

Lanier Islands Resort delivers a refreshing, all-inclusive lakeside destination. Located on 1,200 acres along Lake Lanier in north Georgia, the resort features more than 38,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including conference rooms, ballrooms, and scenic outdoor venues—all designed to accommodate groups of all sizes. Natural light and waterfront views inspire attendees with renewed focus, creativity, and connection.

Beyond the meeting spaces, attendees have access to a full range of amenities, including golf, a spa, marinas, beaches, and three onsite restaurants. The Game Changer entertainment venue adds a social element, with duckpin bowling, arcade games, and axe throwing, while customized teambuilding programs, such as pontoon races and scavenger hunts, offer engaging ways to foster collaboration and build morale among attendees.

With refreshed accommodations, dedicated event support, and a setting that feels removed from the everyday, Lanier Islands Resort delivers productive meetings paired with memorable, experience-driven stays.

## Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina

### Cambridge, Md.

Set along the Choptank River on Maryland's Eastern Shore, this AAA Four Diamond resort spanning more than 300 waterfront acres offers a luxe, yet relaxed, retreat. The 400-room property features private balconies and patios, many with water views, along with a championship 18-hole golf course, a full-service spa and salon, and a 150-slip marina. Guests can take advantage of tennis and pickleball courts, indoor and outdoor pools, a golf simulator, boating and fishing excursions, and miles of walking and biking trails.

Dining options range from fresh, locally inspired seafood to casual poolside fare to quick market selections. Michener's Library serves as a central gathering spot, pairing cocktails and light bites with fireplaces and expansive views of the river and golf course.

For meeting planners, the resort offers more than 122,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor event space, including an 11,000-plus-square-foot ballroom for up to 1,400 attendees. With 24 meeting rooms, integrated technology, and a variety of teambuilding experiences, the property provides a versatile, waterfront setting for conferences, retreats, and special events.

## Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center

### Oxon Hill, Md.

Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center stands out as a leading destination for large-scale meetings, thanks to its expansive capacity and thoughtful design. The property offers 600,000 square feet of flexible meeting space across 94 venues, giving planners the ability to host everything from trade shows to multi-day conferences in one location. Nearly 2,000 guest rooms and 110 suites allow entire groups to stay on site, simplifying logistics and enhancing the attendee experience.

Sustainability is also central to the resort's approach. A rooftop solar installation with 5,760 panels, combined with an onsite microgrid, generates more than 85% of the property's energy, allowing planners to host large-scale events with a reduced environmental impact.

Located just minutes from Washington, D.C., the resort balances size with a strong sense of place. Attendees can connect while dining at Old Hickory Steakhouse or taking in panoramic views from the Rooftop Lounge. The 2026 Atrium House Masterclasses add built-in programming options, with experiences like whiskey tastings, culinary workshops, and themed classes tied to America's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday—offering planners easy ways to add excitement and engaging activities beyond the agenda.

Courtesy Lanier Islands Resort



Courtesy Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina



Courtesy Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center



Courtesy The Biltmore Company, Asheville, North Carolina



## Biltmore Estate

### Asheville, N.C.

For more than 125 years, Biltmore Estate has defined gracious hospitality. Nestled on an 8,000-acre private, gated estate in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Asheville, Biltmore Estate offers a one-of-a-kind resort experience. From the historic Biltmore House to The Inn on Biltmore Estate® and an award-winning winery, Biltmore Estate is designed to transport guests from their daily cares and schedules to the estate's relaxing retreat. The property features America's Largest Home®, acres of gardens and grounds—including miles of nature, bike, and equestrian trails—and unique shopping, dining, and activity options.

More than 20,000 square feet of indoor meeting and event space is available in venues located throughout the rolling hills and forests of the estate grounds. The estate features unique and elegant meeting and pre-function facilities, as well as at the Four Diamond, Four Star Inn on Biltmore Estate.

Courtesy Sonesta Resort Hilton Head Island



## Sonesta Resort Hilton Head Island

### Hilton Head Island, S.C.

Set on 11 acres along Hilton Head Island's Atlantic coast, the AAA Four Diamond-rated Sonesta Resort offers a refreshed, coastal-chic escape ideal for both leisure and business travelers. Following a 2025 transformation, the resort now features 340 redesigned guest rooms, enhanced dining and retail outlets, upgraded outdoor amenities, and revitalized meeting and event spaces.

Meeting planners will find more than 23,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor function space accommodating groups from 10 to 800. Signature venues include the 10,000-square-foot Santee Ballroom, the 7,000-square-foot Oceanfront Pavilion, and the 4,000-square-foot Oceanfront Shipyard Beach Club with panoramic ocean views. Seventeen additional versatile rooms allow for tailored layouts, while onsite audiovisual services and customized catering support seamless events.

Amenities include the Spa at Sonesta, two heated pools, direct beach access, and exclusive access to Shipyard's golf courses and championship tennis courts. Guests can delight in onsite dining options, from breakfast and poolside bites to dinner and a nightcap, and enjoy the convenience of the Sea Glass Provisions resort market and boutique Seaside Shop.

Braden Hanson / Courtesy MeadowView Conference Resort &amp; Convention Center



## MeadowView Conference Resort & Convention Center

### Kingsport, Tenn.

Set against the foothills of Tennessee's Blue Ridge Mountains, MeadowView Conference Resort & Convention Center in Kingsport offers a quiet, scenic retreat with easy access to regional attractions.

The 301 newly renovated guest rooms and suites feature modern amenities and private balconies overlooking the surrounding landscape. Guests can unwind at the indoor pool, stay active in the fitness center, or play the 18-hole Cattails Golf Course, set at the base of Bays Mountain. Dining is centered around a signature restaurant serving regional fare and cocktails.

For meeting planners, the resort combines natural surroundings with practical functionality. A 35,000-square-foot convention center includes flexible ballrooms and breakout rooms suited for conferences, expos, and social events. Distinctive venues, such as a wine cellar, a covered patio, and an outdoor courtyard, provide creative options for gatherings. With onsite catering, dedicated planning support, and complimentary parking, the property offers a convenient and adaptable setting for meetings and events.

## Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center Nashville

### Nashville, Tenn.

Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville offers meeting planners one of the largest non-gaming convention destinations in the country, with 2,888 guest rooms and more than 758,000 square feet of meeting space under one roof. Originally opened in 1977 to support the Grand Ole Opry, the resort has evolved into a full-scale meetings destination known for its capacity, flexibility, and wide range of onsite amenities.

At the heart of the resort are its three signature glass atriums, spanning nine acres and featuring indoor gardens, waterfalls, and winding pathways that create distinctive environments for networking and events. These spaces provide a year-round setting that blends function with visual impact.

Groups can choose from 22 dining venues, unwind at the Relâche Spa, or visit SoundWaves, the resort's upscale indoor/outdoor water attraction. Additional offsite experiences and group outings include nearby golfing and the General Jackson Showboat.

The resort is currently undergoing a multi-phase expansion, having debuted a new two-level sports bar with a beer garden, an event lawn, and an outdoor pavilion in April. With its "everything under one roof" approach and ongoing enhancements, Gaylord Opryland delivers convenience for planners and a well-rounded, memorable experience for attendees.

## Lansdowne Resort

### Leesburg, Va.

Lansdowne Resort, set on 500 scenic acres along the Potomac River near historic Leesburg, offers meeting planners a versatile, full-service destination just 30 miles from Washington, D.C., and 12 miles from Dulles International Airport (IAD). Tucked in the heart of Loudoun County's wine country, the resort's natural beauty and extensive event capabilities make it ideal for corporate retreats, conferences, and leadership summits.

The resort features 296 deluxe guest rooms and suites, many of which overlook championship golf courses, the Potomac River, and nearby mountains. Meeting planners can choose from 55,000 square feet of flexible space, including a 9,525-square-foot ballroom, a 3,500-square-foot outdoor pavilion, a 120-seat tiered amphitheater, and 25 meeting rooms. Lansdowne also offers dedicated conference planners, concierge services, and professional audiovisual support, along with inclusive meeting packages that combine accommodation, meals, and event essentials.

Guests enjoy a variety of dining experiences, from locally inspired cuisine at Piedmont's and Coton & Rye to casual fare at Riverside Hearth and Harmony Market. Amenities include the Spa Minérale, 45 holes of championship golf, tennis and pickleball courts, an aquatic complex, and easy access to area wineries, historic towns, and shopping.

## Stonewall Resort

### Roanoke, W.Va.

Set on 1,900 acres of pristine West Virginia parkland, Stonewall Resort is a lakeside destination for meetings, reunions, and weddings, as well as leisure vacations and romantic getaways. Its rustic yet elegant Adirondack-style lodge, luxury cottages, and lakefront homes sit alongside tranquil waters and the Arnold Palmer Signature Golf Course, offering the perfect balance of relaxation and adventure.

In addition to golfing, guests can boat, kayak, or paddleboard on the lake, hike and bike scenic trails, or play tennis or pickleball. The full-service spa, indoor and outdoor pools, and three restaurants—Stillwaters, Lightburn's, and TJ Muskies Bar & Grill—offer comfort and cuisine for every taste.

With more than 20,000 square feet of IACC-approved event space featuring natural light, modern technology, and lake and mountain views, Stonewall Resort is ideal for combining business and leisure travel. Every detail is designed to deliver effortless elegance and a memorable experience.



# Rendezvous SOUTH

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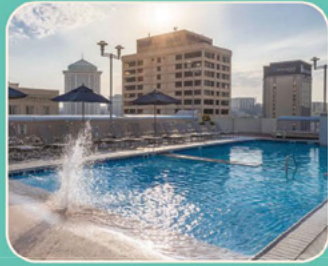
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# SOUTHERN RESORTS GUIDE

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*Sponsored advertising section*

**M**eeting planners seeking the perfect blend of hospitality, accessibility, and memorable experiences continue to choose the South. Known for its warm climate, rich culture, and welcoming spirit, the South offers an exceptional range of resort destinations designed to elevate meetings and events of every scale. Southern destinations provide both versatility and value, from coastal retreats with ocean views to serene mountain escapes and vibrant city-adjacent resorts.

Planners will find modern conference facilities and unique outdoor venues, allowing for creative programming that inspires attendees. Beyond the meeting rooms, guests can enjoy incredible cuisine, recreational activities, and authentic local charm that foster meaningful connections.

*ConventionSouth's* special advertising section highlights several standout destinations and resorts across the region that combine comfort, convenience, and character—helping planners create impactful events in settings that leave lasting impressions.

## *Sponsored Content*

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**Kent Island Resort**

# Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa: Where Smart Meetings Meet Meaningful Rewards

At Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa, meetings feel less like obligations and more like opportunities to connect, inspire, and do something meaningful together. Set among lush natural surroundings and thoughtfully designed spaces, it's a destination that balances focus with ease and productivity with pleasure.

Now, there's even more reason to plan ahead. For groups of 50 people or more booking between August and December 2026, Marriott Bonvoy® Events invites planners to Pick Your Perks—a flexible way to shape rewards around what matters most to you.

Think of it as a choose-your-own advantage. From added value that enhances the guest experience to benefits that support your planning goals, Pick Your Perks puts the

power of choice in your hands. It's a simple idea with real impact—designed to recognize the thought, care, and creativity behind every successful event.

While your attendees enjoy all that Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa has to offer—from a refreshed conference center to world-class golf to inviting outdoor moments, you'll earn Marriott Bonvoy® points along the way. Because great meetings shouldn't just feel good; they should give something back.

If you're planning a conference, retreat, or gathering that deserves a setting—and benefits—that rise to the occasion, this is your moment.

Pick your dates. Pick your perks. Plan something exceptional at Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa. 🍷



## Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa

**Patricia Conrade**  
**Director of Group Sales**

*Director of Sales Patricia Conrade brings 35 years of hospitality experience, including 15 with Marriott, pairing deep industry insight with a warm, relationship-focused approach that consistently drives results and growth.*



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patricia.conrade@marriott.com  
SawgrassMarriott.com



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# Experience Effortless, Unforgettable Events in St. Pete-Clearwater

In St. Pete-Clearwater, event goals and good times come easily to planners and attendees alike.

## Culture that programs itself

St. Pete’s thriving arts district isn’t just a backdrop; it’s built-in programming. The Dali Museum, Chihuly Collection, and hundreds of murals across the EDGE District give planners ready-made cultural excursions that feel curated, not generic.

## Dining worth putting on the agenda

St. Pete-Clearwater has earned national recognition as one of America’s next great food cities. From laid-back Gulf Coast seafood shacks to Michelin-recognized kitchens, the range and quality give planners a roster of restaurants that impress any attendee and appetite.

## Nightlife that keeps the networking going

St. Pete’s Central Avenue corridor is walkable, vibrant, and authentically local.

With rooftop bars, live-music venues, and craft cocktail spots, the energy goes well past the keynote. 🍹

**Elevated dining transforms every meal into a shared experience.**



Photos courtesy Visit St. Pete-Clearwater

**After-hours moments are designed for connection, not just cocktails.**



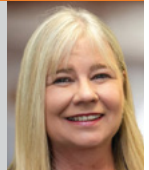
**World-class art experiences turn downtime into something memorable.**



## Visit St. Pete-Clearwater

**Stephanie Alexander-Priakos**  
Director of Meetings & Conferences

*Stephanie Alexander-Priakos is the Director of Meetings and Conferences for Visit St. Pete-Clearwater, leading strategic initiatives to attract meetings, conferences, and group business. She partners with planners, industry leaders, and local stakeholders to position the area as a premier meetings destination, known for its award-winning beaches, diverse venues, and exceptional attendee experiences.*



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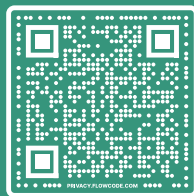


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# The Omni Homestead Resort & Spa: We Bring More to the Table Than Just Meeting Space



Courtesy: The Omni Homestead Resort & Spa

Experience an unparalleled venue for your corporate board retreats, annual conferences, continuing education summits, and high-performing incentive trips at The Omni Homestead Resort & Spa. Nestled in the scenic Virginia landscape, this luxurious destination offers the ideal blend of elegance, functionality, and serenity, ensuring that your gatherings are both productive and memorable.

At The Omni Homestead, we boast a selection of versatile meeting spaces designed to accommodate a variety of group sizes and event formats. Our rooms are adaptable, ideal for intimate discussions, strategic planning sessions, and large conferences alike. Each space is equipped with modern amenities and offers breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains and lush greenery, creating an inspiring atmosphere that encourages innovative thinking and collaboration.

Beyond the meeting rooms, our resort provides engaging teambuilding activities

to foster strong connections among your team members. From challenging outdoor adventures to fun and interactive workshops, our programs promote teamwork, communication, and camaraderie. These activities not only enhance relationships but also create memorable experiences your team will cherish long after the retreat concludes.

