EVENT PLANNERS' GUIDES TO ALABAMA & SOUTH CAROLINA

NOVEMBER 2026
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ConventionSouth

The national planners' resource for Southern destinations



Music-Rich Destinations
HIT ALL THE RIGHT NOTES

AMUSEMENT PARKS
Make a Splash with Meetings

Plus: Standout Venues for Unforgettable Events

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TEAM KENTUCKY

putting it in perspective

A Sound Choice for Meetings

Across the South, music helps shape the culture of some of the region's most iconic destinations, from the Mississippi Delta blues to Kentucky bluegrass, New Orleans jazz, Memphis soul, and beyond. The South's rich musical heritage also helps shape the sound and rhythm of meetings and events, as planners tune in to music-rich destinations and incorporate fun music-themed activities into itineraries.

"Music is part of Savannah's identity, and meeting planners are increasingly looking for destinations that offer authentic experiences outside the meeting room," says Kellie Linder, vice president of sales and services for Visit Savannah. "From the interactive Gretsch exhibit and live performances at District Live to our talented local musicians, renowned Savannah Music Festival, and vibrant live-music venues throughout the city, Savannah gives attendees memorable experiences that blend business and culture. These unique musical touches help create stronger attendee engagement and leave a lasting impression long after a meeting concludes." Read more about Savannah and the other music-rich destinations that hit all the right notes in our cover story, "A Sound Choice for Meetings," on page 8.

Similarly, amusement parks, including theme parks and waterparks, bring excitement to meetings and events. Whether spending a day in the park, combining meetings at their onsite venues, or enjoying an overnight stay at their resort hotels, amusement parks offer many added perks beyond thrilling rides and attractions. For attendees, they add bleisure appeal and demonstrate work-life balance; planners and corporate groups recognize their potential to boost attendance, build loyalty, and connect on a different level outside of traditional meeting rooms. "When you can walk your group from a conference room to a roller coaster in the same afternoon, that changes the energy of the whole event," says Dave Holmin, director of group sales for OWA Parks & Resort in Foley, Ala. "The best agendas we help build are the ones that use these experiences as connective tissue. A teambuilding competition on a ride or attraction does more for a group than another hour in a conference room, and it's still a productive time." Explore how amusement parks are making a splash with meetings in our special feature on page 16.

In "A Grand Affair," we spotlight standout venues for unforgettable events in the South. From historic estates to modern resorts, these venues set the stage for memorable meetings and events. Check out our roundup of standout properties making a lasting impression on planners and attendees alike, beginning on page 24.

Also, our Event Planners' Guides look at what's new for meetings and events in Alabama (page 29) and South Carolina (page 39). Visit **ConventionSouth.com** for additional news, exclusive content, and other resources for planning your next event.



Making Meetings Matter More,

Michelle

Michelle Martin
Editor-in-Chief

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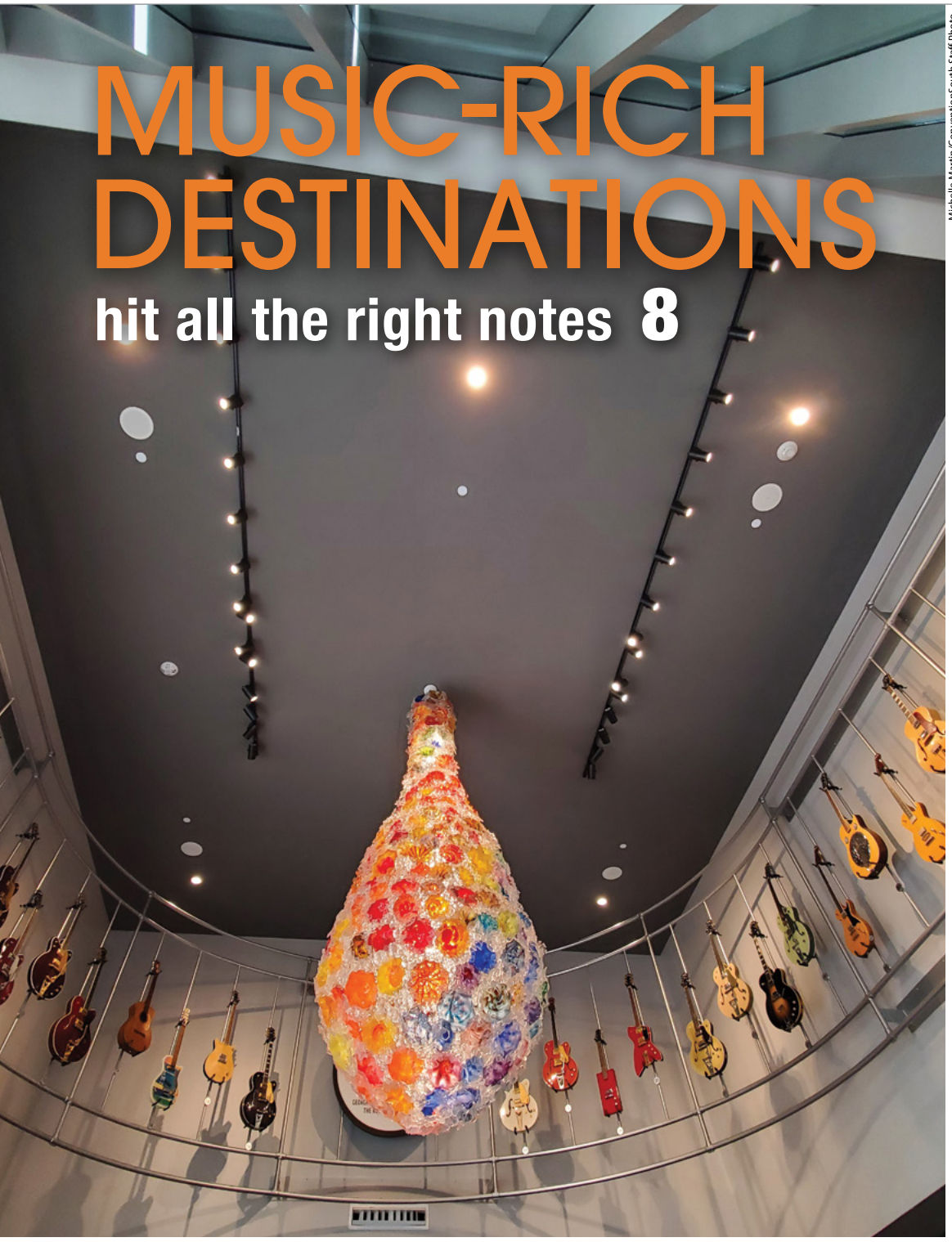
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Michelle Martin/ConventionSouth Staff Photo



Courtesy The Dollywood Co.

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On the cover: **Savannah Music Festival features a diverse lineup of acts, including St. Paul & the Broken Bones.**
Photo by Elizabeth Leitzell for Savannah Music Festival

Making Events Sing

A conversation with James Martin of Big Easy Entertainment



Courtesy BigEasyEntertainment.com

New Orleans native James Martin is a talented musician with 25 years of experience performing, recording, and touring. After founding Big Easy Band in 2016, he also founded and now serves as creative director for Big Easy Entertainment, which provides curated music entertainment and programming to venues and hospitality partners throughout the Gulf South. Here, Martin shares the special role that music plays in connecting visitors to a destination.

What role does Big Easy Entertainment play in connecting musicians, destinations, venues, and event planners?

My roots in this music community run deep. Bringing New Orleans music across 48 states and five continents has been part of a career built on relationships and trust within our local music and event community.

We act as a bridge between that community and event planners. We work alongside venues and hospitality partners to understand what they're trying to create, then collaborate with the right musicians to bring it to life. We feel a responsibility to represent our region, hospitality, and culture well, delivering a special experience for attendees while making sure the artists are represented well, too.

Why do you feel music plays an important role in visitors' connection to a destination?

Music gives visitors a direct connection to the people and culture that make a place distinctive. New Orleans' identity is so connected with music that visitors would notice its absence. You could say the same about Nashville or Memphis, Tenn., and many other destinations.

A live band creates a conversation between musicians and the audience, whether people are singing and dancing or simply enjoying the music over a cocktail. That human exchange becomes part of how they remember the destination.

Anybody can visit a city, eat the local food, or listen to a live band. Participating in something unique gives people a personal connection, a story they'll remember fondly, and a reason to return. That impact should go both ways. The best destination programming should leave an impression on visitors, who, in turn, leave economic value behind in the community they visit.

How do you customize music programming to a company's brand and message, or to an event theme?

The most important thing is to listen: Who's the crowd, what's the client's vision, and what do they want people to feel?

Sometimes the direction is clear: a particular musical style, a casino theme, or a speakeasy atmosphere. Other times, we interpret what we're hearing, offer a few directions, and see what resonates.

Then we translate that into artists, instrumentation, repertoire, timing, and interaction. A copy-and-paste approach to every inquiry would be a disservice to the client, their attendees, and the musicians.

What are some fun and unexpected ways planners can incorporate music into their events?

Some of the most memorable experiences happen when attendees become part of the music. We've turned performances into teambuilding exercises, teaching a major international brand's top brass a song, harmonies, and percussion parts, then having them perform alongside us for their fellow attendees.

We've paraded into an early-morning breakfast with a full brass band and dancers, waking people up and getting them excited for a day of meetings.

I've also co-hosted a national meeting of hotel general managers, working from a teleprompter, improvising with another host, and playing saxophone hints during trivia.

Music can bring people together, parade them between rooms, connect sessions, or become part of the meeting itself.

In what other ways does Big Easy Entertainment help destinations and venues reach visitors through music?

Our partnership with Good Measure, inside The Barnett Hotel in New Orleans, has shown how our model can translate from private events to public venue programming. We bring local audiences and hotel guests into the same room, where visitors can discover a band alongside the people who know and love it, all an elevator ride from their hotel room.

That creates a stronger connection between the hotel and the city while opening more opportunities for local talent. We see real potential in partnerships where hospitality and the music community reinforce each other.

ANYTHING BUT MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD

TEAM KENTUCKY







MEET AT THE INTERSECTION OF THRILLS AND CHARM

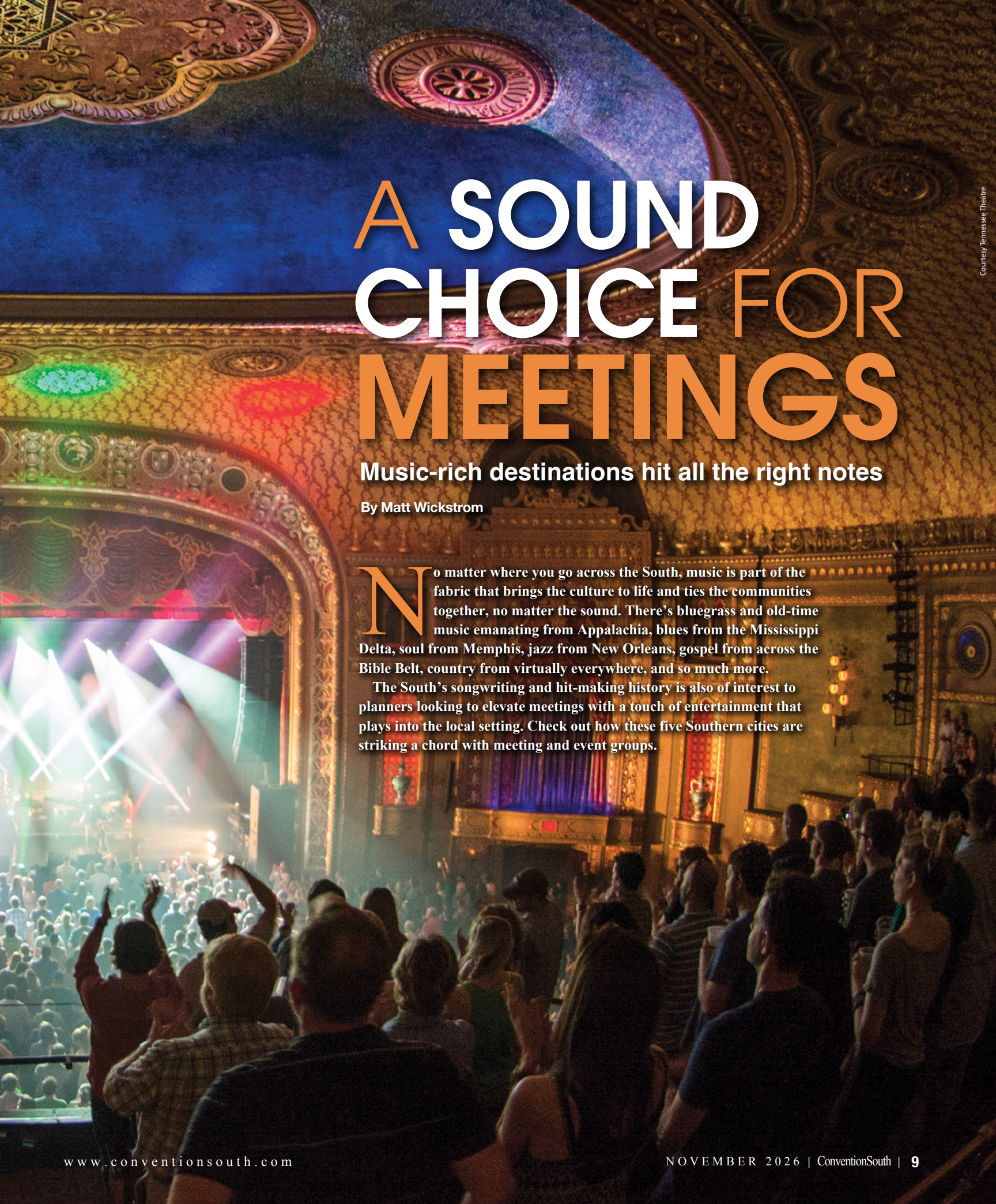
We're revving up relationships while supercharging service in southern Kentucky this year with a conversion of our convention center hotel. With renovations complete, the 218-room property connected to the Sloan Convention Center is now officially **Crowne Plaza Bowling Green**, fueling our standards with a higher octane! Whether it's mingling among legendary Corvettes at the National Corvette Museum, exploring Lost River Cave hidden beneath the city's streets, or networking over local live music and craft cocktails, we'll help put your participants on the fast track to fun!