In addition to our event spaces and teambuilding offerings, The Omni Homestead Resort & Spa is a perfect venue for acknowledging and rewarding high achievers. Guests can indulge in world-class amenities, including two championship golf courses, a luxurious spa, and exceptional shooting sports. With more than 40 diverse activities available, there is something for everyone, ensuring that every attendee can find the perfect way to unwind and recharge after a productive day of meetings.

Banquets play a crucial role in any successful event, and at The Omni Homestead, we take pride in offering outstanding culinary

options. Our experienced conference services team works with you to create menus tailored to your group's preferences and dietary needs. Whether it's a buffet-style lunch, an elegant plated dinner, or a casual outdoor barbecue, our dishes feature fresh, local ingredients to elevate your dining experience.

Our dedicated events team takes care of every detail to ensure a seamless experience. From the initial planning stages to the final touches, our hospitality professionals work diligently to make your event stress-free and enjoyable. We recognize the importance of creating an environment that strikes a balance between productivity and relaxation, allowing you to focus on what truly matters: achieving your objectives while strengthening team bonds.

The Omni Homestead Resort & Spa offers an escape from the ordinary, where its serene atmosphere can stimulate creativity and inspire innovation. Guests can enjoy strolls on our beautiful grounds, visit our historical sites, or relax by the poolside.

Make The Omni Homestead Resort & Spa the destination for your next event, and discover the perfect intersection of luxury, functionality, and a stunning natural environment. Create lasting memories for your team as you blend business with leisure in a picturesque setting that truly embodies the essence of collaboration and achievement. From the moment you arrive until your final farewell, your retreat will be tailored to exceed expectations, leaving you and your team inspired and refreshed. 🍷

## The Omni Homestead Resort & Spa

### Marshall Hilliard National Sales Manager

Marshall Hilliard is a national sales manager for The Omni Homestead Resort & Spa. He is a seasoned hospitality executive with more than 30 years of experience, primarily in the southeastern United States.



704-634-2610  
marshall.hilliard@omnihotels.com

# Turf Valley Resort: Maryland's Premier Conference Destination

Courtesy, Turf Valley Resort



retreat destination with a full-service hotel and conference center.

Featuring more than 40,000 square feet of meeting space, our resort offers 26 flexible venues, banquet and catering options, and 172 guest rooms overlooking our championship golf courses.

A new era of coming together has compelled us to be creative. Our meeting spaces can accommodate large groups and are designed to encourage open dialogue, while breakout rooms are ideal for smaller group events. With high-speed internet accessibility and Wi-Fi throughout our resort and meeting rooms, we can provide access to your onsite and virtual attendees as needed.

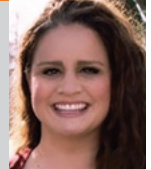
Unwind in our spacious rooms and suites with beautiful views. Explore our two championship golf courses, The Spa at Turf

Valley, our fitness center, indoor and outdoor pools, and onsite restaurant located on the lower level of the hotel. 🍷

## Turf Valley Resort

**Betsy Collings**  
Corporate Account Executive

*Betsy joined the sales team in 2016 as the corporate account executive. Her primary focus is selling Turf Valley Resort as a destination for meetings, events, and group travel for the corporate market and government contractors.*



410-423-0833  
bcollings@turfvalley.com  
TurfValley.com

**A**t Turf Valley Resort, we provide the ideal setting for meetings, corporate events, social gatherings, conferences, and more. Easily accessible from Baltimore and Washington, DC., Turf Valley Resort is an all-in-one



# Turf Valley Resort

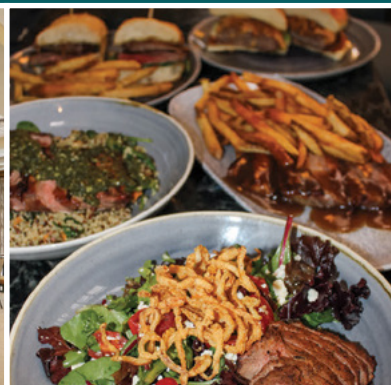
**Maryland's Premier Destination for Conferences & Meetings...**

40,000 sq ft of Meeting Space | 172 Guest Rooms & Suites | On-Site Catering | In-House AV + Attendant | Dedicated Wi-Fi | Full Service Restaurant | Spa & Sauna | Two Championship Golf Courses | Indoor & Outdoor Pools | Tennis & Pickleball Courts

EXPLORE OUR RESORT



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**Coming Spring 2026!**  
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# Escape to Paradise: Discover The Florida Keys Magic

Photos courtesy Visit The Florida Keys & Key West



A great meeting isn't just about the space. It's about the people, how they engage, and what happens when the agenda pauses. In The Florida Keys & Key West, the experience begins the moment you arrive. Turquoise waters, open skies, and a sense of space create a break from the everyday without requiring international travel or a passport, helping teams reset quickly and naturally.

Set across an island chain of five distinct destinations—Key Largo, Islamorada, Marathon, The Lower Keys, and Key West—the experience offers both variety and cohesion. Waterfront resorts and meeting venues are found across each destination, providing planners with flexible options for small to mid-sized groups. Indoor and outdoor spaces work seamlessly together, while offsite venues add variety without adding complexity. Groups can establish a central base and easily expand beyond it, layering in experiences that feel intentional and connected.

Meeting environments here are designed to feel different. Indoor spaces open to the serene outdoors, where natural light replaces the glare of overhead fixtures. Water views and fresh air subtly shift energy and attention, creating a setting where focus comes easier and conversations feel more productive.

It's a change that isn't forced but felt, especially over the course of a multi-day program. Many resorts also offer onsite marina access, making it easy for groups to move directly from meetings to iconic on-the-water experiences.

Beyond the meeting room, the setting does much of the work. Teambuilding becomes something shared rather than scheduled. Groups can kayak mangrove tunnels, gather on shallow-water sandbars, set out on sailing excursions, or connect over fresh, locally sourced seafood. These experiences naturally break down hierarchy and encourage real interaction. Away from the usual conference-room structure, conversations and collaborations flow naturally. Teambuilding opportunities, from eco-tours to fishing and snorkeling, give planners options that feel active, engaging, and distinctly local.

For planners looking to add depth, The Keys also offers opportunities to incorporate purpose-driven elements. Conservation-focused activities and community-based experiences can be seamlessly integrated into the agenda, allowing groups to engage with the destination in meaningful ways. Incentive programs benefit from the same dynamic, where the environment itself becomes part of the reward.

Getting here is easy. In addition to Miami and Fort Lauderdale airports, Key West

International Airport (EYW) offers nonstop service from 28 U.S. cities, giving groups multiple convenient options. For those arriving by car, the Overseas Highway, an All-American Road, offers a scenic drive unlike anywhere else in the country and sets the tone before the meeting even begins.

The right setting doesn't just support a meeting; it changes how people think, connect, and contribute. In The Florida Keys, that shift happens naturally, creating meetings that feel less like obligation and more like opportunity. 🌴

## Visit The Florida Keys & Key West

**Liana Pyne**  
Director of Group Sales

*Liana Pyne is an experienced leader with a deep Florida Keys background, known for building strong planner relationships, simplifying the process, and helping turn great meeting ideas into smooth, successful events.*



305-296-1552  
liana@fla-keys.com  
VisitFloridaKeys.com/Meeting-Planners

Explore some new terrain with your team.



In The Florida Keys & Key West, meetings don't mean stale coffee and awkward icebreakers. The work happens in well-designed meeting spaces, but what surrounds it changes the tone of the day. Step out for a guided hike, a paddle meetup or an easy dockside conversation before heading back in. Across five destinations, flexible venues and built-in experiences help planners create gatherings where teams connect, collaborate and make real progress.

VisitFloridaKeys.com/meeting-planners (305) 296-1552



# Auburn Marriott Opelika Resort & Spa at Grand National: Where Great Meetings Unwind

Photos courtesy Auburn Marriott Opelika Resort & Spa at Grand National



**A**t the Auburn Marriott Opelika Resort & Spa at Grand National, meetings are supported by full-service amenities, flexible spaces, and a setting that strengthens the experience. Tucked among the pines of east Alabama and just 90 minutes from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL), the resort pairs polished meeting spaces with amenities that make guests want to stay a little longer. With 221 guest rooms, AAA Four Diamond recognition, 15 event rooms, and more than 17,000 square feet of event space, the property gives planners the flexibility to host everything from executive retreats to full-scale conferences in one scenic setting. The Grand Ballroom welcomes up to 504 guests, while the 96-seat amphitheater adds a distinctive option for presentations, and the patio is the perfect space for receptions and outdoor programming space.

What sets the Marriott resort apart is what happens after the agenda ends. Guests can unwind at the award-winning Spa at Grand National, tee off on 54 holes at Grand National, part of Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, or spend the afternoon at three resort-style pools with cabanas and bar service. The property also offers biking and walking paths, eight tennis courts, four pickleball courts, and firepits that make evening networking feel more like a getaway than another obligation.

Dining is just as seamless. Southern Oak's restaurant, café, bar, and patio bar keep groups close to the action, with options ranging from specialty coffee and breakfast to poolside bites, steaks, seafood, and cocktails. For groups looking for a resort destination that delivers both productivity and relaxation, Auburn Marriott Opelika Resort & Spa at Grand National offers the best of both. 🍷

## Auburn Marriott Opelika Resort & Spa at Grand National

**Christy Stephens**  
Director of Sales and Marketing

*Christy and her team are passionate about hospitality and ensuring every customer has an excellent experience. She is a 19-year veteran in the hospitality industry.*



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# Discover Northeast Florida's Meetings Paradise

Photos: courtesy Amelia Island CVB



Successful meetings start with inspiring settings, and Amelia Island has inspiration in abundance. This is where Southern charm seems to grow on trees, and pristine beaches stretch for 13 miles. You'll also find a meetings experience rooted in service and hospitality, with year-round availability, even in the peak months. Discover a Florida oasis that caters to small to mid-sized meetings on Amelia Island.

## Venues and accommodations that outperform

World-famous resort and hotel brands have made a home on Amelia Island. Omni Amelia Island Resort & Spa invites guests to experience new dining concepts, an enhanced full-service spa, and reimagined guest rooms. Recently renovated, the resort offers approximately 80,000 square feet of flexible spaces, with nearly 29,000 square feet of outdoor space.

A jewel on the Atlantic beachfront, The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island presents a tradition of luxury and intuitive service, including exquisite dining and a lavish spa. Meeting planners have more than 48,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor event areas to work with, as well as the assistance of conference center experts.

The quality of Courtyard by Marriott, Springhill Suites by Marriott, Hampton Inn & Suites, and Residence Inn is well-known, and these focused-service hotel brands feature banquet and meeting rooms that make the right impression. They also provide technological

amenities and flexible meeting spaces with appealing contemporary décor.

## Unique venues that are a breath of fresh air

Amid the year-round sunshine and wide-open spaces, Amelia Island is rich with creative venues on land and sea. Picture brainstorming sessions under blue skies and breakout sessions on the sand. Attendees will always remember the collaboration that began with a tour of historic Fort Clinch and the cocktail hour, when they sailed the river at sunset.

The Preserve at The Amelia River Club combines elegance with a touch of wilderness. Masterfully planned with 6,000 square feet, this recently opened venue is located along the Intracoastal Waterway and overlooks water oaks and the tidal marsh.

## 100+ delicious destinations

On Amelia Island, inspiration, fresh flavors, and enthusiastic appetites have created a culinary culture unlike any other. Plan a delicious experience for your attendees from our dining scene featuring more than 100 independent restaurants, including seafood, international, craft breweries, and Southern favorites. A waterside view makes for a wonderful ice breaker, or your attendees might enjoy live acoustic music while dining on the patio. From hip downtown spots to fine dining, there's something to please everyone.

## Teambuilding that builds purpose

Thinking on your feet takes on new meaning as your team enjoys the lush beauty of

Amelia Island. Surprise everyone with a round of golf, a historic walking tour, or an invigorating hike under a canopy of moss-draped live oaks. You can also combine CSR goals with adventure during dune renourishment plantings, wildlife conservation programs, and beach cleanups. Helping preserve the island's natural treasures is an experience that will resonate with attendees long after they've returned home.

## Where work and ease go together

Invite your attendees to a destination that's easily accessible, just 25 miles from Jacksonville International Airport (JAX) and a 20-minute drive from I-95, so your team arrives refreshed and ready. You'll appreciate the ease of planning in a destination with mild temperatures year-round and Instagrammable scenery. 🌴

## Amelia Island CVB

### Paul Beirnes Vice President

Recognized as a strategic innovator in hospitality, Paul Beirnes held leadership roles at such brands as Visit Orlando, The Walt Disney Company, Hilton Corporate, and Naples-Marco Island CVB before relocating to Amelia Island.



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pbeirnes@ameliaisland.com  
Ameliasland.com/Meetings

# AMELIA ISLAND

F L O R I D A

Inspired by sunlight and blue sky thinking.



With wide open spaces, year-round availability and a fresh perspective on meetings, big ideas come easy on Amelia Island, Florida.

Find your inspiration at [AmeliaIsland.com/Meetings](https://AmeliaIsland.com/Meetings)

# Plan Meetings with Meaning on the Emerald Coast

As meeting priorities evolve, attendees increasingly seek experiences that fuel inspiration, spark connection, and support overall well-being. They want destinations that feel energizing, not exhausting, and spaces that make it easy to blend productivity with purpose.

Groups return to Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa (Hilton Sandestin Beach) year after year because everything they need is right here in one restorative beachfront setting. With enhanced meeting areas, numerous wellness options, and carefully selected group activities, planners can create gatherings that are both enjoyable and effective.

## Partner with onsite experts

Creating an impactful program is easier when you don't have to do it alone. At Hilton Sandestin Beach, our expert onsite event manager and skilled professional team collaborate with you from the start, bringing deep knowledge of our 62,500 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space to every step of the planning process.

From room layouts and coffee breaks to transportation and logistics, they help streamline the details. Looking to add a wellness component? They can also connect you with specialists for guided meditation and other health-forward enhancements.

## Build in wellness breaks

Modern meeting agendas benefit from intentional pauses that re-center and recharge attendees. At Hilton Sandestin Beach, those breaks can take place just steps from your meeting room on our private white-sand beach. A quiet walk, a few minutes of Gulf views, or a deep breath of salt air can make all the difference in sustaining engagement. For longer breaks, our onsite Serenity by the Sea Spa offers a 24-hour fitness center and a range of services to be enjoyed in an hour or less.

## Strengthen connections with group activities

Set against the Gulf of Mexico, the resort offers a natural backdrop for teambuilding and shared experiences. Planners can customize activities to match their group's interests, from relaxing with massages at our award-winning spa and joining beachfront yoga sessions to



enjoying sunset bonfires or competing in beach Olympics.

For smaller gatherings or executive teams, you can host a memorable dinner at our AAA Four Diamond steakhouse, or choose from a collection of onsite dining venues that highlight fresh Gulf flavors.

## Inspire longer stays

Whether your attendees are traveling from near or far, the Emerald Coast offers a perfect blend of business and relaxation. Promote a positive work-life balance or create an extra incentive for participation by encouraging guests to extend their stay before or after the event. Reach out to our sales team to inquire about extending your group rate dates.

Ready to meet at Hilton Sandestin Beach? Visit [HiltonSandestinBeach.com/Florida-Meetings](https://www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com/Florida-Meetings) to customize your next event! 🍷

## Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa

**Kevin Rosa**  
Director of Sales & Marketing

*With more than 30 years of experience in sales, marketing, and incentive travel, Kevin Rosa specializes in luxury group incentive travel, full-service meetings and events, and employee recognition programs.*



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[HiltonSandestinBeach.com/Florida-Meetings](https://www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com/Florida-Meetings)

# Lake Charles, La.: Where Meetings are Packed with Joy

Courtesy Visit Lake Charles



and straightforward logistics make planning easier and more efficient. Visit Lake Charles serves as trusted connectors, offering resources, incentives, and hands-on guidance that keep events on track.

That ease continues on site. Integrated resort environments, like Golden Nugget Lake Charles and L'Auberge Casino Resort Lake Charles, bring meeting space, accommodations, dining, and entertainment together in one location. With scalable venues, diverse accommodations, and group-ready dining, Lake Charles is built to host meetings of all sizes without added complexity.

Planners can also take advantage of the Meeting Incentive Program, available through 2027, with savings tied to rooms actualized, helping budgets go farther without sacrificing quality.

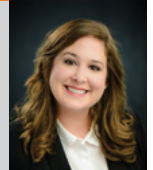
Beyond the agenda, attendees connect with authentic Cajun and Creole culture, from local

cuisine to vibrant festivals. Add in luxury touches and a strong reputation for successful events, and the result is clear: Meetings here just work. 🍷

## Visit Lake Charles

**Taylor Stanley**  
**Vice President of Sales**

*Taylor Stanley leads sales for Visit Lake Charles, working closely with meeting planners to simplify the planning process and deliver engaging, memorable events rooted in southwest Louisiana's authentic culture and hospitality.*



337-240-5779  
tstanley@visitlakecharles.org  
VisitLakeCharles.org

In Lake Charles, La., meetings don't just come together. They come together seamlessly. Planners choose Lake Charles for one simple reason: It works. From the start, clear communication, responsive support,



# A MEETING DESTINATION THAT JUST WORKS

# VISIT LAKE CHARLES

LOUISIANA'S PLAYGROUND



Hear why meeting planners choose Lake Charles!

VisitLakeCharles.org

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# ConventionSouth



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[www.conventionsouth.com](http://www.conventionsouth.com)

# South Padre Island: THE Island for Meetings That Don't Feel Like Meetings

Photos courtesy Shawn Parkin



## The experience beyond the meeting

On THE Island, the off-agenda moments are just as memorable as the meetings. Teams can set sail on dolphin-watching cruises, cast a line on deep-sea fishing charters, or paddle through the calm Laguna Madre. Groups often bond over eco-tours, guided nature walks, and hands-on activities that spark creativity and friendly competition.

When the day's sessions wrap, THE Island shifts into evening mode. Waterfront dining, live music, cocktail cruises, and bayside sunsets make meeting fellow attendees a bit more familiar.

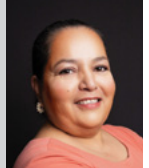
## Where work feels like play

On South Padre Island, meetings don't just stay on schedule, they create moments your attendees remember long after the final session ends. Because sometimes, the best conference room isn't a room at all. 🍹

## Visit South Padre Island

### Mayra Nunez Sales Director

*With more than 15 years at Visit South Padre Island, Mayra serves as the Sales Director, driving market growth while creating seamless, memorable meetings enhanced by the island's scenic Laguna Madre Bay backdrop.*



956-761-8389  
mayra@sopadre.com  
VisitSouthPadreIsland.com/Meetings

There's nothing wrong with a traditional conference room...until you realize your attendees would rather be anywhere else.

That's where South Padre Island comes in.

Here, meetings unfold along 34 miles of coastline, across waterfront terraces, and aboard catamarans, where brainstorming sessions feel like vacation.

On THE Island, work doesn't stop; it just feels a lot more like play.

## Spaces that work for you

The South Padre Island Convention Center is set along Laguna Madre Bay, with views that make early-morning sessions worth the wake-up call. Inside, you'll find 45,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including

a 22,500-square-foot exhibit hall, breakout rooms ready for groups of all sizes, and full audiovisual capabilities.

Step outside to waterfront terraces that turn coffee breaks into photo ops and receptions into unforgettable evenings.

## Easy stays, endless options

From beachfront resorts to intimate hotels and spacious condos, South Padre Island offers accommodations that fit every group, including five full-service resorts, each offering an average of 10,700 square feet of meeting space.

Water views, pool decks, and gathering spaces make networking feel less formal and a lot more natural. In addition, all offer convenient proximity to the Convention Center—allowing attendees to spend more time connecting than commuting.

# Branch Out with Kiawah Island's 50-Year Legacy



Cruising along 30 miles of paved trails on scenic Kiawah Island.

Photos courtesy Kiawah Island Golf Resort

At Kiawah Island Golf Resort, meetings take on a different type of energy: one that's not just about experiences, but about adventures that are truly unique, shaped by sunshine instead of deadlines. It's five decades of awe-inspiring oceanfront settings that naturally inspire one-of-a-kind connections from coast to court to course. Kiawah Island Golf Resort is a paradise where colleagues are welcomed with new ways to engage—and even more reasons to extend their stay.

## Purpose meets play

Here, agendas shift easily from focused sessions to exceptional teambuilding activities. Whether it's a morning meeting at the West Beach Conference Center or an impromptu evening get-together around a crackling fire, every moment carries a sense of wanderlust that attendees won't soon forget.

A year-round mild climate allows guests to enjoy beautiful outdoor receptions set amid fragrant flower borders and canopies of Spanish moss-draped oaks. Take guided nature tours for an even closer look at the region's abundant flora and fauna. Breeze along the hard-packed sandy shore on bicycles or explore 30 miles of paved paths. There's always something exciting on the horizon to discover.

## A new place to perch

Planners looking to branch out with their team will find it at the resort's latest addition, The Treehouse Activity Center at Night Heron Park. It's easy to tee off some friendly competition at the center's two golf SIMS, featuring top courses from around the globe, along with eight bowling lanes and an arcade where skills can be tested on everything from



Carolina Ballroom, West Beach Conference Center

Skee-ball to shooting hoops, air hockey, Mario Kart, and shuffleboard. Afterward, stop by The Perch for laughter, drinks, and pub fare.

## World-class rounds

For golfers, the resort offers the rare opportunity to play five celebrated championship layouts consistently ranked among the world's best, including the crown jewel Ocean Course. Boasting the most seaside holes in North America, with sweeping Atlantic views from all 18, this Pete & Alice Dye masterpiece is renowned for PGA and Ryder Cup play, and will again host the PGA Championship in 2031. Turtle Point by Jack Nicklaus, Osprey Point by Tom Fazio, Oak Point by Clyde Johnston, and Cougar Point by Gary Player round out the legendary list of the property's must-play courses.

## Waves of inspiration

Featuring 10 miles of pristine shoreline and the Kiawah River, as well as myriad lagoons, tidal creeks, and scenic salt marshes, the resort is a haven for waterfront activities. Kayaking, paddleboarding, sunset cruises, beach yoga, dolphin encounters, fishing charters, and shelling expeditions are among the popular group activities. When it's time to trade the tides for tubes, pool complexes are the ideal location to unwind under an umbrella or dive in, depending on the mood.

## Coastal serves

For those who prefer to rally, the property's acclaimed Roy Barth Tennis Center—long recognized as the No.1 tennis resort in the world by Tennis Resorts Online—offers 22 state-of-the-art tennis courts, six dedicated pickleball courts, and two brand-new padel courts for

every skill level. Group and private lessons are also available. The newly remodeled tennis clubhouse is a retreat for serious and leisure players, with a thoughtfully curated and fully stocked pro shop, an inviting outdoor patio, ample seating, TVs, and The Courtside Café—ideal for post-game relaxing and refueling.

## Culinary standouts

In addition to The Courtside Café, groups can choose from 15 additional restaurants and eateries in The Kiawah Dining Collection. Savor South Carolina's only Forbes Five-Star dining experience at The Ocean Room, or enjoy authentic tastes from Italy, sustainable seafood, casual gourmet options, and signature Magic Milkshakes made with locally sourced Wholly Cow ice cream. Guests can also get their fill of Lowcountry culture and cuisine at the Mingo Point Oyster Roast & BBQ, the resort's longest-standing tradition, complete with live music and dancing under the stars.

## Iconic island escapes

Unforgettable stays await at private Resort Villas, offering all the conveniences and comforts of home, or at The Sanctuary—one of just five U.S. properties to carry a Triple Forbes Five-Star distinction for accommodations, restaurant, and spa. Each provides full access to resort amenities, including pool complexes and preferred times for dining and golf.

Kiawah Island Golf Resort is easily accessible by car or Charleston International Airport (CHS). When it comes to memorable meetings, nothing comes close to Kiawah—for five decades and counting. 🍷

## Kiawah Island Golf Resort

### Mary Rieger Director of Sales

Mary Rieger joined Kiawah Island Golf Resort as director of Southeast sales in November 2010 and has served as director of sales since December 2024.



877-713-4907  
mary\_rieger@kiawahresort.com  
KiawahMeetings.com

# 50 YEARS

| OF MEMORABLE GATHERINGS |



At Kiawah Island Golf Resort, team meetings aren't attended—they're experienced. Rolling surf replaces the clatter of keyboards and fresh-air adventures flow naturally into the day's agenda.

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# Collaborate with Disney for Your Next Meeting!



**W**hen the goal is impact and inspiration, having the right partner makes all the difference in creating real meetings magic.

Working with Disney Meetings & Events unlocks a world of endless possibilities to drive results and create transformational experiences across Disney destinations and immersive theme park environments. Our team of Disney Event Architects collaborates with meeting professionals to carry a vision from dream to delivery, working from our Creative Studio, a reimagined innovation center. This stand-alone creative hub brings together dynamic resources—from entertainment and décor to catering and multimedia technology—combining expert talent and tools all under one roof. Disney Meetings & Events is your all-in-one provider, leveraging Disney’s unmatched expertise to elevate your convention, meeting, event, or incentive program.

Walt Disney World’s resort collection includes Disney’s Coronado Springs Resort, an oasis set along the shore of Lago Dorado and the ideal venue to host your meeting or convention. This resort celebrates the daring spirits of the great Spanish explorers, artists, writers, and architects. The majestic 15-story Gran Destino Tower serves as the main entrance for the resort and features a gorgeous two-story

lobby ideal for gathering and networking. The resort now has a total of 2,385 guest rooms and suites within the main tower and neighboring bungalows.

Tolédo – Tapas, Steak & Seafood, a grand table-service restaurant, adorns the rooftop of the Gran Destino Tower. This dining experience features Spanish-inspired cuisine and serves up incredible panoramic views of the Walt Disney World Resort and was recently recognized by the MICHELIN Restaurant Guide. A welcoming oasis can be found on the waters of Lago Dorado with Villa del Lago’s Three Bridges Bar & Grill, which can be accessed via walkways traversing the lake, making it very convenient no matter where you are staying within the resort. Beautiful and unique spaces at both venues will provide wonderful private dining options for hosting clients or VIPs.

Other exciting features of the resort include meeting and event spaces in the Gran Destino tower, including three multipurpose rooms, a 24-seat boardroom, and outdoor event spaces. These additional spaces expand the meeting and event space to more than 220,000 square feet within the resort.

At Disney Meetings & Events, we’re connected. When you work with Disney, you get access to the resources and expertise of our specialized designers and partners

to supplement your own. When you choose Disney, you’re choosing to add us to your team. Our team of Disney Event Architects will work with you every step of the way, sharing and developing ideas and resources to create the best possible outcome for your organization. Rest easy knowing that all your event needs can be found in one place. Everything we do at Disney is created with our world-class imagination—and this goes for your meetings and events, too. We work to ensure that you stay excited and inspired throughout every stage of the process. At Disney, meetings aren’t planned; they’re designed. Let’s create magic! 🧙‍♀️

## Disney Meetings & Events

**Carla Hunt**  
National Sales Director

*Carla Hunt is the national sales director for Disney Meetings & Events, representing the portfolio of meetings destinations, including Walt Disney World, Disneyland, Aulani, and Disney Cruise Line.*



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**Let's create magic.**



# Business by the Bay at Kent Island Resort

Courtesy Kent Island Resort



The Chesapeake Bay has long been a place where ideas move—by tide, by trade, and by intention. At the historic Kent Island Resort, that same sense of momentum carries into every corporate gathering, where peace on the water meets purposeful productivity.

With stunning views and a plethora of outdoor activities, Kent Island Resort offers

teams a setting designed to refresh focus and inspire connection. Natural light, expansive views, and thoughtfully designed meeting spaces create an environment where ideas feel less stagnant and collaboration comes as naturally as the waves. From versatile indoor venues to open-air gathering spaces, each setting encourages clarity without the constraints of a traditional office or conference center.

Beyond meetings, productivity takes on a more meaningful rhythm. Teams reconnect over chef-driven dining, unwind during wine tastings, or reset with restorative experiences like yoga and time outdoors. These shared moments don't just relax; they strengthen communication, spark creativity, and leave teams feeling re-energized.

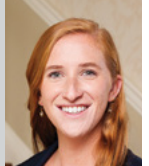
At Kent Island Resort, the workday doesn't end; it transforms. What begins as a meeting becomes an experience, and time away

becomes an investment in focus, connection, and lasting impact. For companies seeking a retreat that feels both radiant and refined, Kent Island Resort offers a coastal escape where productivity flows as naturally as the Bay itself. 🌊

## Kent Island Resort

**Carlie DuLac**  
**Business Development Manager**

*Carlie DuLac partners with meeting planners to create seamless corporate retreats and events, bringing a personalized approach, attention to detail, and a passion for crafting memorable group experiences.*



410-604-8227  
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# BUSINESS BY THE BAY



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From St. Louis to Kansas City, the Show Me State has lots of options for planners. Major cities offer great choices in hotels, event venues, and attractions, while the well-known live entertainment destination of Branson continues to grow and expand its offerings. College towns, historic towns, rural areas, and lake resorts offer their own character and culture. Located in the middle of the country, with easy interstate access and major airports, Missouri is a prime location for meetings and events.