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Courtesy Tennessee Theatre

A SOUND CHOICE FOR MEETINGS

Music-rich destinations hit all the right notes

By Matt Wickstrom

No matter where you go across the South, music is part of the fabric that brings the culture to life and ties the communities together, no matter the sound. There's bluegrass and old-time music emanating from Appalachia, blues from the Mississippi Delta, soul from Memphis, jazz from New Orleans, gospel from across the Bible Belt, country from virtually everywhere, and so much more.

The South's songwriting and hit-making history is also of interest to planners looking to elevate meetings with a touch of entertainment that plays into the local setting. Check out how these five Southern cities are striking a chord with meeting and event groups.

Michelle Martin/ConventionSouth Staff Photo



Savannah's Plant Riverside District is home to the That Great Gretsch Sound! exhibit.

Elizabeth Leitzell for Savannah Music Festival



Old Crow Medicine Show performed at the 2026 Savannah Music Festival.

Savannah, Ga.

Savannah boasts a rich musical lineage, including *Moon River* writer Johnny Mercer, country star Megan Moroney, hip-hop icon Big Boi, jazz saxophonist James Moody, blues musician Victor Wainwright, and all-star producer Dave Cobb. It's also home to plenty of gospel music, buoyed by the First African Baptist Church—a National Historic Landmark dating to 1773, considered the oldest continuously operating African American congregation in North America.

All of these musical styles and others converge at long-held events like the Savannah Music Festival, which began in 1989 and now draws close to 20,000 attendees annually across venues ranging from the 86,000-square-foot Lucas Theatre for the Arts to the 3,600-square-foot Trustee's Garden and small churches like Trinity United.

"Music is woven into Savannah's culture, and that authenticity resonates with meeting attendees seeking experiences beyond the meeting room," says Kellie Linder, vice president of sales and services for Visit Savannah. "The city has deep musical roots, with connections to renowned artists, a thriving local music scene, and an appreciation for a wide range of musical genres. Planners often incorporate local musicians into receptions, dinners, and special events, giving attendees a uniquely Savannah experience while supporting local talent."

Meeting venues include Savannah Convention Center, which was expanded last year and now boasts 660,000 square feet of premier event space, including a 200,000-square-foot exhibit hall and a 40,000-square-foot ballroom. According to Linder, popular hotel venues include JW Marriott Plant Riverside District, with 10,500 square feet of event space, and Thompson by Hyatt, with 8,200 square feet of event space.

On the main level of the building housing the JW Marriott Plant Riverside District hotel is an impressive Gretsch guitar exhibit, presented in collaboration between the Fred and Dinah Gretsch School of Music at Georgia Southern University and The Kessler Collection. Just beyond the Gretsch exhibit are District Live, a live-music venue, and District Live Studios. District Live is available for private events, corporate functions, weddings, and other group bookings.

"At Plant Riverside District, the That Great Gretsch Sound! exhibit celebrates the legacy of the iconic Gretsch family and their influence on the music industry, providing a distinctive backdrop for receptions,

networking functions, and themed events," Linder says. "Planners often use the exhibit as a conversation starter and an immersive experience that gives attendees a taste of Savannah's musical heritage. District Live has also become a popular venue for corporate events, private concerts, receptions, and general sessions. Its state-of-the-art sound, lighting, and production capabilities allow planners to create memorable experiences, ranging from keynote presentations to live-entertainment showcases. Whether attendees are enjoying a private performance or gathering for an evening event, District Live adds an energetic atmosphere that elevates the overall meeting experience."

Linder adds, "Music is part of Savannah's identity, and meeting planners are increasingly looking for destinations that offer authentic experiences outside the meeting room. From the interactive Gretsch exhibit and live performances at District Live to our talented local musicians, renowned Savannah Music Festival, and vibrant live-music venues throughout the city, Savannah gives attendees memorable experiences that blend business and culture. These unique musical touches help create stronger attendee engagement and leave a lasting impression long after a meeting concludes."



Lexington's Railbird Festival draws nearly 100,000 visitors each spring.

Eli Johnson/Courtesy VisitLEX



Blues artist Tee Dee Young regularly performs at his signature Tee Dee's Lounge in his hometown of Lexington.

Mary Jane Speer/Courtesy VisitLEX

Lexington, Ky.

Although its most common exports are fast horses, strong bourbon, and championship basketball, music is also a prominent draw in the central Kentucky city—and it's far more than just bluegrass. Yes, Lexington does claim trailblazing banjo player J.D. Crowe, but other notable artists with Lexington roots and other ties include country singers Tyler Childers, Chris Stapleton, and Sturgill Simpson, along with The Backstreet Boys' Kevin Richardson, blues icon Tee Dee Young, Television guitarist Richard Hell, and Christian singer Anne Wilson.

"We're in the middle of bluegrass country, so that heritage runs deep throughout the region," says Mary Quinn Ramer, president of VisitLex. "There's so much more beyond bluegrass that adds to the vibrancy of the music culture that exists here today."

With so much home-grown talent, there's no shortage of places for artists to play. Similarly, Lexington offers an abundance of meeting venues, from the 20,000-plus-seat Rupp Arena and the conjoined Central Bank Center, with more than 100,000 square feet of space, to more intimate venues like the Lyric Theatre, Singletary Center for the Arts, and Lexington Opera House.

According to Ramer, conventions and other meetings regularly incorporate music into their plans to amplify their message. This month, the Kentucky Travel Industry Association will host a kick-off party at Manchester Music Hall. "We've also seen convention groups come in and do a takeover at The Burl, where they can enjoy that music element and also take advantage of the property's other elements, like its brewery and arcade," she says. "We've also seen corporate events with music pop up at places like the Kentucky Horse Park's Alltech Arena and Rolex Stadium, along with other engagements at nearby distilleries that are aimed at tying all the core pillars of the city's tourism together."

With marquee events like Railbird Festival, which draws nearly 100,000 music lovers to town every spring, along with the recently opened Gatton Park and the upcoming Turner Commons—a district west of downtown that will include restaurants, a bourbon distillery, and The Rail, a 2,200-person-capacity multipurpose event space—Lexington is poised to remain a

Photos courtesy Greenwood CVB



Robert Johnson's gravesite in Greenwood, Miss., is a popular attraction for visitors and musicians who like to pay tribute to the blues legend.



The blues influence runs deep in Tallahatchie Flats, a community of preserved tenant houses available for rent in Greenwood, Miss.

premier destination for music lovers and event planners for years to come.

"I see a nice little triangle forming between the core of downtown, the Distillery District, and Turner Commons that will make for easy navigation for both leisure and business travelers," Ramer says. "We're excited for the Commons to fully open in early 2027 so we can begin leaning into and promoting it even more."

Greenwood, Miss.

Greenwood is one of the Mississippi Delta's most historic blues towns. With ties to names like the legendary B.B. King, who was born just up the road in Berclair and played some of his first radio gigs in town on WGRM in the mid-1940s, along with the mysterious Robert Johnson, early blues guitarist Walter "Furry" Lewis, and longtime Howlin' Wolf guitarist Hubert Sumlin, Greenwood is an epicenter for blues music.

On top of its blues heritage, Greenwood is also home to country singer Bobbie Gentry, best known for her hit song, *Ode To Billie Joe*. The town's role in the Civil Rights Movement—where Emmitt Till allegedly whistled at a white woman prior to being lynched in 1955 and activist Fanny Lou Hamer was nearly beaten to death after being arrested while on a bus trip back to Greenwood in 1963—and the protest music that rang out in Civil Rights marches also contributed to its storied music legacy.

While much of the region's music history is chronicled at the Greenwood Museum of the Mississippi Delta, some mystery remains. Scott Barretta, a sociology professor at the University of Mississippi and local music advocate, hopes a new museum display, expected to open next year, will illustrate how history and mystery have intertwined. "The uncertainty behind Johnson's death and some of the other music landmarks here mean visitors have to use their imaginations a bit, which only helps Greenwood to stand out in the delta," Barretta says.

Despite its small scope, Greenwood still offers numerous venues suitable for hosting events. Leflore County Civic Center features more than 13,000 square feet of event space, while the boutique Alluvian Hotel offers various spaces for corporate groups, retreats, seminars, meetings, and social gatherings. Both venues regularly feature live-music shows as well. Other local venues include



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Courtesy OneSpartanburgInc.

The Spartanburg Music Trail tells the story of local musicians, like James Reese, who contributed to Spartanburg's music heritage.

Tallahatchee Flats (a collection of rentable tenant houses near Johnson's gravesite) and private homes through the Hush Puppy Music Coop (co-founded by Barretta).

Visitors can explore Greenwood and Leflore County's music heritage at several Mississippi Blues Trail markers. "When I tell people about Greenwood and the Mississippi Blues Trail markers, they add these sites to their itineraries, whether it's individuals or tour buses," says Ashley Farmer, executive director of the Greenwood Convention and Visitors Bureau. In addition to Johnson's gravesite, blues marker sites include the building that housed the WGRM radio station, where B.B. King first performed live in 1944, and the Elk's Lodge, where Ike Turner and other famous singers performed.

"People from around the world travel through Greenwood to tour these sites and seek out a little music along the way," Farmer says. "It is common to see a lone guitarist playing and singing to Johnson's grave, with the Delta sunset in the background. It's a beautiful thing to see."

Spartanburg, S.C.

Located in South Carolina's Upstate, Spartanburg was the launching ground for the Marshall Tucker Band and the longtime home of Lynyrd Skynyrd drummer Artimus Pyle. Spartanburg's music heritage goes beyond Southern rock, having also served as the launchpad for songwriter Marshall Chapman, whose songs have been recorded by Conway Twitty, Jimmy Buffett, Emmylou Harris, Wynonna, and Sawyer Brown; gothic blues singer Adia Victoria; and gospel singer Ira Tucker (The Dixie Hummingbirds). Much of this history can be explored on the Spartanburg Music Trail, a 30-minute self-guided walking tour presented by the Spartanburg Philharmonic.

"The Marshall Tucker Band is who we're most often associated with, but Spartanburg actually has a strong music history dating back nearly two centuries, much of which visitors can learn about on the Spartanburg Music Trail," says Patricia Byrd, director of group sales and services for OneSpartanburgInc. "There's info on The Marshall Tucker Band, along with Pinkney 'Pink' Anderson, the Spartanburg bluesman who influenced Pink Floyd; Spartanburg native Don Reno, who collaborated with Arthur Smith on the instrumental *Dueling Banjos* bluegrass classic; and much more. It's a great way for visitors in town to experience Spartanburg and connect our past with the present."

Rigsby's Classic Rock Café, a restaurant and entertainment venue, regularly hosts live acts and features music artifacts from the Beatles, Joan Jett, and AC/DC. It includes a 40-seat private dining room and is available for full buyouts. In addition to Rigsby's Classic Rock Café, Spartanburg Memorial Auditorium seats 3,000 people in The Theatre and can accommodate 1,800 in The Hall, a general admission venue. Since opening in 1951, the historic venue has presented shows from the late Ray Charles, Billy Joel, The Black Crowes, Dave Matthews, and Taylor Swift. Its newest space, The Alcove, is a versatile meeting venue and lounge, offering a blank slate for a wide range of events, from seminars and fundraisers to dynamic meetings and teambuilding activities.

"Spartanburg's rich music heritage offers meeting planners a variety of opportunities to incorporate the city's culture and story into their programs," Byrd says. For example, groups can enhance receptions and special events with live performances by local musicians, incorporate music-inspired elements into décor and programming, and include music-focused experiences in the itinerary. Planners can also arrange visits to cultural attractions and museums highlighting Spartanburg's musical history, or host



Knoxville's music festivals celebrate live music from local and national acts, such as Maggie Rose.

Eli Johnson/Courtesy Visit Knoxville

gatherings at local music and entertainment venues like Rigsby's Classic Rock Café, The Fr8yard, and Fretwell.

"Spartanburg's music story is an important part of what makes Spartanburg so distinctive," Byrd says. "From the artists and venues that continue to shape our music scene today to the people and places that preserve our musical heritage, music provides meeting planners with another authentic way to connect their attendees with our community. Combined with our walkable downtown, diverse venues, welcoming hospitality, and growing hotel inventory, Spartanburg offers groups the opportunity to create meetings and events that are not only productive, but truly memorable."

Knoxville, Tenn.

While Knoxville is famously associated with the Osborne Brothers' hit, *Rocky Top*, which serves as the University of Tennessee's fight song and one of the state's official songs, the city's music history runs much deeper. Knoxville also lays claim to country stars Morgan Wallen, Kelsey Ballerini, Kenny Chesney, Ashley Monroe, and Emily Ann Roberts.

"We like to say that country music was born here in east Tennessee, then we handed it to Nashville to grow up, and it became the 'Music City,'" says Kim Bumpas, president of Visit Knoxville. "Our musical history is rich, running from Appalachian and old-time bluegrass to country, blues, jazz, rock, and Americana."

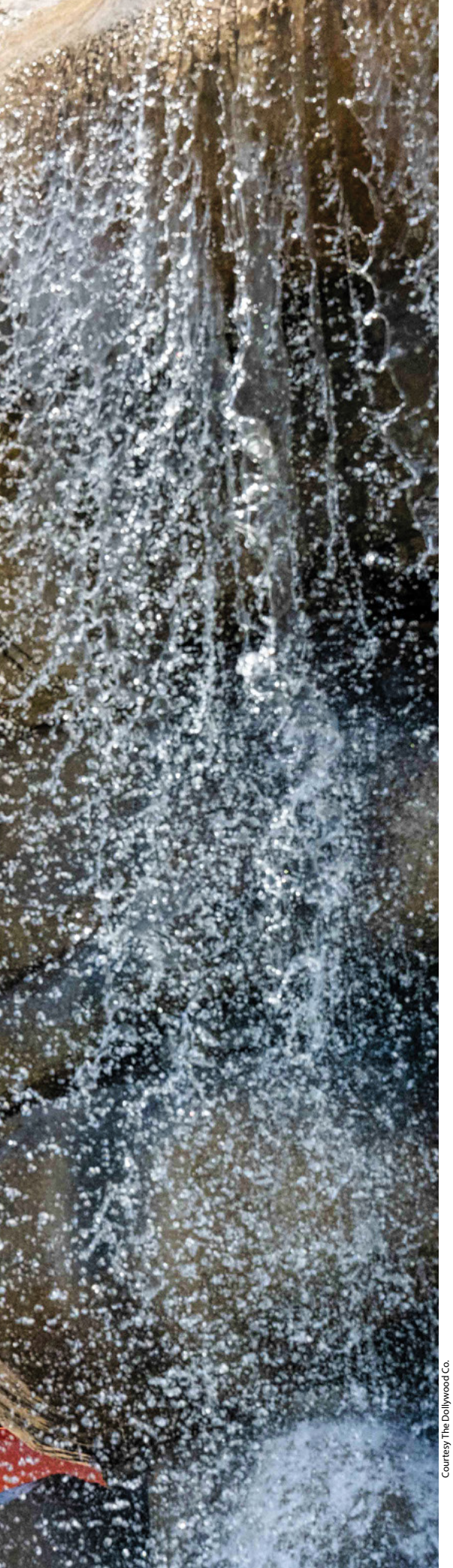
Knoxville is also the home of the Southern Skies Festival (which was paused this year after coming online in 2021) and Big Ears Festival, an eclectic, SXSW-like decentralized festival held in April. Since launching in 2009, the festival has expanded to more than 20 local venues, including the historic Bijou and Tennessee theatres, Knoxville Civic Auditorium & Coliseum, and Boyd's Jig and Reel, drawing an average attendance of 10,000-15,000 visitors annually. Both the Bijou and Tennessee theatres are available for private event rentals.

In addition to the music performances at Big Ears Festival, Knoxville hosts Blue Plate Special, a free lunchtime concert series held inside Visit Knoxville's downtown office. The show launched in 2004, broadcasting at noon daily (excluding Fridays and Sundays) from local radio station WDVX. It has welcomed artists like Chris Stapleton (with The SteelDrivers), Blackberry Smoke, The Avett Brothers, and Rodney Crowell.

When not used for sporting events, Thompson-Boling Arena at the Food City Center and Neyland Stadium host concerts and other events. The 500,000-square-foot Knoxville Convention Center and its companion Knoxville Civic Auditorium & Coliseum host various meetings, conventions, hockey matches, concerts, and more. Other must-see music attractions include the Dolly Parton mural in downtown Knoxville, where the late "Queen of Country" gave some of her first public performances; the Museum of Appalachia, in nearby Norris; and the East Tennessee History Center.

"I see a lot of individuals and event planners locally really leaning into singer-songwriters and using them to highlight their gatherings," Bumpas says. "But at the same time, there are also groups bringing in talent like bluegrass bands and legacy acts like The Temptations. There's truly something for everybody at all times of the day at spaces both big and small here in Knoxville."





Courtesy The Dollywood Co.

AMUSEMENT PARKS MAKE A SPLASH WITH MEETINGS

By Matt Swenson

Amusement parks can bring out the child in all of us. When combined with a meeting, they offer thrilling experiences that attendees crave. "People want to be excited about the meetings they attend," says Robby Briley, senior event consultant for Disney Meetings & Events.

Meetings, conventions, or incentive trips centered on a theme park, waterpark, or similar attraction are a great opportunity for event planners and the organizations they represent to energize their clients, members, staff, and user base. While it's hard to go wrong with a standard day of riding roller coasters or splashing around a waterpark, savvy planners go beyond using the park as just a break from meetings.

Truly engaging events use the park as more than an impressive backdrop. Ambitious planners incorporate the attraction's themes and spectacular setting into their own event story. Moving your meeting to an amusement park demonstrates corporate values like work-life balance, which can instill loyalty among attendees. Amusement park meetings also inspire creativity and imagination—the basis for brand building, marketing, and innovative meeting strategy—in ways that are difficult to duplicate in a hotel ballroom. Plus, few experiences bring attendees together more than surviving the death-defying drops, high-speed loop-the-loops, or other high-adventure "teambuilding opportunities" at such attractions.

Hosting meetings is serious business for amusement parks. In an era when bleisure is coveted, many attractions are upping their business-meeting game—with some even adding onsite hotels. Explore our roundup of theme parks, waterparks, and similar attractions that are transforming a day in the park into an unforgettable experience for attendees.

Busch Gardens

In Williamsburg, Va., a destination steeped in American history, the Parisian streets, Scottish hamlets, and German-style Oktoberfest of Busch Gardens will make you feel as if you're in the Old World. The park has been named the nation's most beautiful theme park by the National Amusement Park Historical Association since 1990. Busch Gardens also offers more than 20 rides and 10 roller coasters, including Loch Ness Monster and Pantheon, as well as animal exhibits and habitats featuring, among others, Clydesdale horses and Scottish Highland cattle.

Busch Gardens also has a park in Tampa, Fla. While the Tampa park's attractions are similar to those at the Williamsburg park, it features an African theme.

Village buyouts are the Williamsburg location's most popular offerings among associations and corporate groups, according to Laura Flint, director of sales at Busch Gardens and Water Country USA, the sister amusement park in central Virginia. Das Festhaus, an authentic Oktoberfest hall that can be transformed into a reception space for 1,000 guests, is arguably the top draw, Flint adds. Other event spaces include Black Forest (1,000 attendees) and the Royal Palace Theatre (4,500 attendees). Catering is available at all event spaces.

The villages at Busch Gardens offer attendees an immersive cultural experience. "Our European villages give groups the opportunity to intertwine each country's themed décor, entertainment, and food and beverage into their park experience while customizing for their meeting needs," Flint says.

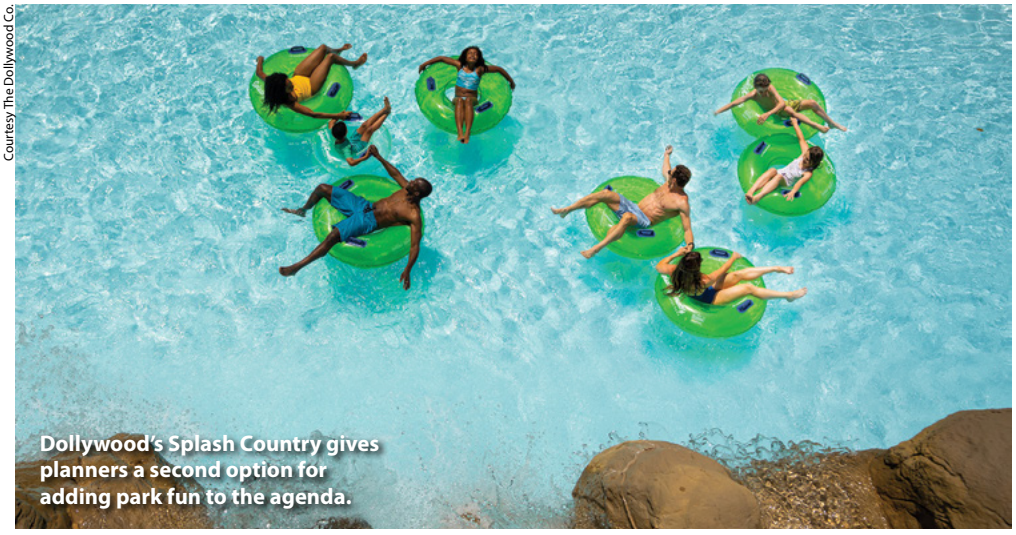
Buyouts are available before the park opens and after hours, although groups often opt to enjoy the park during operating hours with

Courtesy United Parks and Resorts



Das Festhaus, a German-themed event space at Busch Gardens Williamsburg, is among the most popular venues for corporate groups.

Courtesy The Dollywood Co.



Dollywood's Splash Country gives planners a second option for adding park fun to the agenda.

VIP experiences and private catering venues, according to Flint. Behind-the-scenes tours of roller coasters, animal encounters, and themed shows provide a range of options to suit attendees' interests.

Dollywood & Dollywood's Splash Mountain

The immense public outpouring in response to Dolly Parton's recent passing reflects how beloved the entertainer, entrepreneur, and philanthropist was. Her welcoming spirit lives on at her namesake Dollywood theme park in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., set in the shadows of the Great Smoky Mountains.

Jasmine Mealy, event planner for JJ Snack Foods, says she could sense Parton's kindness throughout the process of organizing the company's sales meeting at HeartSong Lodge & Resort in November 2025. In fact, the experience was so nice that the company is planning a repeat visit this year. "It all goes back to Dolly's message of putting a smile on your face and being the bright light in someone's day," Mealy says.

Mealy was seeking a combination of resort meeting space and theme-park entertainment to spark a high turnout and strong engagement. She says Dollywood was a natural fit because some of JJ Snack Foods' brands, including Dippin' Dots, SuperPretzels, and churros, are already sold at the park.

According to Cordelia Morrell, director of sales for Dollywood Parks & Resorts, business groups are a target audience of Dollywood's HeartSong Lodge & Resort, which opened in 2023 with 302 guest rooms and 26,000 square feet of event space, and Dollywood's DreamMore Resort and Spa, which opened in 2015 with 300 guest rooms and 6,000 square feet of event space. Now, Dollywood, Dollywood's Splash Country, and the two resorts host event groups every week, even during the offseason, which runs January through March.

Dollywood's HeartSong Lodge & Resort is ideal for mid-size meetings like JJ Snack Foods, Morrell says. The resort's event spaces, audiovisual capabilities, and F&B options are conducive to getting business done and to hosting JJ Snack Foods' awards ceremony, Mealy adds.

While JJ Snack Foods' headquarters are in New Jersey, many executives are based in Nashville, within driving distance of the park. Some employees came from the Northeast, Southern California, Texas, Canada, Mexico, and elsewhere; for many, the meeting was their first opportunity to experience Dollywood. To enhance attendees' connection to the venue, JJ Snack Foods provided the park's famous cinnamon bread as a gift, featuring the park's butterfly logo.