## EVENT PLANNERS' GUIDE TO

# MO

# Missouri

BY D. FRAN MORLEY



The National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City offers group tours and space for private events, including an auditorium, a lobby, and outdoor event spaces to accommodate up to 10,000 guests.

Michael Edwards/Courtesy Visit KC

### Branson

**ExploreBranson.com/Meetings;**  
**@ExploreBranson**

Branson offers a unique blend of outdoor adventure, live entertainment, and elevated meeting space that makes the destination perfect for any type of group, says Sierra Delrosa, sales and administrative specialist for Explore Branson. “Branson is also the perfect setting for unforgettable teambuilding or wellness retreats. With scenic golf outings overlooking the Ozarks, high-energy fun ziplining at Fritz’s Adventure, and relaxing boating on Table Rock Lake, there’s something for everyone. Add thrilling Pink Jeep tours and rejuvenating hiking trails, and your group gets the ideal mix of adventure, connection, and relaxation.”

Entertainment options in Branson include more than 100 live entertainment/music shows, museums, an aquarium, a scenic train ride,

and Silver Dollar City theme park, featuring more than 40 rides and attractions, as well as more than 100 local artisans demonstrating and selling their crafts.

The city offers more than 20,000 guest lodging options. Chateau on the Lake has 301 guest rooms and 53,052 square feet of function space across 19 event rooms, including the Great Hall, which can seat 2,250 classroom style. The AAA Four Diamond resort also offers a full-service spa and a marina. Spanning 4,600 acres, Big Cedar Lodge has multiple golf courses, a nature arena, a spa, lake cruises, and more. The 362-room resort offers a variety of lodging options, including the lodge, lakeside cottages, rustic cabins, and on-course golf accommodations. It features 21,000 square feet of meeting and event space, including the Grand View Conference Center, which can accommodate up to 1,000 guests.

Branson Convention Center, located downtown and adjacent to the Branson Landing dining and shopping complex, has more than 220,000 square feet of event space, including a 48,000-square-foot exhibit hall. The convention center is connected to the 292-room Hilton Branson Convention Center, which offers an additional 3,462 square feet of event space. A five-minute walk away is the 242-room Hilton Promenade at Branson Landing, with 1,898 square feet of space, including a 120-person-capacity ballroom.

Approximately 10 minutes from downtown Branson, College of the Ozarks offers unique dining and event spaces, including the Keeter Center, which features the 4,900-square-foot Royal Oak Forum (seats 350 classroom style) and the 300-seat Silver Dollar City Parlor, plus additional smaller meeting and event spaces. In addition, the college’s Mabee Lodge has 15 luxury suites.

## Cape Girardeau

**VisitCape.com; @VisitCape**

Big news in Cape Girardeau is the recent opening of BetMGM Sportsbook at Century Casino and Hotel, according to VisitCape.com. Century Casino and Hotel features The Riverview, a 69-room hotel with 7,450 square feet of event space and 41,000 square feet of casino gaming space. Sportsbook includes a classic menu, a full bar, and self-service BetMGM kiosks.

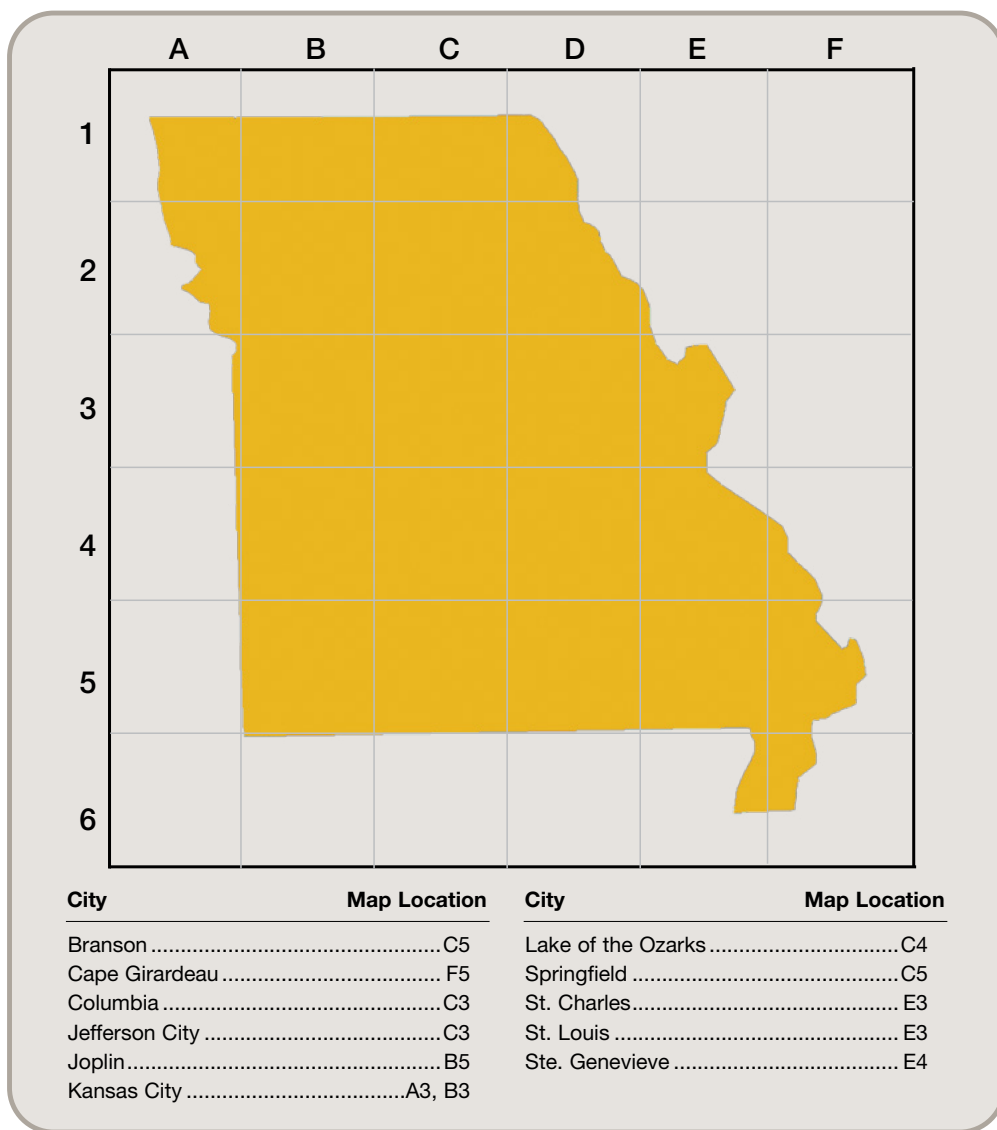
Drury Plaza Hotel Cape Girardeau Conference Center offers 168 guest rooms and 14,000 square feet of meeting space at the conference center, plus 1,400 square feet of function space at the hotel. Buckner-Ragsdale Event Center in downtown has event spaces for parties, corporate events, and other gatherings, including a ballroom seating 300, a loft with a capacity of 200 guests, and two smaller rooms. Osage Center, a city-owned multipurpose space for conventions, meetings, and sports events, includes a 16,677-square-foot main floor and six meeting rooms. Southeast Missouri State University offers a variety of classrooms, meeting rooms, and performance venues.

## Columbia

**VisitColumbiaMO.com; @VisitColumbiaMO**

Columbia’s central location allows attendees to “meet in the middle from all directions,” says Terra Nuzum, tourism sales specialist for Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). “We are an ideal location for events. In addition to being easily accessible, Columbia is affordable, vibrant, and fun. There is always something for every age and interest. What truly sets us apart is our strong focus on hospitality. We want to make sure every attendee has a memorable experience that leaves them eager to return.”

There are approximately 3,726 guest rooms in the city, according to the CVB. Wyndham Executive Center Columbia, which expects to complete a full renovation by 2027, has 298 guest rooms and 40,000 square feet of function space to seat up to 1,600 banquet guests; the 151-room Hilton Garden Inn has 12,638 square feet of meeting space; and the 181-room Stoney Creek Columbia and Frontier Conference Center has four main event rooms with space to seat 600 banquet guests. The Broadway Columbia, a DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel debuted a new tower in 2025; it now has 192 guest rooms and



9,000 square feet of event space. Additionally, the 133-room Courtyard by Marriott Columbia has 9,602 square feet of event space to host up to 450 guests; the 134-room Hampton Inn & Suites Columbia at the University of Missouri has 7,088 square feet of meeting space; and voco, The Tiger Hotel, a historic downtown landmark, has 62 guest rooms and event space for up to 200 seated guests.

Event venues on the campuses of Columbia’s three colleges include the 1,700-seat Jesse Auditorium, 1,200-seat historic Missouri Theatre, two auditoriums, and more than 30 meeting rooms at the University of Missouri; a variety of spaces at Columbia College, including the 571-seat Launer Auditorium; and the 350-person-capacity Kimball Ballroom and the newly renovated Hugh Stephens Penthouse at Stephens College that can host 120 reception guests.

Columbia prides itself on a variety of locally owned restaurants, breweries, distilleries, and wineries, with parks, trails, and nature areas to explore, plus unique opportunities for teambuilding and excursions. “Visitors will enjoy Rocheport, a small, charming town a few miles away with a general store, antique shops and more; North Village Arts District, with galleries, restaurants, shops, and a monthly First Friday Art Crawl; The Stockyards, with fun for the whole family; the Shops at Sharp End, with a rich Black history and heritage trail to explore; and The District, a several-block area of downtown with dining, retail, and live entertainment, surrounded by our three college campuses,” says Nuzum.

## Jefferson City

**VisitJeffersonCity.com; @VisitJeffersonCity**

Perched on a high bluff overlooking the Missouri

Courtesy Columbia CVB

Planners can choose from a variety of spaces at The University of Missouri in Columbia, including the 1,700-seat Jesse Auditorium, 1,200-seat historic Missouri Theatre, two auditoriums, and more than 30 meeting rooms.



River, the state capital of Jefferson City features hiking and biking trails, a historic downtown, and unique historic attractions, including the state capitol building, which houses the Missouri State Museum and a collection of public art. A few blocks away, the 1870s-era Governor's Mansion is one of the few state executive residences in the country that is open to the public for tours, according to VisitJeffersonCity.com. The mansion and adjacent gardens offer event space for a 120-person reception or a 72-person seated dinner.

Located downtown, the 225-room Capitol Plaza Hotel & Convention Center has 22,000 square feet of event space, including a ballroom seating 1,200 banquet style. Other hotels with event space include the 151-room DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Jefferson City, with 8,152 square feet of function space, including a ballroom seating 500 theater style; 121-room Courtyard by Marriott Jefferson City, with 6,245 square feet of function space; and 131-room Holiday Inn & Suites, with space for 160 reception style or 196 theater style.

## Joplin

**VisitJoplinMO.com; @VisitJoplinMO**

In the rolling hills of southwest Missouri, Joplin is a gateway to one of the state's most ecologically rich regions. "Shoal Creek, considered the most biologically diverse creek in the state, winds through the area, offering scenic beauty and wildlife sightings.

Our location at the crossroads of interstates 44 and 49, plus the legendary Route 66 and the Jefferson Highway, means there is easy access," says Kerstin Landwer, assistant director/director of sales for Visit Joplin. "Our history, vibrant culture, striking natural beauty, and exceptional value make Joplin a standout destination in the Midwest."

There are nearly 1,840 guest rooms in Joplin. The 160-room LaQuinta Inn & Suites by Wyndham Joplin has 1,600 square feet of event space to accommodate 100 guests, and Holiday Inn Joplin has a 2,300-square-foot ballroom and three meeting rooms.

Offsite event space includes Joplin Expo, with 40,000 square feet of exhibit space and a 9,000-square-foot ballroom; The Harry M. Cornell Arts & Entertainment Complex, with a 435-seat theater (that also can accommodate 256 banquet guests), classrooms, breakout areas, and outdoor decks and patios; and Scottish Rite Cathedral, a historic facility with a 385-seat auditorium and a dining area seating 400. Joplin Avenue Coffee has space for up to 100 guests, while Chaos Brewing, a stop on the popular Steins & Vines Trail, has a taproom, private indoor event space, and patio space for up to 100 guests.

With its historic location on Route 66, Joplin delivers small-town charm with a big personality, Landwer says. "Joplin delivers an experience that feels both rooted in history and refreshingly unexpected." Popular stops include

Fred & Red's and Wilder's Steakhouse, both in operation since 1929. Held the first week in June, the World Street Painting Festival showcases 3-D street paintings created by more than 20 different artists. "These 3-D images, with Route 66 themes, appear to pop right out of the ground when seen from a specific viewpoint, making for great photo ops," Landwer says.

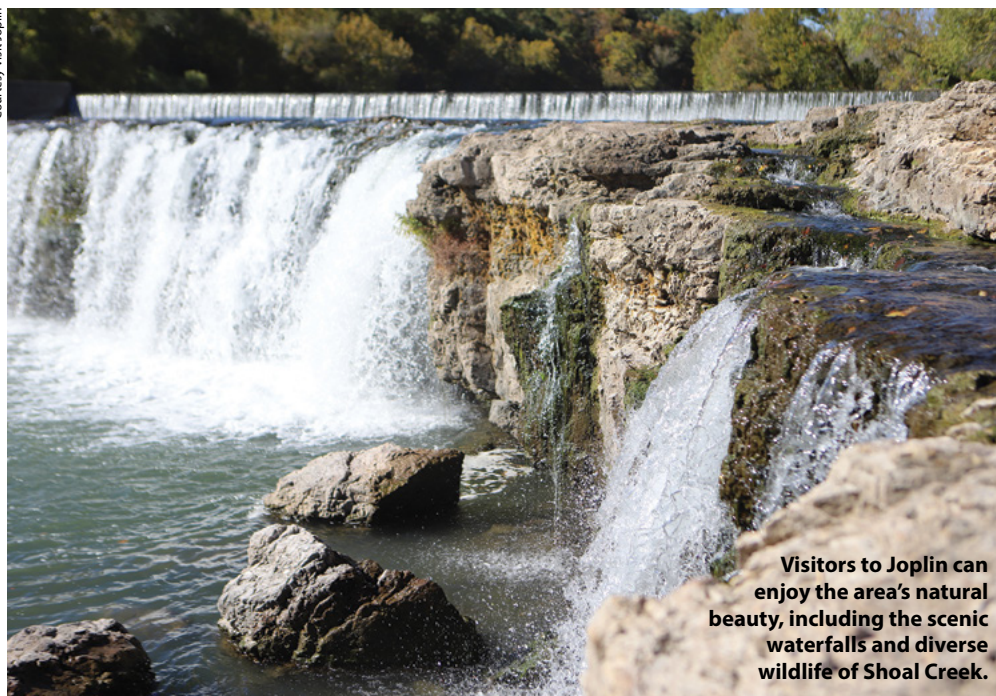
## Kansas City

**VisitKC.com/Meetings; @VisitKC**

In Kansas City, planners can take advantage of affordability without sacrificing on culture and personality, says Nathan Hermiston, senior vice president of sales and services for Visit KC. "From our historic traditions like jazz and barbecue to our world-class museums and innovative projects taking shape across the city, meeting attendees have plenty of opportunities to experience what sets Kansas City apart. Whether it's an opening reception at the vibrant KC Live Block, a board dinner at one of KC's founding barbecue restaurants, or a networking event at the upcoming Barney Allis Plaza, Kansas City's event spaces celebrate our rich history while also embracing the future."

In 2026 and beyond, KC is welcoming more than \$2 billion in development, with new hotels, restaurants, and event space at KC's Convention District and downtown, Hermiston says. "We are particularly excited about the revitalized Barney Allis Plaza, just steps from the Kansas

Courtesy Visit Joplin



Visitors to Joplin can enjoy the area's natural beauty, including the scenic waterfalls and diverse wildlife of Shoal Creek.

City Convention Center. Slated to open in fall 2026, the reimagined plaza will be one of KC's premier public spaces, offering an array of multifunctional outdoor spaces, including a paved event plaza for large events, multiple green spaces, a pavilion, a play area, and a dog park, all in the heart of the city. Below the plaza, a parking garage will offer approximately 580 spaces with connections to the Kansas City Marriott Downtown and Municipal Auditorium via an underground pedestrian tunnel."

Several hotels are expected to open in the Kansas City area by summer 2026, according to Visit KC. These include the dual AC Hotel & Residence Inn by Marriott, with 261 guest rooms; an 84-room Aiden by Best Western, in the historic Kessler Building, which is the site of Walt Disney's first art studio; and the 93-room Atwell Suites Liberty. All of these are expected to have small event spaces. Also coming this summer, a 134-room Hilton Garden Inn Kansas City Riverside will offer 2,500 square feet of meeting and event space.

The 228-room Margaritaville Hotel Kansas City, which opened in 2025, has 14,000 square feet of function space. Since 2023, nine hotels have opened in the immediate area, with 10 more set to open throughout 2026.

In 2025, the city opened a 3.5-mile expansion of the free Kansas City Streetcar, adding 16 new stops in popular neighborhoods and near top hotels; another 0.7-mile extension is set to open this spring.

The 800,000-square-foot Kansas City Convention Center, located just steps from the popular Power & Light District, is the region's largest event facility. It features a 388,000-square-foot column-free exhibit space, a 2,400-seat theater, a 46,484-square-foot ballroom, 45 meeting rooms, and an outdoor festival plaza that can host up to 2,000 people. Connecting directly to the convention center is the 800-room Loews Kansas City Hotel, which features 60,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor event space. Additional hotels with event space near the convention center include the 970-room Kansas City Marriott Downtown, with 115,406 square feet of event space, and the 385-room Crowne Plaza Kansas City Downtown, with 15,000 square feet of event space. The 724-room Westin Kansas City at Crown Center has 44,347 square feet of event space, while the 730-room Sheraton Kansas City Hotel at Crown Center has 96,537 square feet of meeting and event space. The two hotels connect to the Crown Center shopping and entertainment district—home to the international headquarters of Hallmark Cards and more than 30 shops and restaurants—via The Link, an elevated, climate-controlled pedestrian walkway. The 392-room Harrah's Kansas City has a 60,000-square-foot gaming floor and a full-service convention center, including a ballroom seating 550 banquet style.

Unique offsite venues include the National World War I Museum and Memorial, with a

240-seat auditorium, a 225-person-capacity lobby, and outdoor event spaces to accommodate up to 10,000 guests; historic Union Station, with space for up to 2,500 guests; and the American Jazz Museum, with a 500-seat theater.

## Lake of the Ozarks

**FunLake.com; @FunLakeMO**

Covering three counties in central Missouri, Lake of the Ozarks has event spaces for groups of up to 3,000, with 14 championship golf courses and numerous marinas in an affordable, centralized location, according to FunLake.com.

The 54,000-acre lake has 1,150 miles of shoreline with six convention hotels. Margaritaville Lake Resort, Lake of the Ozarks has 550 guest rooms (plus additional vacation homes) and more than 76,000 square feet of function space across 27 event rooms, including a ballroom seating 1,200 guests classroom style. The resort features a spa, an indoor waterpark, golf, a marina with boat rentals, and kids' activities. The Lodge of Four Seasons has 356 guest rooms and multiple event spaces for up to 1,800 convention guests; it offers a full-service marina, a spa, 54 holes of golf, and other amenities. Set on 700 acres, Old Kinderhook Resort and Golf Club offers lodge and vacation-home accommodations, features more than 11,000 square feet of indoor conference space, and offers 8,000 square feet of outdoor space for up to 250 guests. Camden on the Lake Resort has 116 guest rooms, 19,000 square feet of meeting and event space, and a marina offering boat rentals. The Resort at Lake of the Ozarks has 155 guest rooms and 16,000 square feet of function space, while the 153-room Inn at Grand Glaize has 15,000 square feet of event space. The Inn at Grand Glaize offers an exclusive multi-day "takeover" for larger groups.

The 10,000-seat Ozarks Amphitheater offers a regular schedule of concerts and shows and is available for private events.

## Springfield

**SpringfieldMO.org; @LoveSpringfield**

Springfield offers a distinctive mix of urban amenities, cultural experiences, and outdoor adventures, according to Madison Woods, communications manager for Visit Springfield. "We're a city built on bold ideas," Woods says, "We helped put Route 66 on the map in 1926, we're home to the original Bass Pro Shops, we're the founding location of O'Reilly

Courtesy Visit Springfield MO

**Originally built as an orphanage in 1913, Pythian Castle in Springfield provides a unique setting for events, with a ballroom seating 200.**



Courtesy Visit KC

**The 800-room Loews Kansas City Hotel features 60,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor event space and connects to the 800,000-square-foot Kansas City Convention Center.**



Auto Parts, and the home of Springfield-style cashew chicken. We're also where you will find Fantastic Caverns, America's only ride-through cave. Planners will find authentic experiences here. Attendees can explore Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium, tour the caverns, or stroll through our vibrant downtown with rooftop bars, live-music venues, and locally owned restaurants, all near hotels and meeting spaces."

The 267-room University Plaza Hotel and Convention Center is located across the street

from the Springfield Expo Center. Together, the two facilities offer 160,000 square feet of function space to seat up to 1,500 guests theater style, with 35 breakout spaces. Oasis Hotel & Convention Center, an Ascend Collection Hotel has 173 guest rooms and more than 30,000 square feet of function space to accommodate 1,500 guests. The recently renovated DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Springfield has 203 guest rooms and 30,000 square feet of meeting and event space, including the recently opened Glendalough Conference Center, which can

host 500 guests banquet style or seat 800 theater style. In downtown, the historic AAA Four Diamond Hotel Vandivort has 97 guest rooms, a 1,500-square-foot meeting hall, a penthouse-level 2,800-square-foot ballroom, and two smaller meeting rooms.

White River Conference Center, adjacent to Wonders of Wildlife Museum & Aquarium and the original Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World, has space to seat up to 1,000 theater style for corporate events, social gatherings, and meetings. Just across the street from the conference center is the 67-room Bass Pro Shops Anglers Lodge. Pythian Castle, originally built as an orphanage in 1913, now offers history tours, escape rooms, ghost events, and murder mystery nights. The historic venue features a ballroom seating 200.

## St. Charles

**DiscoverStCharles.com;**

**@DiscoverStCharlesMO**

Located just minutes from St. Louis Lambert International Airport (STL), St. Charles is known for its walkable historic Main Street, lined with more than 100 locally owned shops, restaurants, and attractions, and set against a scenic riverfront backdrop that provides built-in entertainment for attendees, according to Joanie Ohlms, director of sales for Discover St. Charles. "What makes St. Charles truly memorable is its ability to deliver a destination-style atmosphere without the big-city stress," Ohlms says. "Planners appreciate the city's strong inventory of hotels and flexible meeting spaces, while attendees love the vibrant mix of dining, nightlife, gaming, and arts and culture, including venues like Foundry Art Centre and the nearby Katy Trail. Our niche is creating meetings that feel like a getaway, where history, hospitality, and a lively sense of place come together. We offer year-round festivals, strong visitor services, and a reputation for being both easy to navigate and full of character."

There are 2,587 guest rooms in the city, according to Discover St. Charles.

Ameristar Casino Resort Spa has completed a significant expansion and renovation, Ohlms notes. "The project tripled the size of its meeting and convention center, adding 43,000 square feet of state-of-the-art event space and an enhanced pre-function area. The resort now features 65,000 square feet of event and meeting space, making it one of the largest convention centers in the St. Louis metro area." The resort has a 130,000-square-foot casino and 400 guest rooms.

St. Charles Convention Center features a 35,700-square-foot exhibit hall, multiple breakout and meeting rooms, and a grand ballroom that can accommodate 1,577 guests theater style. It is connected to the 296-room Embassy Suites by Hilton St. Louis St. Charles, which features an additional 12,386 square feet of function space. The 180-room Drury Plaza St. Louis St. Charles, part of the entertainment, shopping, and dining destination Streets of St. Charles, has four event rooms, including a ballroom seating 144 theater style.

St. Charles offers a variety of excursions and teambuilding opportunities. In the communities of Augusta and Defiance, in Historic Missouri Wine Country, attractions and activities include eight vineyards, the historic Daniel Boone Home and Village, Miss Augusta Cruises (public and private charters), hiking and biking along the KATY Trail, local parks with lots of recreation opportunities, and personalized teambuilding programs. “In Historic Main Street, Missouri’s oldest and largest historic district, ‘Hit the Bricks’ tours are a terrific opportunity to discover the people and places that shaped the city,” Ohlms says, noting such attractions as the Lewis & Clark Boathouse and Museum, celebrating the Corps of Discovery and their journey west, along with Foundry Art Centre, Lindenwood University, and lots of nightlife and unique local dining options.

## St. Louis

### ExploreStLouis.com; @ExploreStLouis

For those who think they’ve seen it all, St. Louis surprises, says Catherine Neville, vice president of communications for Explore St. Louis. “We deliver a rare mix of accessibility, affordability, and unexpected adventures that feel anything but ordinary,” Neville says, noting media outlets have recognized St. Louis as the “next great food city,” while Grand Centr has been spotlighted as the nation’s “most exciting emerging arts district.” She adds, “With more free attractions than any U.S. city other than D.C., travelers can explore iconic landmarks like the Gateway Arch National Park without spending a penny.”

In the heart of downtown, America’s Center Convention Complex has four distinct facilities under one roof: Cervantes Convention Center, The Dome at America’s Center, the St. Louis Executive Conference Center, and



Big Muddy Adventures offers river paddles in downtown St. Louis, full-moon floats to river islands, and other paddle outings on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

© Gregg Goldman Photography/Courtesy Explore St. Louis

the Ferrara Theater. Altogether, the center features 574,000 square feet of exhibit halls, a 28,000-square-foot ballroom, a 1,400-seat theater, a 67,000-seat arena, and more than 95 meeting rooms.

St. Louis has nearly 8,000 guest rooms in the heart of a walkable, redeveloped downtown central business district, all within a mile or less of the America’s Center.

Set to open this spring in the historic Jefferson Arms building, AC Hotel St. Louis Downtown will feature 225 guest rooms, 235 apartments, and 13,686 square feet of event space for up to 766 guests. Larger convention hotels include the

910-room Hyatt Regency St. Louis at the Arch—the closest hotel to Gateway Arch National Park—with 83,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space; historic 917-room Marriott St. Louis Grand, with 74,014 total square feet of function space across 40 event rooms; 671-room Hilton St. Louis at the Ballpark, with 36,436 square feet of event space, including a grand ballroom with a reception capacity of 1,500; 173-room 21c Museum Hotel, with an art gallery, a full-service wellness center, and more than 14,000 square feet of function space; and 216-room Live! By Loews St. Louis, with 17,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor event space.

Courtesy Discover St. Charles



**Part of the Historic Missouri Wine Country in St. Charles, Chandler Hill Vineyards offers a beautiful backdrop for private events.**

Courtesy Explore Branson



**Spanning 4,600 acres, the 362-room Big Cedar Lodge in Branson offers a variety of lodging options and features multiple golf courses, a nature arena, a spa, lake cruises, and 21,000 square feet of meeting and event space.**

With 567 guest rooms and more than 100,000 square feet of event space, including 48 meeting rooms, the AAA Four Diamond St. Louis Union Station Hotel, Curio Collection by Hilton has been a St. Louis icon since 1894. Prime spaces at the complex include Midway, which can seat 3,178 theater style, and the historic Grand Hall, which seats 400 banquet guests and features a 65-foot-high barrel-vaulted ceiling covered

in frescoes, intricate woodwork, and Tiffany windows. The St. Louis Aquarium and a 200-foot-tall observation wheel are part of the Union Station complex.

Located in downtown near the Gateway Arch, Horseshoe St. Louis Casino features two hotels: the 294-room Hotel Lumière at The Arch and the 200-room Four Seasons Hotel St. Louis. The hotels offer more than 20,000 square feet of event space, including

an 8,000-square-foot ballroom. The complex offers table games, poker, slots, boutique shopping, spa services, and fine dining, including Ramsay's Kitchen and Morton's The Steakhouse.

Offsite event venues include the 40,000-person-capacity Busch Stadium and Ballpark Village, with more than 15 venues, concert stages, and other event spaces; City Museum, with a variety of event rooms, including the 300-person-capacity Vault Room, adorned with salvaged bank relics; City Winery, part of City Foundry, with a dining room, mezzanine, patio, and concert venues; and St. Louis Art Museum, located in Forrest Park and featuring a 465-seat auditorium. Event space at the city's famous Anheuser-Busch Brewery includes the 150-person-capacity Lager Room, an outdoor tented and heated Biergarten for up to 300 guests, and an indoor Biergarten, which can seat up to 150 guests, or 500 guests when combined with the outdoor space.