The quality of services and rides at Dollywood and Dollywood's Splash Country



Rafting is a popular teambuilding option at the 120-acre Montgomery Whitewater, located in Alabama.

Elijah Wittum Photography

waterpark (open May through September) might surprise first-time guests, Morrell says. "Dollywood's somewhat smaller size, compared to other theme parks, lends itself to the charm and intimacy that you can't get from larger parks," Morrell says.

Mealy allotted time on the agenda for attendees to enjoy Dollywood for several hours, and Dollywood provided discounted tickets and food vouchers. Part of Dollywood's appeal is that it is more than thrill rides, Mealy adds. The park offers plenty of options for guests who aren't interested in rides—including live shows, village areas, and carnival-inspired attractions.

Dollywood's inclusive nature is part of the park's appeal among meeting groups, according to Morrell. The family-friendly attractions and mix of stellar business and entertainment options align with what organizations are seeking. "What better way to convey your company's commitment to work-life balance than to bring someone to a place that already demonstrates it?"

Beyond traditional meetings, Dollywood also regularly hosts employee appreciation days, when the entire family is likely to tag along.

Repeat meetings like JJ Snack Foods can still enjoy new experiences at Dollywood, as the park often introduces new programming, rides, and seasonal events. NightFlight Expedition, a hybrid indoor water and roller coaster, opened this past summer, and each year the park adds special décor, dining options, and events programmed around its fall harvest and winter holiday themed seasons.

With both Dollywood and Dollywood's Splash Country, there is always something fun in store for groups. As Morrell notes, after enjoying the roller coasters and other attractions at Dollywood, one corporate group mixed things up by taking over Dollywood's Splash Country.

Dollywood Parks & Resorts staff can also arrange Pink Jeep Tours and other local offsite activities for groups interested in exploring the Great Smoky Mountains beyond the parks.

Mealy says the Dollywood Parks & Resorts' desire to please stands out from other events she has planned. "They're all so friendly and want to make the event work for what you do."

Montgomery Whitewater

Montgomery Whitewater is a 120-acre outdoor adventure center and entertainment district, located near downtown Montgomery, Ala., and easily accessible via I-65 and I-85. While the venue hosted the 2024 U.S. Olympic Canoe Slalom Team Trials, it offers activities for all skill levels and interests, according to Heather Watts, sales director.

Montgomery Whitewater offers both the fun and teambuilding options that corporate groups seek in an event venue. "Rafting works particularly well [for teambuilding] because participants have to communicate, listen, and work together toward an immediate common goal," Watts says.

In addition to whitewater rafting, the Montgomery attraction includes an aerial ropes course, climbing, biking, trails, and other land-based recreation, which encourage leadership, friendly competition, and cooperation—building camaraderie and collaboration that carries over after employees return to the workplace. "Companies want employees to connect, build relationships, and have an experience they will continue talking about after they return to work," says Watts.

The land-based activities also allow groups to take advantage of the attraction year-round.

Dedicated event space includes a 1,468-square-foot venue seating 94 theatre style or 72 banquet style, as well as an outdoor patio for up to 150 guests. Onsite catering is available.

Customized signage and branding, reserved spaces, F&B packages, and onsite entertainment are available to planners. Hosting a reception or happy-hour event after an afternoon excursion is a popular trend at the attraction, Watts notes.

Downtown hotels, restaurants, convention and meeting facilities, and historic and cultural attractions in Montgomery are only minutes away, making it easy to add an offsite excursion to a meeting agenda. "We work with planners to make Montgomery Whitewater feel like an extension of their event, rather than simply a venue they are visiting," Watts says.

OWA

"When you can walk your group from a conference room to a roller coaster in the same afternoon, that changes the energy of the whole event," says Dave Holmin, director of group sales for OWA Parks & Resort in Foley, Ala.

Approximately a 25-minute drive from the beaches of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach, OWA has emerged as a popular break in meetings or host venue in its own right.

Tropic Falls theme park, which includes an indoor waterpark, features more than 23 rides and attractions. In addition, Downtown OWA offers shopping, dining, and entertainment.

Courtesy OWA



Located in Foley, Ala., OWA Tropic Falls theme park includes more than 20 rides, an outdoor wave pool and surf simulator, and an indoor waterpark.

Courtesy Silver Dollar City



Adventurous attendees might enjoy Silver Dollar City's Outlaw Run, which features the world's first and only double barrel roll on a wooden coaster.

In addition to after-hours theme park and group ride experiences, OWA hosts corporate receptions, award ceremonies, teambuilding exercises, and themed events at The Bohemian (flexible event spaces range from 1,763 to 4,637 square feet) and OWA Theater (with 435 seats, six handicap-accessible spaces, and the Mezzanine, which has a private bar), both located at Downtown OWA. The two venues can be decorated to meet a wide range of corporate looks and event themes.

Planners appreciate OWA's ability to incorporate more than one experience into a day or night at the park, Holmin says. "The best agendas we help build are the ones that use these experiences as connective tissue. A teambuilding competition on a ride or attraction does more for a group than another hour in a conference room, and it's still a productive time."

The onsite Marriott TownePlace Suites, which has 150 extended-stay suites, 600 square feet of flexible meeting and conference space, and free breakfast buffet, brings added convenience for groups requiring overnight accommodations.

According to Holmin, OWA and the surrounding Gulf region are attractive to planners looking to provide a mix of relaxation and work. "When attendees know there's a reason to arrive a day early or stay a day later, attendance goes up, and so does satisfaction," Holmin says. "That's the advantage of a destination like OWA. It's a legitimate meetings destination that also happens to be a place people enjoy."

Silver Dollar City

Silver Dollar City in Branson, Mo., is built on creating shared experiences, with an array of options that distinguish it from other amusement parks across the country. Silver Dollar City theme park features more than 40 rides and attractions, including seven roller coasters, as well as an 1880s-style mining town, live music and entertainment, and artisan (blacksmiths and glassblowers) demonstrations, along with Silver Dollar City's White Water waterpark and Silver Dollar City's Showboat, available for private and semi-private cruises around Table Rock Lake. Groups can also reserve private areas within Silver Dollar City's theme and water parks for

exclusive events and buyout experiences. The park's 700-seat dining room features flexible banquet seating and meal service, along with audiovisual equipment and technical support.

Teambuilding looks and feels different at Silver Dollar City, according to Angela Davis, the park's director of sales. "For example, Silver Dollar City Theme Park sits atop Marvel Cave, America's third-largest cave and one of the Heartland's most fascinating natural wonders," she says. "Another example is a customized scavenger hunt throughout Silver Dollar City Theme Park that incorporates a company's brand, values, or meeting objectives, and encourages attendees to explore, laugh, and discover together."

As a complement to the park, Silver Dollar City Resort is set to open in 2027. The resort will offer 262 guest rooms and 20,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space. It is the first project in the company's $500 million, 10-year strategic investment in the Ozarks. Miner's Mountain Express, a family coaster, will also open at the park next year.

Diana Nelson, who plans meetings for ProValue Insurance, says she jumped at the chance to bring an event to the new Silver Dollar City Resort. "From the moment I heard plans for Silver Dollar City Resort, I knew I wanted to host an event there. In fact, I was determined to be the very first group to sign a contract, and I was thrilled to make that happen," she says.

Nelson hopes bringing the ProValue Insurance event to Silver Dollar City will boost attendance and build excitement. "I believe our attendees will be excited by the opportunity to gather at a brand-new resort and experience something different from a traditional meeting destination," she says. "Rather than serving as just a backdrop for the event, Silver Dollar City becomes part of the experience itself, making it more meaningful and memorable for attendees."



Courtesy Universal Kids Resort

Universal Kids Resort opened this past summer in Frisco, Texas, with onsite meeting space and a 300-room hotel.



Courtesy Universal Orlando Resort

Universal Helios Grand Hotel, a Loews Hotel is a luxury property offering direct access to Epic Universe in Orlando, Fla.

Universal Kids Resort & Universal Orlando Resort

Bleisure travelers now have the chance to hang out with SpongeBob SquarePants, Shrek, and the Minions at the new Universal Kids Resort, which opened this past summer in Frisco, Texas, a booming suburb outside of Dallas.

The new attraction is geared more to younger audiences than Universal Studios Hollywood in California and Universal Orlando Resort in Florida. In that regard, it is ideal for family days, employee appreciation events, customer celebrations, and other gatherings, according to Sharon Parker, director of marketing & sales for Universal Kids Resort.

Groups can take advantage of the park's onsite meeting space before exploring the rides and other attractions. Curiosity Central is a flexible space for presentations, celebrations, branded gatherings, and more. From there, it's a quick walk to the park's attractions, games, face painting, character meet-and-greets, and live entertainment.

In addition, Universal Kids Resort's 300-room hotel is just steps from the park. Amenities include a resort-style pool, a fitness center, an arcade, and onsite dining. Guest rooms accommodate up to six guests, ideal for families tagging along on the business trip.

"For employee family events, that mix of business and play gives organizations a way to recognize associates while creating time for coworkers and families to connect," Parker says.

Photos courtesy Walt Disney World Resort



The Disney Meetings & Events team can arrange special appearances by Disney characters, exclusive entertainment, and VIP access for corporate groups.



Walt Disney World's Animal Kingdom offers a safari-like experience, as well as tours, shows, and other attractions.

Florida's Universal Orlando Resort is accustomed to hosting corporate groups. The resort includes 300,000 square feet of meeting space and 11,000 guest rooms across multiple Loews hotels and resorts, as well as Hard Rock Hotel.

Universal Orlando Resort's three parks include Epic Universe, which opened in 2025. The parks feature a mix of coasters and experience-based rides, many of which are suitable even for those who have a fear of heights. Other attractions include Diagon Alley and shows based on *Harry Potter* and *How to Train Your Dragon*.

Planners can customize their events. Immersive experiences include Universal's Great Movie Escape at Universal CityWalk and a ride-and-dine program with VIP access to two rides at Universal Islands of Adventure or Universal Studios Florida, and scavenger hunts. Onsite group dining is also available at Universal CityWalk or Epic Universe's many restaurants. Team/family picnics are also available.

Walt Disney World

Just outside of Orlando, in Lake Buena Vista, Walt Disney World touts itself as "The Happiest Place on Earth."

Planners can choose from Walt Disney World's four theme parks. Animal Kingdom adds a safari element; EPCOT highlights global cultures; Hollywood Studios sends you to a galaxy far, far away; and Magic Kingdom, the original attraction, features Cinderella's castle and offers more than 20 rides.

"It really depends on what the planner wants to accomplish," says Briley, with Disney Meetings & Events. "Some groups want the energy of an attraction like Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind, while others may be looking for something more immersive or meaningful, like a conservation-focused experience at Disney's Animal Kingdom."

Corporate events at Walt Disney World offer elevated experiences beyond the standard guest offerings. Private or expedited attraction access, exclusive entertainment, character appearances, unique venues, and customized F&B are among the ways the Disney Meetings & Events team can enhance group events.

"There's always another way to tell the story," Briley says.

In addition to the four theme parks, Walt Disney World offers a number of resort properties, with complimentary transportation (via shuttle or water taxi) to each park. The newly expanded and renovated Disney World Swan and Dolphin is now the largest convention hotel on the U.S. Eastern Seaboard—now offering 600,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space. Disney's Coronado Springs Resort, Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, and Disney's Contemporary Resort put groups close to the Magic Kingdom. Disney Springs adds shopping and restaurant options, both upscale and family-friendly.

"At Walt Disney World, it's really about elevating the meetings experience and giving planners the flexibility to build an event that works for their goals and their attendees," Briley says. "A destination like Disney gives attendees an opportunity to connect with colleagues, experience something together, and enjoy the destination beyond their business sessions. That bleisure appeal gives people another reason to attend, extend their stay, or bring family along."

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A GRAND AFFAIR

Meet the South's venues that know how to make an occasion of it

By Paige Townley

From grand estates steeped in history to glamorous resorts framed by sweeping landscapes, the South's most storied venues know how to turn a meeting or event into a memorable occasion. Their appeal goes beyond impressive architecture and beautiful surroundings, bringing together distinctive settings, dramatic showpieces, and meeting facilities that set the stage before the first guest arrives. These Southern properties make a lasting impression and give planners plenty to consider when choosing a location for their next event.

Courtesy The Capital Hotel



Courtesy The Admiral Hotel

The Admiral Hotel Alabama

In the heart of historic downtown Mobile, The Admiral Hotel brings the unmistakable character of the Gulf Coast to meetings and events. With more than 6,000 square feet of event space across six venues, the hotel can accommodate everything from executive sessions and training programs to receptions and company celebrations.