For teambuilding and excursion options, Big Muddy Adventures offers river paddles in downtown, full-moon floats to river islands, and other paddles on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

## Ste. Genevieve

**VisitSteGen.com; @VisitSteGen**

Founded by French Canadians around 1735, with a big German settlement beginning in the mid-1800s, Ste. Genevieve is Missouri's oldest permanent European settlement. According to VisitSteGen.com, it's a small community "that tells a big piece of America's story." Part of the National Park Service, the Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park includes the historic downtown, with three architecturally significant anchor buildings and an arts colony dating from the 1930s.

According to Visit SteGen.com, lodging includes historic inns, cottages, bed-and-breakfasts, and small hotels. Hometown Inn & Suites offers 48 guest rooms and suites, as well as a small meeting room, and the historic Hotel Audubon has seven boutique-style guest rooms, a restaurant, and two small event rooms.

In the surrounding wine country, Baetje Farms has five luxury tiny homes on a farm making award-winning goat cheese. It is across the road from Chateau Ste. Genevieve winery, which offers tastings and tours. 🍷

Virginia offers groups an appealing blend of modern versatility with historic prestige. The commonwealth's strategic East Coast location provides effortless accessibility, while a diverse portfolio of venues—ranging from colonial estates and mountain resorts to state-of-the-art convention centers—caters to events of practically any size and type.

## EVENT PLANNERS' GUIDE TO

# VA

# Virginia

BY NICOLE DUFOUR

Virginia is rich in American history and attractions, including George Washington's Mount Vernon.



### Alexandria

**VisitAlexandria.com; @VisitAlexVA**

Located on the Potomac River waterfront and home to America's third-oldest historic district, Alexandria offers a diverse mix of hotel brands and more than 130,000 square feet of meeting space.

"Alexandria is an ideal destination for boutique-sized meetings," says Andrew Postal, director of communications for Visit Alexandria. "Our evolving hotel landscape continues to elevate the visitor experience through refreshed spaces, inclusive initiatives, and new amenities."

Hotels with event space include Westin Alexandria Old Town, with nearly 41,000 square feet of event space to host up to 900 people for receptions. Hilton Alexandria Mark Center features more than 37,000 square feet; its largest space can accommodate up to 1,500 for banquets. The 180-room Hotel AKA Alexandria offers more than 14,000 square feet, with its largest space accommodating up to 288 guests.

Hotel Heron Old Town Alexandria recently joined Hilton's Curio Collection, while Embassy Suites by Hilton Old Town Alexandria is undergoing phased renovations to its meeting rooms and lobby. Hampton Inn & Suites Old Town Area South is also completing a full renovation of its 213 rooms and event spaces. Archer Hotel Old Town Alexandria recently debuted several updates, including the new JoyLife Spa and a new restaurant, HomeGrown.

In 2025, Hyatt Centric Old Town Alexandria partnered with accessibility nonprofit KultureCity to support sensory accessibility and inclusion initiatives for neurodivergent individuals, including people with PTSD or autism. In local dining, Thompson Italian introduced three new private dining and event spaces accommodating gatherings from 12 to 75 guests. Founding Farmers Alexandria, a farmer-owned restaurant featuring scratch-made American cuisine, opened in 2025.

Alexandria will celebrate the nation's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday with Sails on the Potomac, June 12–14, which will feature iconic tall ships and other festivities throughout the weekend. On July 11, the city will host its own 277<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration with fireworks, music, and other fun at Oronoco Bay Park along the waterfront.

### Arlington County

**StayArlington.com; @StayArlington**

Arlington balances rich history and modern innovation within Virginia's largest walkable downtown. "History buffs love our storied past and how they can explore the solemn beauty of Arlington National Cemetery, the iconic U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial, the National 9/11 Pentagon Memorial, and countless other landmarks honoring our nation's history and service," says Portia Conerly, director of sales and visitor services for Arlington Convention and Visitors Service. "Arlington is also a thriving county with city-like energy; we deliver the ultimate

attendee experience, blending culture, convenience, and connection.”

Arlington’s venues include Convene 1201 Wilson Boulevard, which has 34,000 square feet of event space across eight rooms and can accommodate up to 500 guests for receptions; Virginia Tech Research Center – Arlington, with a capacity of 100 for receptions; University of Virginia Arlington (UVA) Darden Sands Family Grounds, with a capacity of 250 for receptions; and AAMI Conference Center, with a capacity of 260 for receptions.

Arlington offers 9,480 guest rooms across more than 30 hotels. Hyatt Regency Crystal City at Reagan National Airport features 53,000 square feet of meeting space, including a 23,000-square-foot ballroom with a capacity of 2,500 guests. Crystal Gateway Marriott boasts more than 39,000 square feet of event space for up to 2,100 people. The 331-room Hilton Arlington Rosslyn The Key opened last year with nearly 30,000 square feet of event space. The former Crystal City Marriott reopened in 2025 as AC Hotel Arlington National Landing after completing a multimillion-dollar transformation; the property features 8,800 square feet of updated meeting and event space and two dining options. Hilton Garden Inn Arlington Shirlington recently added more than 2,200 square feet of new meeting space.

New event venues in Arlington include Fuse at Mason Square, which opened last year; the 345,000-square-foot facility includes advanced audiovisual studios. Concorde Meeting & Events recently opened at National Landing. The new venue offers flexible event space to accommodate more than 470 guests at full capacity.

## Charlottesville/ Albemarle County

**VisitCharlottesville.org; @CharlottesvilleVAL**  
Nestled in Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains, Charlottesville and Albemarle County provide a historic, pastoral backdrop for meetings. “Our area offers amazing historical sites and great outdoor recreation opportunities, making Charlottesville and Albemarle County a fantastic place to blend business and leisure,” says Anna Whitlow, director of marketing and public relations for Charlottesville Albemarle Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB).

The region offers approximately 4,200 guest rooms. The 170-room Boar’s Head

City	Map Location	City	Map Location
Alexandria.....	H2	Hot Springs/Bath County .....	E3
Arlington County .....	H2	Loudoun County.....	H1
Charlottesville/Albemarle County .....	G3	Lynchburg.....	F4
Chesapeake .....	I5	Nelson County .....	F3
Danville/Pittsylvania County .....	F5	Newport News.....	I4
Fairfax County ★ .....	H2	Norfolk.....	I4, I5
Fredericksburg .....	H2, H3	Richmond Area .....	H4
Giles County/Patrick County/ Wythe County .....	D4	Stafford/Stafford County .....	H2
Hampton ★.....	I4	Virginia Beach.....	J5
Harrisonburg/Rockingham County.....	F2	Virginia’s Blue Ridge/Roanoke.....	E4
		Williamsburg/Historic Triangle ★ .....	I4

Resort features 22,000 square feet of facilities, including a pavilion for 630 guests. The AAA Four Diamond Kimpton The Forum Hotel has 198 rooms and more than 22,000 square feet of indoor space. Other hotels with event space include the 239-room DoubleTree by Hilton, which offers 16,000 square feet, and Omni Charlottesville Hotel, which features 14,000 square feet. The new Virginia Guesthouse Hotel & Conference Center recently opened at UVA. The hotel offers 214 rooms and 25,000 square feet of space; its largest venue can accommodate up to 900 guests.

For historic settings, Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello features the Robert H. Smith Center at Montalto for up to 300 guests, while James Monroe’s Highland offers an event barn for 200. The Wool Factory, located within Charlottesville’s restored 19<sup>th</sup>-century Woolen Mills, accommodates 570. The 20-room Clifton historic boutique hotel, restaurant, and wedding venue can accommodate events of up to 250 guests.

## Chesapeake

**VisitChesapeake.com; @VisitChesapeakeVA**  
Located 15 minutes from Norfolk International Airport (ORF), Chesapeake Conference Center features 39,000 square feet of flexible space. Its 20,000-square-foot ballroom accommodates 2,800 guests for receptions and 1,300 for banquets. The facility anchors Chesapeake’s Greenbrier District, a navigable hub with restaurants and hotels, including the 226-room Delta Hotels Chesapeake Norfolk, which features more than 11,300 square feet of event space, and the 132-suite SpringHill Suites by Marriott Chesapeake Greenbrier, which offers 3,100 square feet of versatile space across two rooms.

## Danville/Pittsylvania County

**DanvilleVA.gov; @CityOfDanville**  
With the recent opening of Caesars Virginia, along with several new boutique hotels and restaurants, Virginia’s Southside, or SoSi region, is experiencing a significant boom in event offerings that planners will love.

Courtesy Hilton Arlington Rosslyn The Key



Arlington offers more than 9,480 guest rooms across more than 30 hotels, including the 331-room Hilton Arlington Rosslyn The Key, which features nearly 30,000 square feet of event space.



Groups can explore the Victorian mansions on Millionaires Row in Chesapeake's historic West End.

Courtesy Danville Office of Economic Development &amp; Tourism

“The Visit SoSi region is the fastest-growing destination in Virginia,” says Lisa Meriwether, tourism manager for Visit SoSi. “Besides all of our exciting new developments, our region offers groups an area that’s rich in history, culture, and opportunities for outdoor adventures.”

The SoSi region’s top event venue and resort, Caesars Virginia, features 320 guest rooms and more than 50,000 square feet of versatile meeting space. Its 29,150-square-foot event center can accommodate more than 2,900 for receptions and 2,500 theater style. The resort also features nine dining options and a 2,500-seat entertainment venue, The Pantheon.

Boutique options include the 47-room Bee Hotel, 45-room The Holbrook Hotel, and newly opened 36-room The Laurel, located in a former textile mill near the Caesars resort.

Other area accommodations include the 118-room Comfort Inn & Suites near Danville Mall; 93-room Holiday Inn Express Danville, an IHG Hotel; 92-room Courtyard by Marriott Danville; and 88-room Hampton Inn Danville.

The Institute for Advanced Learning and Research Conference Center provides 25,000 square feet of space, including an 8,400-square-foot great hall for up to 750 guests and a 3,800-square-foot atrium for receptions of up to 400 guests.

VIRginia International Raceway offers 45 guest suites, 12 villas, and unique teambuilding activities, including karting and pit-crew challenges. The attraction’s

6,900-square-foot gallery can accommodate 300 guests for banquets.

Groups can explore Chesapeake’s Victorian mansions on Millionaires Row in the historic West End. The nearby River District features excellent dining options and scenic riverfront.

## Fairfax County

**FXVA.com; @VisitFairfax**

Fairfax County offers 19,000 rooms across 126 hotels, along with world-class attractions and easy access to the National Capital area. “Year after year, groups keep coming back to Fairfax County,” says Dean Miller, national sales manager for Visit Fairfax. “They love our proximity to the National Capital area, easy and inexpensive access, outstanding hotels, and wide range of world-class attractions, many of which are free.”

Hotels with event space include the 335-room Westfields Marriott Washington Dulles, which offers 59,538 square feet of event space and can accommodate 1,100 in its largest space. JW Marriott Reston Station has 248 guest rooms and 39,840 square feet of space for up to 1,300 people. The recently renovated Hyatt Regency Reston features 518 guest rooms and more than 33,000 square feet of function space, with a capacity of 950 guests. The Four-Star, 458-room Hilton McLean Tysons Corner includes 28,279 square feet of space for up to 1,300 guests.

Several new hotels opened in Fairfax County in 2025, including AC Hotel Reston and Residence Inn by Marriott Reston; the

two adjacent properties share 10,638 square feet of event space. Hilton Washington Dulles Airport was reflagged as DoubleTree by Hilton Washington Dulles Airport, with 39,791 square feet of flexible meeting space. Hyatt Regency Tysons Corner Center is expected to complete a full refresh of its 300 guest rooms and corridors this June. The hotel features 15,500 square feet of event space, with a capacity of 500 people in its largest space.

Capital One Hall in Tysons features the 1,600-seat Main Theater and an atrium that accommodates 1,600 guests for receptions.

## Fredericksburg

**Fxbg.com; @VisitFxbg**

Fredericksburg offers planners many advantages: proximity to Richmond and Washington, D.C., rich history, unique teambuilding and group activities on the Rappahannock River, and a vibrant culinary scene, to name just a few.

Fredericksburg Convention Center features 120,000 square feet of event space, including an 80,000-square-foot exhibit hall that accommodates up to 380 exhibit booths or 3,400 people theater style. The facility also includes a grand ballroom with a capacity of 700 guests. The 5,000-seat Virginia Credit Union Baseball Stadium, home to the Fredericksburg Nationals, includes the 6,000-square-foot Club Room for banquets and receptions with up to 200 people.

The Publisher, Downtown Fredericksburg, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel is a AAA Four

Courtesy: Bernando Fuller for the National Museum of the United States Army



The National Museum of the United States Army is one of many free attractions in Fairfax County.

Courtesy: Fredericksburg Convention Center



Fredericksburg Convention Center features 120,000 square feet of event space, including an 80,000-square-foot exhibit hall and a grand ballroom.

Diamond property with more than 2,800 square feet of event space. In the historic district, the 98-room Courtyard by Marriott Fredericksburg Historic District features 1,750 square feet of space. Other local options include the Hilton Garden Inn, with 2,628 square feet of meeting space, and the Hampton Inn & Suites Fredericksburg at Celebrate Virginia.

Beyond its modern amenities, Fredericksburg has a deep-rooted legacy. “Many visitors don’t realize how significant a place Fredericksburg is in terms of American history, from George Washington to the Civil War and Civil Rights,” says Victoria Matthews, tourism stadium and sports sales manager for the City of

Fredericksburg. Group activities might include visits to Ferry Farm, Washington’s childhood home, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, and the Fredericksburg Civil Rights Trail. Virginia Outdoor Center offers guided group adventures on the Rappahannock River.

Groups can enjoy a visit to Fredericksburg’s iconic Carl’s Frozen Custard or modern dining at Stockyards Restaurant & Bar. To unwind, groups can grab cocktails at River’s End Speakeasy, located on the second floor of Galvin’s Delicatessen. A. Smith Bowman Distillery, Virginia’s oldest distillery, can accommodate up to 200 for receptions and other private events.

## Giles County/Patrick County/Wythe County

[VirginiasMtnPlayground.com](http://VirginiasMtnPlayground.com); @GilesCoVA  
[VisitPatrickCounty.org](http://VisitPatrickCounty.org); @VisitPatrick  
[VisitWytheville.com](http://VisitWytheville.com); @VisitWytheville

Southwest Virginia’s Giles, Patrick, and Wythe counties combine logistical ease via Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport (ROA) with authentic Blue Ridge character.

Giles County’s iconic Mountain Lake Lodge, location for the *Dirty Dancing* movie, sits on a 2,600-acre preserve. The resort features 100 guest rooms and 10 event spaces, the largest of which accommodates 200 guests.

More than an hour away, Patrick County is home to the 54-room Lodge at Primland, Auberge Collection. The resort features 12,149 square feet of meeting space for up to 275 people. Amenities at Primland include an award-winning 18-hole golf course, an observatory for stargazing, a full-service spa, and access to horseback riding, fly fishing, and other activities.

Wytheville Meeting Center in Wythe County can host large-scale events of up to 1,200 people. For intimate gatherings, the boutique 30-room Bolling Wilson Hotel offers space for up to 120 guests.

## Hampton

[VisitHampton.com](http://VisitHampton.com); @VisitHamptonVA

Hampton—where the Chesapeake Bay, Hampton River, and Atlantic Ocean meet—blends waterfront charm with many practical conveniences that planners love.

The region’s premier meeting venue, Hampton Roads Convention Center features 344,000 square feet of space, including a 102,000-square-foot exhibit hall with a capacity of 14,000 people. The venue’s grand ballroom has a capacity of 3,890 guests for receptions and was significantly updated and modernized in 2021. “The renovation of the convention center ballroom created an unmatched event space,” says Yuri Milligan, director of media and community relations for Hampton CVB. “The convention center also has its BGAC Star™ Facility Accreditation, making it a safe and sustainable venue for all by prioritizing occupant health and building maintenance.”

The venue connects via a covered walkway to the 295-room Embassy Suites by Hilton Hampton Convention Center. On the same campus, Hampton Coliseum features more than 84,000 square feet of space.



## HIGH-IMPACT MEETINGS IN HISTORIC WILLIAMSBURG

Epic history meets elevated hospitality in Williamsburg, part of Virginia's Historic Triangle. In this iconic destination, inspiring settings foster connection and growth. Distinctive venues and walkable charm welcome attendees, while storied attractions, delicious cuisine, award-winning golf, and outdoor adventures offer enriching fun. Plus, the area is easily accessible via three airports and Amtrak. Check out our Meeting Incentive Plan for exclusive perks and savings.

Meet in Williamsburg. Where America's Journey Begins.

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JAMESTOWN ▼ YORKTOWN

[VisitWilliamsburg.com/Groups/Meetings](https://www.visitwilliamsburg.com/Groups/Meetings)  
757-253-2313 | [sales@visitwilliamsburg.com](mailto:sales@visitwilliamsburg.com)

Courtesy Hampton CVB

**Hampton offers waterfront charm, a modern convention center, ample accommodations, and a walkable downtown filled with restaurants and attractions.**



Other area accommodations include the 110-room Hyatt Place Hampton Convention Center, which accommodates gatherings of up to 180 people, and the 175-room Landing at Hampton Marina, Tapestry Collection by Hilton, featuring 10,782 square feet of space.

## Hot Springs/Bath County

### DiscoverBath.com

With its blend of refined indoor venues and vast outdoor recreation, Bath County remains a premier destination for high-end corporate retreats. The 483-room Omni Homestead Resort & Spa boasts 76,000 square feet of flexible space across 28 recently renovated meeting rooms. Its largest venue, a 13,485-square-foot ballroom, accommodates up to 1,200 guests. Other spaces at the resort include the 10,368-square-foot Regency Ballroom (capacity 1,000) and a historic 270-seat theater.

The resort offers an array of amenities and activities, including golf, falconry, and fly fishing. Other activities in Bath County include exploring Douthat State Park and kayaking the Jackson River.

## Loudoun County

### VisitLoudoun.org; @VisitLoudoun

Known as “DC’s Wine Country,” Loudoun offers 5,700 guest rooms and a mix of historic estates and modern venues, creating a charming destination for corporate and social events.

“Loudoun offers meeting planners the perfect balance of convenience and inspiration for their attendees,” says Ann Hayes, director of sales, groups and meetings for Visit Loudoun. “Groups can embrace open spaces, meet in rooms with vineyard views, at historic sites, or modern resorts—where creativity comes naturally.”

In historic Middleburg, the Forbes Four-Star Salamander Middleburg resort offers 168 guest rooms and more than 30,000 square feet of space. In Leesburg, the AAA Four Diamond Lansdowne Resort features 296 renovated guest rooms and 55,000 square feet of event space across 37 rooms. Its largest indoor venue, at 9,525 square feet, accommodates 1,000 guests theater style. Also in Leesburg, the boutique Hotel Burg opened this past August in the city’s historic district; it features 39 guest rooms and intimate event spaces, including

a 1,100-square-foot community room for 110 guests. Other new hotels in the area include the new 122-room Home2 Suites by Hilton Ashburn, which opened recently near Ashburn’s One Loudoun mixed-use development.

Loudoun County offers a diverse range of recreational and dining options. Sterling’s 810 Entertainment offers bowling, laser tag, and arcade games, while Activate Sterling gets groups going with interactive physical challenges. Fine-dining options include Shutters on King, Petit Domaine, and Brasserie Royale. For Southern-inspired gatherings, groups can visit Juleps Kentucky Tavern in Ashburn.

In 2022, the Washington Metro System expanded into Loudoun County, opening three new stops, including one at Dulles International Airport (IAD). This Silver Line expansion directly connects Loudoun County to Washington, D.C., via public transportation for the first time.

## Lynchburg

### LynchburgVirginia.org; @LynchburgVA

Located in central Virginia, Lynchburg is home to six colleges—including Randolph College and HBCU Virginia University of Lynchburg—2,400 guest accommodations, and an excellent selection of venue options for planners to consider.

The 241-room Lynchburg Grand Hotel features 12,000 square feet of versatile conference space, with its largest space accommodating up to 500 guests. The property is currently undergoing renovations to be transformed into a dual-branded Holiday Inn and Candlewood Suites. Though the project is scheduled for completion in 2027, it will not interrupt meeting bookings or guest accommodations. The 115-room Virginian Lynchburg, Curio Collection by Hilton—a local landmark since 1913—features 6,753 square feet of event space, including a restored 2,880-square-foot ballroom with a capacity of 500 guests. Renovated in 2024, the boutique Bella Vista Hotel & Suites Lynchburg features 120 guest rooms and 6,700 square feet of event space. The Craddock Terry Hotel, Lynchburg, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel, which occupies a historic 1905 shoe factory, offers nearly 5,000 square feet of unique event space.

Andrew Marks, CGMP, City of Lynchburg assistant director of tourism, says these

properties exemplify the city's broader commitment to breathing new life into its architectural heritage. "Lynchburg emphasizes adaptive reuse and reinvestment. Historic buildings have been transformed into boutique and full-service hotels, meeting spaces, and cultural venues, combining character with modern amenities."

Other Lynchburg hotel options include the 126-room Hilton Garden Inn Lynchburg, 129-room Fairfield by Marriott Inn & Suites Lynchburg Liberty University, and 120-room La Quinta Inn & Suites, which houses the Ridgeview Event Center.

Outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy the Blackwater Creek Trail or year-round skiing at Liberty Mountain Snowflex Center. Opening this month is Lynchburg's Riverfront Park Amphitheater, a new venue for festivals and community events.

## Nelson County

**NelsonCounty.com; @VisitNelsonCounty**

Nelson County in central Virginia offers a premier mountains-to-market setting, blending rustic-chic barns and vineyard estates with high-altitude resorts.

The 230-room Wintergreen Resort offers more than 41,000 square feet of event space across 18 flexible rooms. Its largest space, the 7,317-square-foot Skyline Pavilion, accommodates 600 guests for receptions and theater-style seating. Resort amenities include onsite dining and four-season recreational options, including 45 holes of championship golf, tennis, pickleball, skiing, and other activities.

Nelson County is approximately a 45-minute drive from Charlottesville-Albemarle Airport (CHO) and approximately two hours from Richmond International Airport (RIC).

## Newport News

**Newport-News.org; @NewportNewsVA**

Newport News has 3,000 guest rooms and is easily accessible from Richmond, Norfolk, and Washington, D.C.

Newport News Marriott at City Center features 20,861 square feet of space, including a 12,000-square-foot ballroom with a capacity of 1,600 guests for receptions. Holiday Inn Newport News – Hampton by IHG offers 11,000 square feet of flexible space, with its largest space accommodating up to 450 people.

Unique event options include the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center, which includes a 276-seat auditorium. The Mariners' Museum and Park has several event spaces, including the Anna Huntington meeting room, which can accommodate 200 people for receptions. For an immersive experience, the Virginia Living Museum—featuring a zoo, an aquarium, and a planetarium—accommodates up to 500 guests

for cocktail parties. Attendees can explore exhibits ranging from a cypress swamp to the underwater world of Chesapeake Bay.

## Norfolk

**VisitNorfolk.com; @VisitNorfolkVA**

Home to the world's largest naval base, a walkable waterfront, IACC-certified facilities, and amenity-filled venues, Norfolk offers

*The End*  
OF YOUR  
*Meeting*  
IS JUST THE BEGINNING

Your attendees expect a meeting. They won't expect Fort Monroe. Explore a living national landmark where freedom was won and history made. Where group tours feel more like standing inside the story of America.

Hampton offers meeting planners the full package. You will enjoy waterfront restaurants, historic sites, and coastal Virginia experiences you simply cannot replicate anywhere else. Meetings don't feel like meetings in Hampton.

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With 296 renovated guest rooms and 55,000 square feet of event space, the AAA Four Diamond Lansdowne Resort can accommodate events of up to 1,000 guests.



planners a one-of-a-kind setting for successful gatherings, according to Dawn Whittaker, Visit Norfolk director of sales. “Norfolk’s naval history adds a distinctive character that fascinates visitors. Our city’s naval history adds a distinctive character that fascinates visitors. We also have an outstanding arts and cultural scene, endless nightlife and dining options, and so much more for groups to love.”

Norfolk Waterside Marriott features 407 rooms and 68,879 square feet of event space; its largest venue, a 14,400-square-foot ballroom, can accommodate 2,400 people. Hilton Norfolk The Main has 300 guest rooms and 41,443 square feet of event space. The hotel’s 18,382-square-foot Main Ballroom is the largest in Virginia, with a capacity of 2,200 people theater style. Sheraton Norfolk Waterside Hotel offers 468 rooms and 45,570 square feet of meeting space, with a capacity of 1,600.

The Chrysler Museum Glass Studio, also known as Perry Glass Studio, recently tripled in size, offering event space for 400 and hands-on art experiences. The 175-acre Norfolk Botanical Gardens is expected to unveil its new Garden of Tomorrow this spring. The garden’s centerpiece, the 26,000-square-foot Perry Conservatory, will be available for private events. Nauticus,

Norfolk’s maritime discovery center, recently added interactive exhibits and a planetarium. The attraction offers several areas for private events, including the 350-seat Brock Theater and 12,000 square feet of exhibit space. The World War II-era *Wisconsin* battleship, one of the U.S. Navy’s largest ships, accommodates a capacity of 600 standing guests on its main deck, up to 250 seated guests on its fantail, and a capacity of 80 seated dinner guests in the elegant officer’s wardroom.

Norfolk International Airport (ORF) is undergoing a \$1 billion expansion that will include updated terminals and an onsite hotel. The project is estimated for completion in 2028.

Norfolk’s Elizabeth River Trail—a 10.5-mile pedestrian and bike path along the waterfront—continues to expand. Norfolk is also home to Virginia’s first light-rail system, the “Tide.” The rail system serves downtown Norfolk and surrounding neighborhoods.

## Richmond Area

**VisitRichmondVA.com; @VisitRichmondVA**

Virginia’s capital city, Richmond is part of a metropolitan area that also includes the city of Colonial Heights, the town of Ashland, and four counties: Chesterfield, Hanover, Henrico, and New Kent. Interstate 95 connects the

region north and south, while Interstate 64 links the area to the east and west.

“Groups love our selection of outstanding venues, accommodations, and attractions,” says Jerrine Lee, vice president of sales for Richmond CVB. “We also have unique attributes; for example, we are the only place in the nation that has class III and IV rapids running through downtown. Add to that our walkable historic neighborhoods, charming restaurants, historical attractions, and other amenities, and you have the ingredients for a memorable, successful event.”

Greater Richmond Convention Center offers 700,000 square feet of adaptable space, including a 178,000-square-foot exhibit hall, which can accommodate more than 12,000 people. The facility also features 80,000 square feet of meeting space across 36 rooms, including a 30,550-square-foot ballroom. Henrico Sports & Events Center provides 39,000 square feet of flexible space for up to 4,500 attendees. On Richmond’s riverfront, the new Allianz Amphitheater can accommodate events of up to 7,500 people.

Richmond Marriott includes 26,520 square feet of event space for up to 2,000 guests. The historic Jefferson Hotel boasts 26,000 square feet of space, while Virginia Crossings Hotel & Conference Center, Tapestry Collection by Hilton offers 23,839 square feet. Westin Richmond features 22,761 square feet of space for up to 600 guests, and Linden Row Inn provides 2,600 square feet for intimate boardroom meetings.

CarMax Park, home to the Richmond Flying Squirrels AA-affiliate of Major League Baseball’s San Francisco Giants, offers private spaces, including the 6,000-square-foot Atlantic Union Bank Lounge, which accommodates more than 600 people. The 270-room Hilton Richmond The Mondelle at Springling at District 60 is scheduled to open in 2028 in Chesterfield County, offering 30,000 square feet of meeting space.

## Harrisonburg/ Rockingham County

**VisitRockingham.com; @VisitRockinghamVA**

Located in the Shenandoah Valley, Harrisonburg and Rockingham County offer a mix of conference hotels, mountain resorts, and unique agritourism venues.