Custom catering and personalized service support each event, while 156 guest rooms, including six suites, allow groups to stay on property. Indoor gathering spaces and outdoor terrace options provide flexibility for receptions and social events, while Le Moyne's Chophouse, the hotel's award-winning steakhouse, offers private dining for executive dinners and special events.

Step outside, and downtown Mobile becomes an extension of the meeting experience. More than 20 attractions are within walking distance, the Mobile Convention Center is just a 10-minute walk away, and Dauphin Street's dining and nightlife are also close by. French-colonial streets, the river, and centuries of history give attendees plenty to explore between sessions.

The location is particularly appealing during Mobile's Mardi Gras, when groups can take advantage of the hotel's proximity to parade routes and Carnival festivities.

Courtesy The Capital Hotel



The Capital Hotel Arkansas

For 150 years, The Capital Hotel has been a fixture of downtown Little Rock, combining historic character with the amenities and flexibility today's groups need and expect.

Known as the "Front Porch of Little Rock," the hotel offers six unique event spaces and pre-function areas for meetings, receptions, and special events. The 1,849-square-foot ballroom provides the largest setting, while the 1,504-square-foot Brooks Parlor and 1,457-square-foot Baxter Parlor offer additional space for larger gatherings. Smaller programs can take advantage of the 740-square-foot Quapaw Parlor or the 312-square-foot Cherokee Parlor and Wine Cellar, giving planners options for everything from executive meetings and intimate dinners to receptions and celebrations.

The 94 guest rooms and suites feature 14-foot ceilings and floor-to-ceiling windows, while full-service valet and parking add convenience for attendees. The hotel is just a 15-minute drive from Bill & Hillary Clinton National Airport (NIT).

The Capital Hotel's downtown location makes it easy for groups to experience Little Rock beyond the meeting room. After sessions, attendees can gather at Capital Bar & Grill, a local institution known for Southern-inspired fare and handcrafted cocktails, or One Eleven at the Capital, which serves breakfast and weekend brunch.

Courtesy The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, Miami



The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, Miami Florida

Set along the pristine shores of Key Biscayne, The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, Miami offers planners an oceanfront locale paired with the scale and sophistication of a major meetings destination.

For planners, the meeting space is a standout. The resort features more than 37,000 square feet of event space across 26 event rooms, with the Ritz-Carlton Ballroom serving as the largest venue, accommodating up to 1,000 guests. An oceanfront lounge and elegant salons offer additional opportunities for conferences, board meetings, receptions, and executive gatherings, while indoor and outdoor spaces allow events to take advantage of the Key Biscayne setting.

Outside the meeting room, the resort gives attendees plenty of ways to make the most of their stay. A spa with a new spa garden, state-of-the-art fitness facilities, pools, beach access, and the Cliff Drysdale Tennis Center offer options for both relaxation and recreation. The Club Lounge adds an elevated gathering point, with culinary and beverage offerings throughout the day. Dining concepts include Luma, Paralía, Rum Bar, and Dune Beach Bar, plus Pura Vida Miami.

Courtesy Cloudland at McLemore Resort Lookout Mountain



Cloudland at McLemore Resort Lookout Mountain, Curio by Hilton Georgia

Perched atop Lookout Mountain in Rising Fawn, Cloudland at McLemore Resort offers a rare combination of elevated resort amenities and a dramatic mountain scene. With 245 guest rooms, including 21 suites, the property feels removed from the everyday, yet remains within easy reach of Chattanooga, Tenn.

The meeting space is designed to make the most of the resort setting. Cloudland offers more than 20,000 square feet of meeting and event space, including the Skyline and Cumberland ballrooms, four additional breakout rooms, and dedicated pre-function areas. Floor-to-ceiling windows bring the surrounding landscape into the event experience, while outdoor terraces, event lawns, and a pavilion offer additional options for receptions, teambuilding activities, and social gatherings. The Cumberland Ballroom accommodates up to 550 guests theater style.

Outside the meeting room, the resort offers a deep roster of group experiences. Three golf courses—the Highlands, The Keep, and The Cairn Short Course—anchor the recreation program, while hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, and other outdoor pursuits provide plenty of choices for team activities and downtime. Selah Spa, a heated infinity-edge pool, and a 24-hour fitness center round out the wellness offerings.

Dining is another draw, with four restaurants and a café, including Auld Alliance, a Scottish-French concept, and Skyside, where handcrafted cocktails accompany expansive mountain views.

Courtesy The Brown Hotel



The Brown Hotel Kentucky

The Brown Hotel is a natural choice for groups looking to combine meetings with a uniquely Louisville experience.

A Louisville landmark since 1923, the AAA Four Diamond hotel offers nearly 40,000 square feet of meeting and event space across 17 venues, accommodating groups from six to 600. The mix includes two ballrooms, executive boardrooms, breakout rooms, reception areas, and private dining spaces. The historic Crystal Ballroom provides an elegant setting for larger gatherings, while the Rooftop Garden offers an open-air option with views of the downtown skyline. Onsite audiovisual and production capabilities, along with dedicated sales, event-planning ,and culinary teams, support programs from corporate meetings to receptions and celebrations.

The hotel's 293 guest rooms, fitness center, business center, and concierge services provide additional conveniences for attendees. Dining is another part of the experience, with J. Graham's Café and the Lobby Bar & Grill located on property. Perhaps the most recognizable amenity is the Original Hot Brown, created at The Brown in 1926. Groups can incorporate Louisville's iconic dish into meals and receptions, adding a local element to their programs.

Four blocks from the Kentucky International Convention Center, The Brown Hotel also puts attendees within easy reach of the Bourbon District, Museum Row, Fourth Street Live!, and other downtown attractions.


Courtesy WATERMARK Baton Rouge, Autograph Collection

WATERMARK Baton Rouge, Autograph Collection Louisiana

WATERMARK Baton Rouge boasts history, luxury, and meeting spaces in the heart of downtown Baton Rouge. Housed in the former Louisiana National Bank Building, the 12-story hotel has 144 guest rooms, including accommodations that retain original architectural details, such as carved woodwork and plaster molding. The property's lower level offers one of its most standout spots for groups, with the original bank vault and depository transformed into meeting rooms and the replica vault door providing a memorable architectural detail. Throughout the hotel, historic photographs, original Art Deco elevators, and Greek Revival columns reflect the building's past while fitting comfortably within its updated design.

For dining and breaks, the property offers two onsite options. The Gregory offers an elevated dining experience beneath restored bas-reliefs by Louisiana artist Angela Gregory, while Milford's on Third serves breakfast and lunch in a more casual setting.

Location is another advantage for meeting groups. WATERMARK sits in the Third Street Business District between Baton Rouge's Old State Capitol and New State Capitol, placing attendees close to downtown restaurants, nightlife, and other attractions.


Courtesy Live! Casino Hotel Maryland

Live! Casino Hotel Maryland Maryland

Live! Casino & Hotel Maryland gives meeting groups a full-service destination where accommodations, event space, dining, and entertainment are all under one roof.

Located in Hanover, between Baltimore and Washington, D.C., the AAA Four Diamond-rated property features 310 guest rooms, including 50 suites, along with a fitness center, Live! Spa, and VIP check-in.

For meetings and events, the Live! Event Center offers 40,000 square feet of flexible space, including a 1,500-seat banquet capacity, a grand ballroom with six breakout rooms, pre-function space, and two boardrooms. The space can accommodate corporate meetings, conventions, trade shows, galas, weddings, and other gatherings. The Hall at Live! adds another option for larger events and entertainment, with 75,000 square feet spread across three levels and seating for up to 4,800.

Groups also have an extensive selection of dining and entertainment nearby and on property, while the casino offers nearly 4,000 slot machines, 182 live-action table games, and a 52-table poker room. Arundel Mills Mall is adjacent to the property, and Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI) is just minutes away, making Live! particularly accessible for regional and out-of-town attendees.


Courtesy Dunleith Historic Inn

Dunleith Historic Inn Mississippi

Dunleith Historic Inn offers an opportunity to meet and gather within a historic Natchez estate, with event spaces, accommodations, and dining spread across the property.

Built in 1855 and designated a National Historic Landmark, the Greek Revival estate offers a range of picturesque backdrops for meetings, retreats, receptions, and private events. The Main House provides a backdrop for smaller gatherings, while the Courtyard and extensive grounds offer additional options for receptions and outdoor functions. The South Lawn can accommodate larger events, and the pool and patio provide a more relaxed setting for cocktails and networking.

The Castle Restaurant & Pub, located in the estate's historic carriage house and stables, adds another onsite option for group dining. Private dinners and receptions can be arranged in the restaurant's upstairs dining room, while the Pub and patio offer a more casual atmosphere.

Planners can choose from 22 elegant and charming guest rooms at the Main House, the Courtyard, and the Dairy Barn. The overnight accommodations spread across the estate offer distinct experiences while simplifying logistics and keeping attendees connected throughout a program.

Dunleith's location also makes it easy to incorporate Natchez into a group itinerary. Historic homes, local restaurants, cultural attractions, and Mississippi River views are all part of the destination.


Courtesy The Royal Sonesta Chase Park Plaza St. Louis

The Royal Sonesta Chase Park Plaza St. Louis Missouri

The Royal Sonesta Chase Park Plaza St. Louis pairs a landmark St. Louis venue with an impressive collection of meeting spaces, dining options, and guest amenities.

The AAA Four Diamond hotel features more than 65,000 square feet of meeting and event space, making it suitable for programs ranging from business meetings and conferences to receptions and large-scale celebrations. Its 398 guest rooms and suites provide convenient accommodations for attendees, while three onsite restaurants give groups several options for meals and informal gatherings.

The property also offers amenities that can fill out an attendee's schedule between sessions. An 18,000-square-foot fitness center, a seasonal outdoor pool, and a five-screen cinema are all located onsite, while the Central West End puts guests within walking distance of restaurants, boutiques, galleries, and entertainment.

The Chase Park Plaza itself is part of the city's history. The original Chase opened in 1922, followed by the Art Deco Park Plaza tower in 1929; the properties were later connected to create the hotel as it is today.


Courtesy Chetola Resort Blowing Rock

Chetola Resort Blowing Rock North Carolina

Chetola Resort Blowing Rock gives meeting groups a change of pace from the traditional conference setting, with meeting space, varied accommodations, and 75 acres of grounds in North Carolina's High Country.

The resort offers 50 lodge rooms along with more than 85 condominiums and rental homes through its rental program, giving planners flexibility for groups with different lodging needs. Meeting venues range from the 500-square-foot Equestrian Board Room to the 1,925-square-foot Evergreen Room, which accommodates up to 160 theater style. The Silverlake Room and several outdoor venues, including the lakeside Boathouse, Firepit, and a 4,800-square-foot tent, provide additional options for meetings, receptions, and private events.

The property also provides planners with ways to build activities into a group itinerary. Chetola Resort's Orvis®-endorsed Fly Fishing Guide Service offers guided instruction for beginners and experienced anglers, while hiking, boating, lawn games, and sporting clays provide other options between sessions. A spa, fitness center, and pool add to the onsite amenities, while nearby downtown Blowing Rock offers dining, shopping, and exploring.


Courtesy Omni Oklahoma City Hotel

Omni Oklahoma City Hotel Oklahoma

Omni Oklahoma City Hotel occupies a prominent place in the downtown landscape, where the guest experience extends well beyond the boardroom.

The 605-room hotel offers 76,000 square feet of meeting and event space, with venues suited to programs ranging from smaller business meetings to large conferences and receptions. The 20,500-square-foot Oklahoma Station Ballroom serves as the largest event space, while the Five Moons Ballroom and 12 breakout rooms give planners additional flexibility for concurrent sessions and smaller gatherings.

Outside the meeting rooms, groups can choose from six dining destinations for meals and informal gatherings, while a rooftop pool, a fitness center, and Mokara Spa add amenities for attendees between sessions.

The hotel's location also simplifies group itineraries. Bricktown, the Oklahoma City Convention Center, and Paycom Center are all nearby, while the surrounding downtown area offers restaurants, entertainment, and other attractions within walking distance. OKC Will Rogers International Airport (OKC) is approximately 10 miles away.


Courtesy The Dunlin, Auberge Collection

The Dunlin, Auberge Collection South Carolina

The Dunlin, Auberge Collection brings Lowcountry character to the meeting experience. Set on Johns Island along the banks of the Kiawah River, the hotel is approximately 20 miles from Charleston and just 30 miles from Charleston International Airport (CHS).

The 74-room property includes guest rooms, suites, and bungalows, each reflecting a cottage-inspired style with generous porches overlooking the surrounding marsh and riverfront landscape.

The Dunlin offers more than 5,500 square feet of space, including The Shippon, its largest event venue, which features floor-to-ceiling windows and oversized doors that open the room to the landscape. The 2,575-square-foot Lime House offers another elegant option for meetings, luncheons, and receptions, while the Riverbank lawn and Yarrow Field provide outdoor venues framed by live oaks, marshland, and waterfront views.