Hotel Madison & Shenandoah Valley Conference Center in downtown Harrisonburg

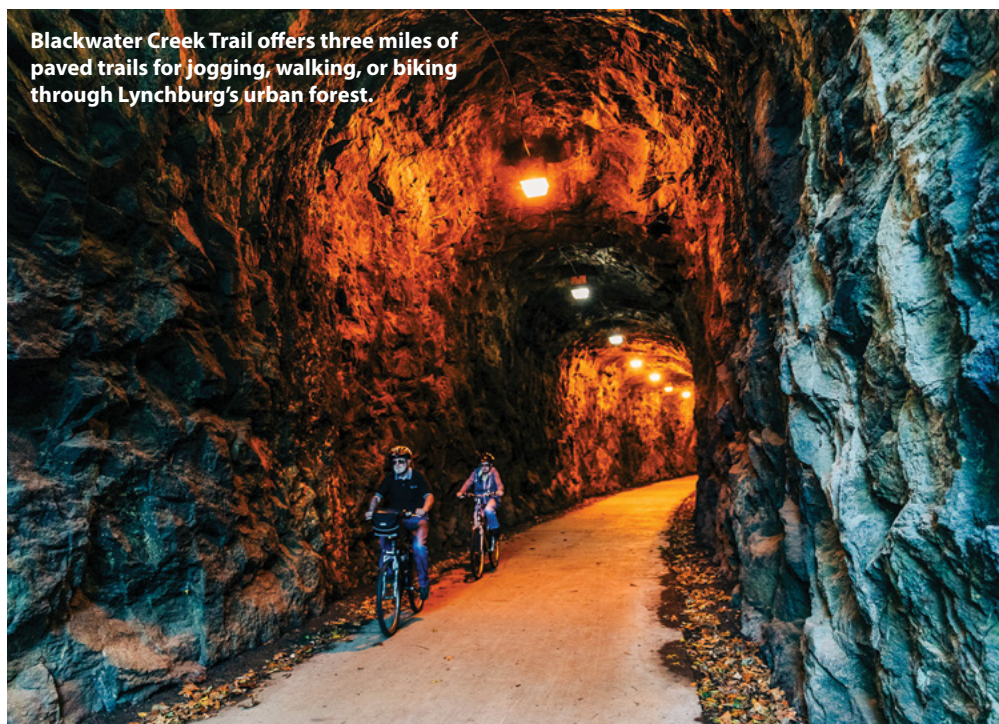
features 230 guest rooms and more than 21,000 square feet of versatile function space for up to 1,200 guests. Massanutten Resort features more than 20,000 square feet of meeting space across 10 venues, with a capacity of 250 in its largest venue.

The 143-room DoubleTree by Hilton Harrisonburg features more than 5,400 square feet of event space, while the 110-room Courtyard by Marriott Harrisonburg has 1,100 square feet. Unique venues include On Sunny Slope Farm and James Morgan estate, both of which can accommodate up to 200 people. CrossKeys Vineyards offers nice mountain views and a dedicated tasting room for receptions and dinners.

### Stafford/Stafford County

[TourStaffordVA.com](http://TourStaffordVA.com); [@TourStaffordVA](https://twitter.com/TourStaffordVA)

Situated along the Interstate 95 corridor, Stafford County is approximately halfway between Washington, D.C. (40 miles north), and Richmond (60 miles south). The 99-room



Blackwater Creek Trail offers three miles of paved trails for jogging, walking, or biking through Lynchburg's urban forest.

Courtesy Lynchburg Office of Economic Development



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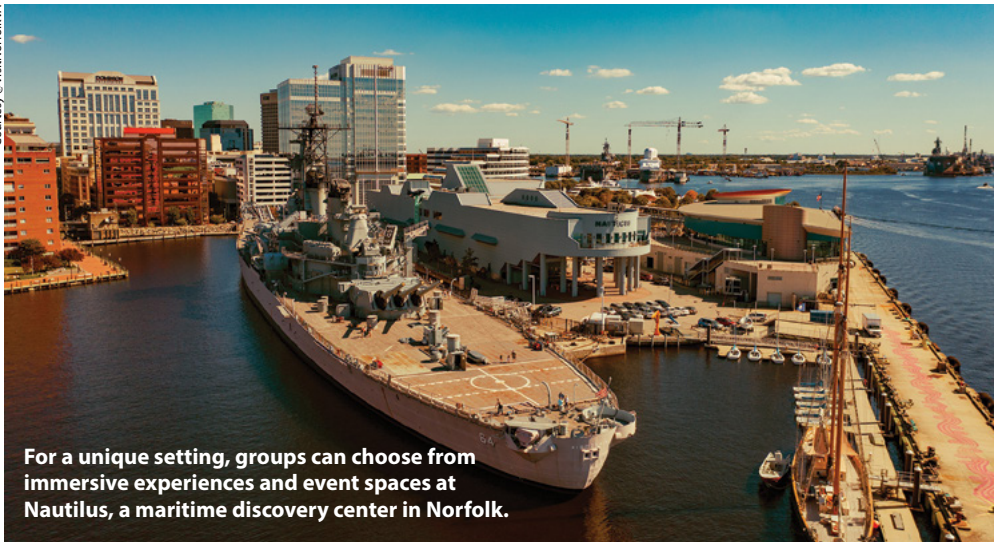
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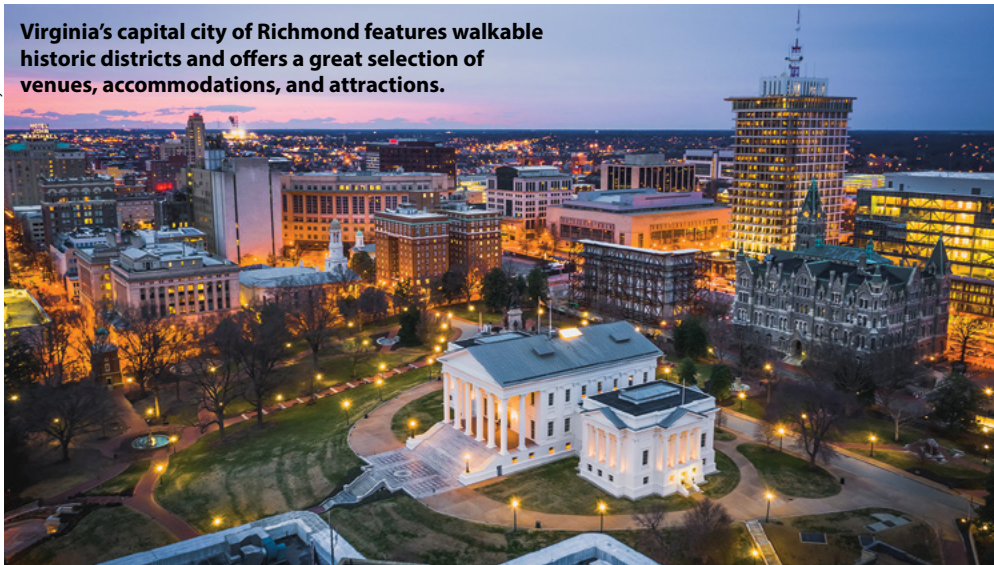


Courtesy @VisitNorfolkVA



For a unique setting, groups can choose from immersive experiences and event spaces at Nautilus, a maritime discovery center in Norfolk.

Chase Gunn/Courtesy Richmond CVB



Virginia's capital city of Richmond features walkable historic districts and offers a great selection of venues, accommodations, and attractions.

Hampton Inn Stafford/Quantico & Conference Center has 2,900 square feet of event space, with its largest space seating up to 255 theater style. The 95-room Fairfield by Marriott Inn & Suites Quantico Stafford has two meeting rooms, which can accommodate up to 97 people in their largest configurations.

Other options include Potomac Point Winery & Vineyard, a Tuscan-style estate that accommodates up to 200 guests, and Riverside Center for the Performing Arts, which features 36,000 square feet of meeting space and can accommodate up to 700 people in its largest configuration.

## Virginia Beach

**VisitVirginiaBeach.com; @VisitVABeach**

Virginia Beach offers a versatile location with 35 miles of beaches, more than 10,000 hotel rooms, and walkable districts.

Hotels with event space include the 245-room Founders Inn and Spa, Tapestry Collection by Hilton, with 40,127 square feet of meeting space for up to 1,400 people, and the 236-room Westin Virginia Beach Town Center, which boasts 11,266 square feet of event space, including an 8,514-square-foot ballroom with a capacity of 1,200 guests for receptions. Cavalier Resort offers three distinct hotel properties: Historic Cavalier Hotel and Beach Club, Autograph Collection, with 9,885 square feet of event space; the 305-room Marriott Virginia Beach Oceanfront Resort, offering 19,084 square feet; and 157-room Embassy Suites by Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront Resort, which has 8,171 square feet of event space.

Virginia Beach Convention Center provides more than 500,000 square feet of event space, including a 150,012-square-foot exhibit hall.

## Virginia's Blue Ridge/ Roanoke

**VisitRoanokeVA.com; @VisitVBR**

Centered in Roanoke, Virginia's Blue Ridge region provides a metro-mountain setting featuring 650,000 square feet of flexible meeting space and 5,000 guest rooms.

Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center, Curio Collection by Hilton features 327 guest rooms and 63,670 square feet of event space, including a 14,400-square-foot ballroom. Holiday Inn Roanoke-Tanglewood-Rt 419 & 1581 by IHG provides 196 rooms and more than 9,000 square feet of event space, including a 6,100-square-foot ballroom.

Roanoke's Berglund Center features 110,000 square feet of event space, including a 46,000-square-foot special events center, a 2,148-seat performing arts theater, and a coliseum seating 10,500 people. Nearby, Salem Civic Center offers 21,000 square feet of space for up to 6,000 guests.

## Williamsburg/ Historic Triangle

**VisitWilliamsburg.com;**

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Virginia's Historic Triangle—Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown—is a premier event hub, with 500,000 square feet of meeting space, 7,000 guest rooms, and such attractions as Colonial Williamsburg and Busch Gardens.

The 323-room Williamsburg Lodge, Autograph Collection has 45,000 square feet of space for up to 1,300 guests, while the Williamsburg Inn features 6,500 square feet for smaller banquets. The 43-room Griffin Hotel and the 300-room Williamsburg Woodlands Hotel & Suites are also part of the Colonial Williamsburg Resort Collection. The 295-room DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Williamsburg features 42,089 square feet of meeting space. The Four-Star Kingsmill Resort has 425 guest rooms, a 16,000-square-foot conference center, three golf courses, and a spa. Great Wolf Lodge | Williamsburg boasts 405 rooms and 12,322 square feet of meeting space.

The new 200,000-square-foot Greater Williamsburg Sports and Events Center is scheduled to open this June. It will include 12 basketball courts, an indoor turf field, and more than 4,000 square feet of customizable meeting space. 🍷



Courtesy Visit Hampton

## Visit Hampton



Centrally located in coastal Virginia, with the Chesapeake Bay as your backdrop, Hampton is rich in history and hospitality. Discover the city's incredible heritage at such attractions as Fort Monroe National Monument, Virginia Air & Space Science Center, and Hampton University Museum. Hampton Roads Convention Center offers 344,000 square feet of space and hybrid meeting capabilities, while other venues offer a flexible mix of facilities for meetings, conventions, exhibitions, special events, and corporate entertainment. Accommodations include full-service convention hotels, boutique hotels, and quaint bed-and-breakfasts.

[VisitHampton.com](http://VisitHampton.com)

## Visit Fairfax



Located across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., Fairfax County celebrates America's history and future in grand style. Groups can enjoy the historic grandeur of George Washington's home and gardens at Mount Vernon and the thrilling story of American space and flight exploration at The Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, located at Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD). The area's natural beauty, award-winning wineries, golf, arts and entertainment, shopping, dining, and lodging options, along with accessibility and affordability, combine for a memorable experience.

[FXVA.com](http://FXVA.com)

Angela Pan for Visit Fairfax



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## Visit Williamsburg



Part of Virginia's Historic Triangle, Williamsburg sits 150 miles south of Washington, D.C., between Richmond and Virginia Beach, with easy access via three airports and Amtrak. The destination offers 7,000 rooms and 200,000 square feet of flexible meeting space across historic hotels, resorts, and unique venues. Groups enjoy diverse dining, from colonial taverns to modern cuisine, plus breweries and a winery. Rich in history yet full of modern attractions, Williamsburg delivers value, convenience, and memorable experiences for meetings and events.

[VisitWilliamsburg.com](http://VisitWilliamsburg.com)

Jane D'Angelo

# Closing Remarks

## Meetings Meet University Culture & Charm at Virginia Guesthouse Hotel & Conference Center

By Helen Jacob



Courtesy Virginia Guesthouse Hotel & Conference Center

**T**he University of Virginia in Charlottesville expands its campus appeal for conference hospitality with the new Virginia Guesthouse Hotel & Conference Center, which opened in April. Blending academic life, cultural exchange, and the natural beauty of Charlottesville, the venue brings a relaxed, inspired setting that sparks conversation and fosters connection.

Part hotel and event playground, Virginia Guesthouse offers 214 guest rooms and suites, three inspired food and drink experiences, and versatile meeting and event space for hosting meetings, conferences, corporate retreats, special events, and social celebrations. It is designed to serve as a vibrant hub for connection, discovery, and celebration, where comfort meets flexibility and every space invites guests to gather, engage, and experience the spirit of Charlottesville.

Virginia Guesthouse Hotel & Conference Center, an IACC-certified facility, features more than 25,000 square feet of flexible space, including the 9,800-square-foot Grand Ballroom, which can accommodate nearly 1,000 guests and can be divided to suit different event needs; 3,000-square-foot Main Hall, paired with the foyer for networking; 1,280-square-foot Study for meetings and breakout sessions; and 1,260-square-foot Gallery for receptions of up to 100 people. Additional studios, ranging from 840 to 1,488 square feet each, provide smaller, more intimate settings for private gatherings.

For planners who want to pair work with play, the hotel's central location provides convenient access to Charlottesville's top attractions. Attendees can take guided tours of the University of Virginia Grounds (a UNESCO World Heritage site), sip tasting flights on the Monticello Wine Trail, hike the scenic Blue Ridge Mountains, or visit the nearby estates of presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe.

Virginia Guesthouse's dining and outdoor options include the Poplar Parlor, serving seasonal, locally inspired fare; The Perch, a rooftop bar perfect for unwinding over craft cocktails and taking in views of the university; and The Counter Café, for quick bites and coffee breaks.

"The Virginia Guesthouse Hotel & Conference Center was intentionally designed to meet the evolving needs of today's meeting and event planners," says Rich Keurajian, director of sales and marketing for Virginia Guesthouse. "From relaxed gathering spaces to advanced technology, our 25,000 square feet of event space was built to support productive collaboration and meaningful connections. Being located on the Grounds of the University of Virginia brings a unique sense of purpose and intellectual energy that planners and attendees will immediately feel. Set alongside the Blue Ridge Mountains and Virginia's renowned wine country, Virginia Guesthouse offers an environment that leaves a lasting impression on every guest."

In addition, the ground-floor Welcome Center allows easy access to university tours and key campus events, along with other popular campus attractions, including the Lawn, athletic venues, and academic hubs.

Virginia Guesthouse Hotel & Conference Center isn't just for outside guests. Faculty, staff, and student groups can claim it as a central gathering spot for workshops, seminars, or simply socializing. Locals are also welcome at The Perch, Poplar, and the hotel's curated events, turning it into a year-round destination for locals and visitors alike.

Owned by the UVA Foundation, Virginia Guesthouse Hotel & Conference Center is ideally suited as one of central Virginia's go-to venues, set in a historic university environment, for academic events, conferences, meetings, and special events. 🍷



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