Beyond the event spaces, The Dunlin gives groups a range of ways to experience the Lowcountry. Onsite dining centers on seasonal, locally inspired cuisine, while the property's waterfront location lends itself to boating, fishing, and cycling. Guests can spend time exploring the surrounding marshes and riverfront, gathering outdoors beneath the live oaks, or simply enjoying the property's porch views.


Courtesy The Guest House at Graceland

The Guest House at Graceland Tennessee

Just steps from Elvis Presley's Graceland, The Guest House at Graceland brings Memphis history and Southern hospitality into a full-service destination.

The AAA Four Diamond hotel features 450 guest rooms and suites, with interiors that nod to Presley's personal style and the architecture of his nearby home. The Upstairs, the hotel's exclusive top floor, takes its cues from Graceland's private living quarters. Included in the accommodations are 20 themed suites, featuring design and décor supervised by Priscilla Presley.

For meetings and events, the nearly 11,000-square-foot Grand Ballroom is the centerpiece, accommodating up to 1,350 guests and divisible into five meeting rooms ranging from 929 to 4,700 square feet. The manicured Lawn can host approximately 400 guests for receptions, while the hotel's 464-seat theater provides a unique venue for presentations, live performances, and screenings.

The property's amenities give groups plenty to incorporate beyond scheduled sessions, including multiple dining options, a fitness center, an outdoor pool, and direct access to the Graceland campus. Its location also simplifies arrival, with Frederick W. Smith International Airport (MEM) approximately 10 minutes away.

Courtesy Commodore Perry Estate, Auberge Collection



Commodore Perry Estate, Auberge Collection Texas

Set within a historic 10-acre estate in the city's Hyde Park neighborhood, Commodore Perry Estate, Auberge Collection brings an intimate scale to Austin meetings and events.

Designed by Ken Fulk, the property boasts the character of its original architecture with 53 guest rooms and suites, including five signature suites. The residential-style accommodations provide groups with a more private setting, while the estate's indoor and outdoor spaces offer spaces for everything from executive gatherings to larger celebrations. Four event venues accommodate groups from 12 to 175, including the Chapel, with more than 1,600 square feet indoors and an additional 3,000 square feet outdoors.

The estate's amenities also give planners ways to build a fuller program around meetings. The 50-foot oval pool, fitness studio, and Spa Suite provide opportunities for downtime and wellness activities, while weekly programming, musical performances, and lawn games offer additional fun for attendees. House bicycles and a Mercedes-Benz loaner car add convenience for exploring Austin.

Dining is another draw. Lutie's Garden Restaurant serves highly seasonal, ingredient-driven cuisine sourced from Texas farmers, ranchers, and the Gulf Coast; the restaurant earned MICHELIN Guide recommendations in 2024 and 2025.

Courtesy Williamsburg Inn



Williamsburg Inn Virginia

Williamsburg Inn has been part of the Colonial Williamsburg experience since 1937, offering groups a historic site where gracious hospitality and meeting space elegantly come together.

Planned and designed under the direction of John D. Rockefeller Jr., the 62-room inn was created with an eye toward comfort and detail and has hosted royalty, presidents, and celebrities.

Today, the inn is the only Forbes Four-Star Hotel in Williamsburg. Its amenities include access to The Spa of Colonial Williamsburg, Golden Horseshoe Golf Club, and the attractions of Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area, all within easy reach.

For meetings and events, the inn offers 6,500 square feet of space across indoor venues. The 4,600-square-foot Regency Room—known as the "crown jewel of Williamsburg event venues"—and East Lounge provide sophisticated settings for meetings and receptions, while the Social Terrace—an extension to the inn's main lobby—Queen's Terrace, Oval Garden, and Fountain Garden offer spaces for gatherings in the open air.

Courtesy The Dupont Circle Hotel



The Dupont Circle Hotel Washington, D.C.

The Dupont Circle Hotel offers a distinctly D.C. experience for meetings and events, with a storied address in one of the city's most established neighborhoods.

Across nine floors, the hotel's rooms and suites pair contemporary design with residential touches, while Signature Suites add private terraces and city views.

For groups, 10,000 square feet of event space across six spaces creates a range of possibilities for meetings, dinners, and receptions. The 3,271-square-foot Dupont Ballroom accommodates up to 250 guests and features floor-to-ceiling windows, crystal chandeliers, and a private patio. The 2,004-square-foot Glover Park Room seats up to 150 and opens onto a 760-square-foot terrace, while the Foxhall Room can be divided into three smaller breakout spaces. Smaller programs can make use of the Georgetown and Kalorama rooms or the Douglass boardroom.

The hotel also offers distinctive options beyond traditional meeting space. The Pembroke restaurant opens onto a seasonal terrace, while Doyle Bar channels 1960s cocktail culture and offers private indoor and outdoor areas overlooking Dupont Circle.

Courtesy Oglebay Park Resort



Oglebay Park Resort West Virginia

Set across 2,000 acres in Wheeling, Oglebay Park Resort weaves its natural setting into the resort experience. Accommodations include lodge rooms, cottages, cabins, and larger homes, allowing groups to stay on property while enjoying multiple dining options and amenities, including a full-service spa.

The resort offers 30,000 square feet of event space for groups of 50 to 500, with options ranging from the 8,000-square-foot Glessner Auditorium and the 1930s-era Pine Room to ballrooms and smaller conference rooms for breakouts and meetings.

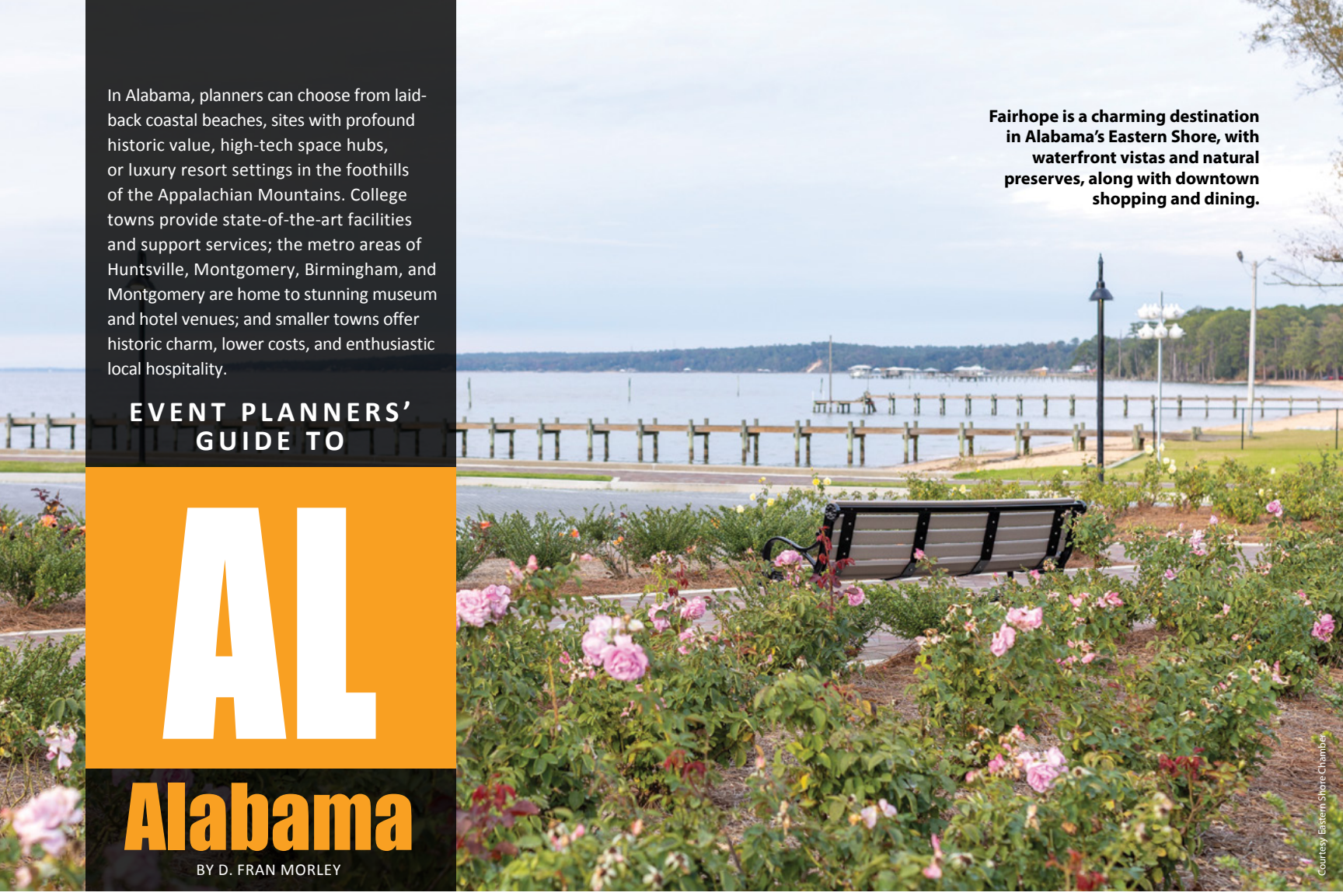
Outside the meeting spaces, Oglebay offers plenty to explore between sessions. Golf, hiking trails, pools, tennis, pickleball, and other recreational activities provide opportunities for teambuilding or downtime. The resort is also home to Oglebay Good Zoo, West Virginia's only zoo accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. More than 250 animals representing 68 species call the zoo home, including red pandas, cheetahs, and wallabies.

In Alabama, planners can choose from laid-back coastal beaches, sites with profound historic value, high-tech space hubs, or luxury resort settings in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. College towns provide state-of-the-art facilities and support services; the metro areas of Huntsville, Montgomery, Birmingham, and Montgomery are home to stunning museum and hotel venues; and smaller towns offer historic charm, lower costs, and enthusiastic local hospitality.

EVENT PLANNERS' GUIDE TO

AL Alabama

BY D. FRAN MORLEY



Fairhope is a charming destination in Alabama's Eastern Shore, with waterfront vistas and natural preserves, along with downtown shopping and dining.

Courtesy Eastern Shore Chamber

Northern Alabama

Huntsville

Huntsville.org; @VisitHuntsvilleAL; @Go2HuntsvilleAL

Known as "Rocket City" and home to NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center and the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, Huntsville offers a unique blend of high-tech innovation and space exploration history, along with a vibrant arts scene, natural attractions, and convenient accessibility, according to Jamie Koshofer, vice president of conventions for Huntsville/Madison County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). "Few destinations balance outdoor beauty with urban amenities like Huntsville," Koshofer says. "Huntsville International Airport (HSV) has been recognized among the best small airports in the United States, and the compact layout of our city allows quick connections between hotels, venues, and entertainment districts."

Downtown, adjacent to Big Spring International Park, the Von Braun Center has 170,000 square feet of convention and event space, including two ballrooms, a 1,955-seat concert hall, and an 8,300-seat arena. Connected to the center, the 295-room Embassy Suites Huntsville Downtown has 12,310 square feet of function space, including a 400-person-capacity ballroom. Several hotels are within a seven-minute walk, including the 120-room AC Hotel by Marriott Huntsville, with six event rooms to seat up to 200 people; 150-room Hampton Inn & Suites Huntsville Downtown, with 1,870 square feet of meeting space; 106 Jefferson, Curio by Hilton, with a 1,600-square-foot ballroom and additional spaces; and the recently opened Trilogy Hotel Huntsville, Autograph Collection, with 214 guest rooms, 4,250 square feet of meeting space, and a top-floor lounge.

Adjacent to Redstone Arsenal and the Cummings Research Park, Huntsville's dynamic MidCity district includes The Camp, a live-music, entertainment, and arts venue, as well as the 8,000-seat Orion Amphitheater, Topgolf, High Point Climbing & Fitness, the new 4,300-square-foot Artemis Pavilion, local shops and restaurants, and the newly opened 112-room Hotel Indigo Huntsville-MidCity, with a 138-person-capacity event space.

The U.S. Space & Rocket Center can host a 1,000-person dinner underneath an authentic Saturn V moon rocket. It features a 350-seat theater, a planetarium, classrooms, and other unique event spaces. At the center, the 290-room Huntsville Marriott has 11,288 square feet of meeting space. Nearby, the dual-branded Westin-Element has 382 guest rooms and 12,741 square feet of event space. There are more than 10,000 guest rooms in the Huntsville/Madison County area.

In addition to the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, other distinctive attractions in Huntsville include Lowe Mills ARTS & Entertainment, the largest privately owned arts facility in the U.S., and Campus No. 805, a transformed high school-turned-brewery and entertainment hub. Both venues offer one-of-a-kind, flexible event spaces showcasing Huntsville's creative spirit.

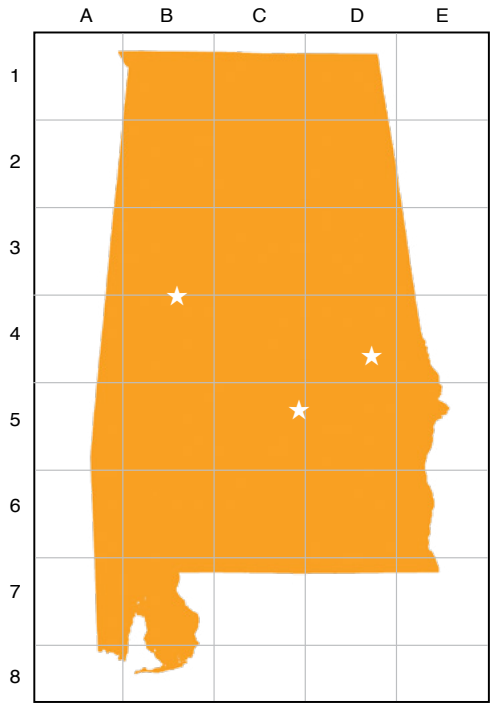
The Shoals – Lauderdale & Colbert Counties

VisitFlorence.com; TheShoalsAL.com; @VisitTheShoalsAL

The Shoals, including the cities of Muscle Shoals, Florence, Tuscumbia, and Sheffield, is a unique place in many ways, according to Brody Gravitt, sales manager of sport/travel trade for the Florence-Lauderdale CVB, known as Visit The Shoals. "Geographically, our location allows you to be within a short drive of Nashville, Tenn., Huntsville, Birmingham, and even Atlanta," he says. "Our rich music legacy is well-known, but we continue to expand our offerings for all kinds of interests. We're big enough to accommodate your needs while providing a cozy, welcoming atmosphere."

There are approximately 1,250 guest rooms in the region. The 196-room Renaissance Shoals Resort & Spa in Florence has more than 30,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space to host up to 900 guests. It features a full-service spa and the state's only revolving restaurant, 360 Grille, located on the 27th floor of the Renaissance Tower and overlooking Florence and the Tennessee River.

The Lauderdale County Ag Center, a multipurpose facility, is expected to open in 2027 with an arena and a plaza. Plans for future phases include an exposition hall and a hotel on the 200-acre site. The 10,000-person capacity Bank Independent Stadium at the University of North Alabama in Florence opened this past September.



City	Map Location
Auburn and Opelika ★	D4
Birmingham	C3
Cullman	C2
Eastern Shore	B7
Foley	B7, B8
Gadsden	D2
Gulf Shores and Orange Beach	B8
Huntsville	C1
Mobile	A7, B7
Montgomery ★	C5
The Shoals - Lauderdale and Colbert counties	B1
Tuscaloosa ★	B3, B4

★ See Breakout Spotlight



Built in 1829 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Gorgas House Museum on the University of Alabama campus is available for private events.

Alabama Tourism Dept./TravelSouthUSA.com

Cullman

VisitCullman.com; @VisitCullmanAL

Located off I-65 between Birmingham and Huntsville, Cullman blends German roots with Southern charm. According to VisitCullman.com, planning a visit to Cullman is refreshingly simple, with everything to see and do close, connected, and easy to enjoy.

Cullman offers a wide range of venues suited for meetings, conferences, celebrations, tournaments, retreats, and group gatherings of all sizes—from professional meeting spaces and event centers to scenic outdoor settings and unique local venues. OmniPlex, a large-scale multisport complex inside Cullman's 155-acre OmniSports District, features 115,500 square feet of courts, event space, and athletic facilities. In addition to hosting sports events, the facility can accommodate corporate events and community programming. It includes eight meeting rooms with smart boards and audiovisual capabilities, a director's lounge, and a commercial kitchen. Onsite catering is available.

Other options include Brick Haven Venue, with indoor and outdoor space for up to 1,500 event guests; The Venue at Cotton Creek, with a 10,000-square-foot event hall; and Abbey Byre at Saint Bernard, a historic building that has been renovated and repurposed as a performing arts and event center and accommodates 200 guests indoors and 300 outdoors.

Guest rooms are available across a variety of hotels, as well as retreat venues and unique accommodations. Red Rooster Retreat Center on Smith Lake has space to accommodate 23 overnight guests, a 30-seat dining room, and ample gathering spots for meetings. The Flying Fifty is a luxury boutique hotel in downtown with seven bespoke suites.

Central Alabama

Gadsden

GreaterGadsden.com; @GreaterGadsden

Gadsden and Etowah County offer a wide range of leisure, cultural, historic, and recreational opportunities for visitors, with abundant natural attractions, including the Coosa River and Noccalula Falls, according to GreaterGadsden.com.

Noccalula Falls Park features a 90-foot waterfall, trails for mountain biking and hiking, a mini-golf course, a mini train, and animal exhibits. The park also has indoor and outdoor event facilities for up to 200 guests.

The Venue at Coosa Landing is the City of Gadsden's newest event space. It has 75,000 square feet of space, including three meeting rooms seating 200 people and a main hall seating 1,200 theater style. Additional event spaces include the 7,500-square-foot Downtown Civic Center; 210 at the Tracks, a performance and event venue with a multipurpose room accommodating 1,000; Pitman Theater, which seats 1,000; Twin Oak Farms, with elegant indoor space to host up to 300 guests; and Back Forty Beer Co., a microbrewery with a full restaurant and indoor and outdoor gathering spots.

There are approximately 1,132 hotel rooms in the Greater Gadsden area.

Birmingham

InBirmingham.com; @InBirmingham

Birmingham offers many of the assets meeting planners value in a destination, from world-class conference facilities and attractions to one of the country's most exciting culinary landscapes, says Dan Williams, CEO and president of In Birmingham, the Greater Birmingham CVB. "What truly distinguishes us are our people," Williams says. "We consistently hear that Birmingham's genuine Southern hospitality creates an experience attendees remember long after the event ends. Our community takes pride in making visitors feel welcome, and that commitment to hospitality is one of the reasons planners continue to bring their meetings and events back to Greater Birmingham year after year."

Located downtown, the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Center (BJCC) offers a variety of versatile event spaces, with 220,000 square feet of contiguous exhibit space, more than 74 meeting rooms, and two ballrooms, plus a 47,000-seat stadium, 17,000-seat arena, 2,835-seat concert hall, 1,000-seat theater, and additional indoor and outdoor event spaces. The complex also includes CityWalk, a 31-acre linear park, and the 9,300-seat Coca-Cola Amphitheater.

Connected to the BJCC are the 272-room Sheraton Birmingham Hotel and the 254-room Westin Birmingham. The Sheraton Birmingham Hotel has redesigned four Presidential Suites to offer elevated hospitality experience for VIP guests.

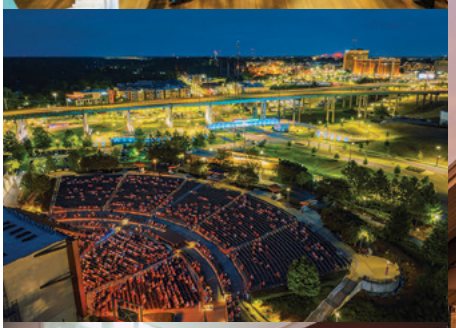
MAKE THE MOST OUT OF YOUR
MEETING EXPERIENCE
IN TUSCALOOSA

Located in the heart of West Alabama, Tuscaloosa offers a legendary experience your guests won't forget.

Home to The University of Alabama, you'll find a welcoming community with a fun college town vibe. You can choose from more than 40 lodging facilities, local restaurants featuring eclectic cuisine, a walkable and vibrant downtown, outdoor spaces, historical attractions, and a destination that's easily accessible.

Enjoy your meeting and try the TUSCA Life





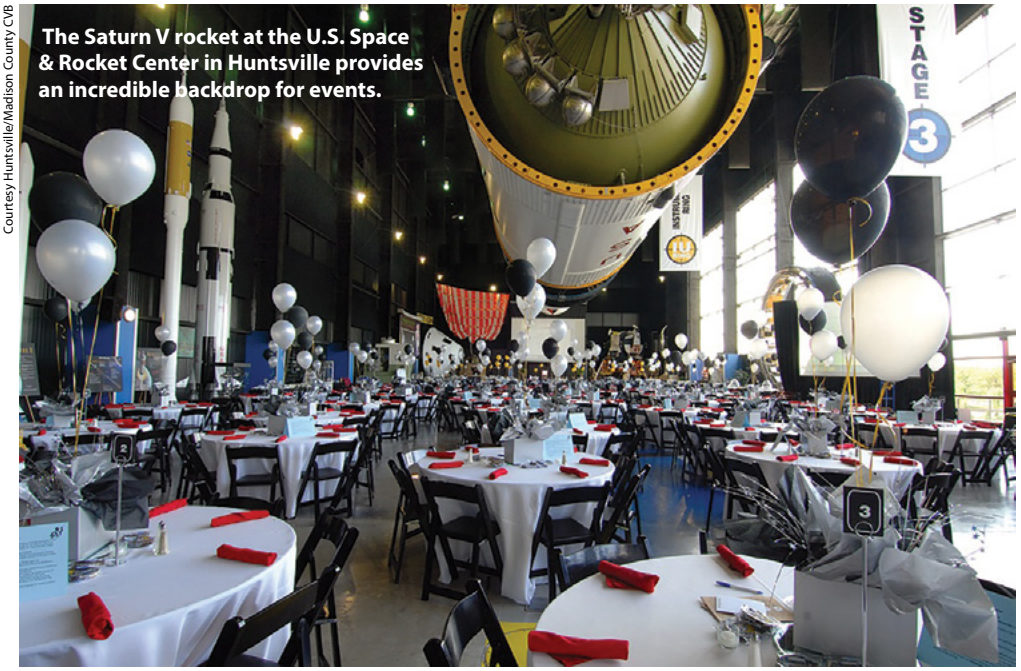






CONTACT JASMINE RAINEY!
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VisitTuscaloosa.com

Visit TUSCALOOSA



Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County CVB

The Saturn V rocket at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville provides an incredible backdrop for events.

Downtown's historic Tutwiler Hotel is now a DoubleTree by Hilton, following a $7 million renovation and flag change. The Tutwiler has 149 guest rooms and 6,266 square feet of meeting space. Other downtown event hotels include The Redmont Hotel Birmingham, Curio Collection by Hilton, with 120 guest rooms and three smaller meeting rooms; The Elyton Hotel, with 117 guest rooms and 4,000 square feet of sophisticated function space; and the 295-room Hilton Birmingham Downtown at UAB, with 14,892 square feet of event space.

Beyond downtown, The Hyatt Regency Birmingham – The Wynfrey Hotel, connected to the Riverchase Galleria, has 329 recently renovated guest rooms and a 600-peron-capacity ballroom. The 208-room Embassy Suites Hoover has 15,115 total square feet of function space, while the AAA Four Diamond Renaissance Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa has 257 guest rooms and 18 event spaces to accommodate up to 1,000 guests. The 100-room Hotel Wildemont, an Autograph Collection Hotel, a AAA Four Diamond property, has nearly 15,000 square feet of event space. Marriott Birmingham has 302 recently renovated guest rooms and nearly 13,000 square feet of event space, while DoubleTree Birmingham Perimeter Park has 204 guest rooms with 10,000 square feet of meeting space. There are more than 17,500 guest rooms in the Greater Birmingham area.

At the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, a rotunda can accommodate a 200-person reception. The Birmingham Botanical Gardens has indoor and outdoor venues, including the 60,000-square-foot Garden Center. Birmingham Zoo offers unique indoor and outdoor event venues for up to 2,500 people, including a small reception space on the giraffe platform. Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum has meeting rooms, a theater, and an atrium that can seat 800 dinner guests.

Tuscaloosa

VisitTuscaloosa.com; @VisitTuscaloosa

Tuscaloosa thrives at the crossroads of tradition and energy, says Jasmine Rainey, director of tourism for Visit Tuscaloosa. "From the roar of Bryant-Denny Stadium on game day to the quiet charm of downtown, the city offers a balanced blend of excitement and authenticity. We're where Southern hospitality meets a passion for excellence, whether you're cheering on the Tide, savoring a craft cocktail by the river, or in town for a conference. Tuscaloosa's unique identity comes from its history, people, and commitment to excellence."

Along the Black Warrior River, construction is underway on the Sports Illustrated Resort. "This $150 million, ground-up development will feature vacation club rental units, condominiums, restaurants, and event space, with an opening targeted for 2028," Rainey says. "Also new, ALUM Tuscaloosa has broken ground in downtown for a new luxury brand built for college towns. It will include 68 condo-hotel units, a private members' club, a rooftop lounge, and meeting and event spaces."

Also, a $4.3 million downtown streetscape project is nearly complete with wider sidewalks, landscaping, and increased walkability, according to Visit Tuscaloosa.

Bryant Conference Center on the University of Alabama (UA) campus is the city's largest event space. More than 30,000 square feet of function space includes tiered classrooms, 16 meeting rooms, and pre-function space. Adjacent to the conference center, the 150-room Hotel Capstone has 12,000 square feet of function space. Paul W. "Bear" Bryant Museum on campus has after-hours event space for 150 guests; event bookings include admission to the museum. Other UA facilities with event space include the Gorgas House Museum and grounds, Alabama Museum of Natural History, and Moundville Archaeological Park.

There are approximately 4,100 guest rooms in the city, including more than 1,000 in downtown. Embassy Suites by Hilton Tuscaloosa Alabama Downtown has 5,618 square feet of function space. AC Hotel Tuscaloosa Downtown has four event rooms and a rooftop venue. The Alamite, Tuscaloosa, A Tribute Portfolio Hotel has event space to host 250 guests.

Offsite event space includes Mercedes-Benz Amphitheater, which seats 7,470 people; the University Club, which seats 130 indoors and can host up to 300 people in the garden; and Tuscaloosa River Market, with 5,600 square feet of versatile indoor event space to seat 400 or host a 1,500-person reception.

Montgomery

ExperienceMontgomeryAL.org; @ExpMontgomery

Set at the crossroads of I-65 and I-85, Montgomery offers strategic accessibility and affordability, with a combination of cultural heritage, modern venues, and Southern charm, according to ExperienceMontgomeryAL.org.

Downtown's Convention District has approximately 1,100 guest rooms and is convenient to the Riverwalk, Riverfront Park, and Riverwalk Stadium (home to the minor league baseball's Montgomery Biscuits), as well as restaurants, nightlife, and historic landmarks.

The AAA Four Diamond Renaissance Montgomery Hotel & Spa at the Convention Center has 342 guest rooms and 32 event rooms, including a 72,520-square-foot exhibit hall and a ballroom that can host a 1,500-person reception. Adjacent to the



LAUREL HOTEL AND SPA ROOFTOP

Visit AUBURN OPELIKA

The Destination Planners Return To.

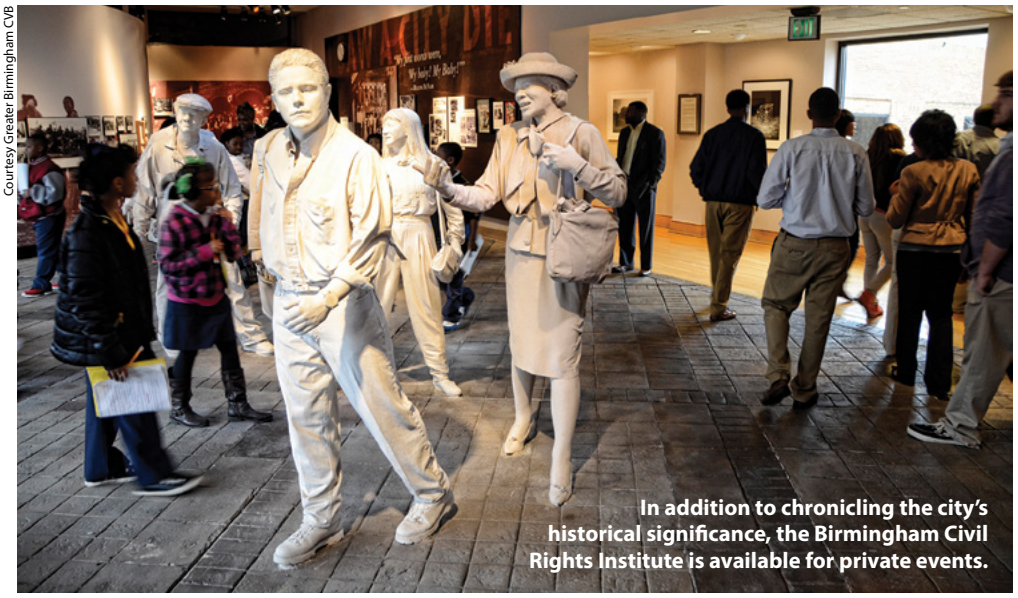
With elegant properties, walkable downtowns and a team ready to make planning easier, Auburn-Opelika gives conferences more than a place to meet. Our collaborative community helps bring every detail together, creating the kind of experience planners want to return to.

Meet the coolest college town in the South. And his hip older sister.



Courtesy Renaissance Shoals Resort & Spa

Renaissance Shoals Resort & Spa in Florence offers 196 guest rooms and suites, more than 30,000 square feet of event space, and the state's only revolving restaurant.



Courtesy Greater Birmingham CVB

In addition to chronicling the city's historical significance, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute is available for private events.

complex, the 237-suite Embassy Suites by Hilton Montgomery Hotel and Conference Center offers 14,354 square feet of event space with a 1,000-person capacity ballroom. The 1,800-seat Montgomery Performing Arts Centre also is part of the convention center complex.

Additional downtown hotels include the 141-room DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Montgomery Downtown, with 20,084 square feet of function space, and 115-room Staybridge Suites Montgomery Downtown. Located in downtown's historic district, Trilogy Hotel Montgomery, Autograph Collection has indoor and outdoor event spaces, including a 2,100-square-foot ballroom and a rooftop bar.

As both the first capital of the Confederate States of America and the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement, Montgomery offers planners a unique historical perspective. According to ExperienceMontgomeryAL.org, The Legacy Sites, four distinct but interconnected spaces, explore the experience of enslaved people. The sites feature a museum, a sculpture park, and the six-acre National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which lists the names of 122,000 Black people who adopted surnames in the census of 1870. Located near the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the Elevation Convening Center & Hotel features a 200-person-capacity ballroom, two meeting rooms, and boardrooms.

The Alabama Shakespeare Festival, located in the 175-acre Blount Cultural Park, is a year-round professional theater with a full schedule of productions and a variety of indoor and outdoor event venues. The Festival Stage Theater can host 250 guests for receptions. Also in the park, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts has indoor and outdoor event spaces to accommodate meetings of up to 300 guests.

Downtown's Montgomery Whitewater is an urban tubing and rafting experience that offers teambuilding options and event space, including a 468-square-foot conference room seating 94 and an outdoor patio for up to 150 reception guests.

Set on 1,600 acres approximately 15 minutes from downtown, Montgomery Marriott Prattville Hotel & Conference Center at Capitol Hill offers 96 recently renovated guest rooms and 20,107 square feet of event space. The resort features 54 holes of championship golf, part of the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.

Auburn and Opelika

AOTourism.com; @AuburnOpelika

The cities of Auburn and Opelika give planners three very different meeting experience options within one destination, according to Cindy Pugh, group sales manager for Auburn-Opelika Tourism. "There's the energy of downtown Auburn and Auburn University (AU), the character of historic downtown Opelika, and a full resort experience at Grand National," she says. "What makes the area especially flexible is the willingness of our partners to work together, allowing planners to build an event around the experience they want. Groups can build an itinerary around golf and spa experiences, chef-led culinary experiences, Auburn University tours, performances at the 1,200-seat Gogue Performing Arts Center, or outdoor adventures at Chewacla State Park."

The area offers more than 3,500 guest rooms. In downtown Auburn, the 235-room Hotel at Auburn University & Dixon Conference Center, a AAA Four Diamond property, has 22,000 square feet of function space, including a 550-person-capacity ballroom; and 177-room Graduate by Hilton Auburn features 10,568 square feet of event space, with rooftop dining at the War Eagle Supper Club. Partnered with the Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management at AU, The Laurel Hotel & Spa, Alabama's only AAA Five Diamond property, is a luxury teaching

hotel with 26 guest rooms and suites, a small meeting space for 20 guests, rooftop dining, a pool, and a garden. The hotel offers numerous options for retreats and small groups.

Auburn Marriott Opelika Resort & Spa at Grand National has 221 recently renovated guest rooms and more than 15,000 square feet of event space. The resort includes a full-service spa and 54 holes of championship golf at the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail at Grand National.

Offsite venues include 540 at The Park, with space to seat 115 theater style; the Bottling Plant Event Center in downtown Opelika, with space to host 1,500 reception guests; and Botanic, with indoor and outdoor gathering places to accommodate 180 guests, plus a venue buyout option.

Groups can enjoy easier access to restaurants, attractions, and meeting spaces during the summer, when many students are away, Pugh says. "Auburn University football weekends are the biggest dates planners should avoid unless the game-day experience is intentionally part of the event." Commencement in December and May is also a peak period.

Southern Alabama/Gulf Coast

Eastern Shore

ExploreEasternShore.com; @EasternShoreCC; @ExploreEasternShore

Across the bay from Mobile, the Eastern Shore cities of Spanish Fort, Daphne, Fairhope, and Point Clear have something for everyone, says Casey Gay Williams, president and CEO of Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce. "We have the right settings for all types of events, formal, casual, or in between, with beautiful water vistas, recreation, nature preserves, an incredible culinary scene, and great shopping."

In Point Clear, the historic Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa, Autograph Collection—a member of Historic Hotels of America—offers 405 guest rooms and suites and more than 41,000 square feet of function space, including lawn and bayfront venues. The resort features a 20,000-square-foot spa, a tennis complex, a marina, 36 holes of championship golf on the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, and other amenities. Including hotels, inns, and B&Bs, the Eastern Shore offers more than 2,000 guest rooms. Two new hotels are under construction in Spanish Fort: a Tru by Hilton and TownePlace Suites by Marriott, which together will add approximately 200 additional guest rooms.

In Fairhope, Little Point Inn, set to open in early 2027, is a total reimagining of the former Baron's Inn in Fairhope. It's a sister property of Little Point Clear, a boutique property with elegant indoor and outdoor event spaces and a new chapel.

Additional venues in Fairhope include Apiary, a refined, versatile space in downtown with a 6,000-square-foot main hall, courtyard, and terrace; Eastern Shore Art Center, with



Courtesy Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism



Gulf Shores and Orange Beach's 32 miles of white-sand beaches add bleisure appeal to planners seeking destinations for productive yet relaxed meetings.

Dylan Stewart/Courtesy Auburn-Opelika Tourism



Downtown Opelika adds historic character to meetings and events in the Auburn-Opelika region.

three galleries and a courtyard; the city-owned James P. Nix Center, with a ballroom seating 500 theater style; The Venue, with indoor and outdoor space to accommodate 300 guests; and 87-room Holiday Inn Express Fairhope-Point Clear, with space to seat 54 banquet guests.

In Daphne, the 124-room Hilton Garden Inn Mobile/East Bay Daphne has 2,122 square feet of meeting space, while the 104-room Homewood Suites by Hilton Mobile-East Bay-Daphne has three meeting rooms.

Daphne Civic Center has more than 20,000 square feet of function space to accommodate up to 1,450 event attendees. Bellforest Pointe is a new venue with a 6,000-square-foot reception hall, a 3,000-square-foot covered patio, and space to host 500 guests.

Mobile

Mobile.org; @VisitMobileAL

Mobile's cultural heritage, 325 years of diverse historical influences, vibrant traditions, and dynamic community life offer a respite from the ordinary, says Ashley Rains, senior public relations and communications manager for Visit Mobile. "The city's early French and Spanish settlers left a lasting impact, while our significant African American population, with deep roots in the city's history, contributed to its music, food, and cultural festivals. Mobile is the birthplace of the original Mardi Gras celebration in the United States, which adds centuries of traditions and heritage that make us truly and wholly born to celebrate."

Amtrak rail service's return to Mobile celebrated its first anniversary this past August, carrying more than 150,000 riders on twice daily, round-trip service between New Orleans and downtown Mobile. Slated to open in early 2027 near the intersection of I-10 and I-65, Mobile International Airport (BFM) brings a modern terminal and facilities to downtown, just minutes from the convention center or from the Eastern Shore. Region's Arena, also expected to open in early 2027, will offer flexible seating and layout options to accommodate a range of activities, from smaller shows to events with more than 10,000 spectators, Rains says. "The design also includes multiple ballrooms capable of hosting events of all sizes, offering greater flexibility for Mardi Gras balls and local gatherings while also creating additional spaces for conventions."

The 317,000-square-foot Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center takes full advantage of its waterfront setting on Mobile River, with outdoor terraces and expansive windows on all levels. It has 16 meeting rooms, two ballrooms, and 100,000 square feet of exhibit halls. Connected to the convention center is the 373-room Renaissance Mobile Riverview Plaza Hotel, which offers an additional 39,438 square feet of event space.

There are more than 6,000 guest rooms city-wide and approximately 1,400 in downtown, several within a few blocks of the convention center. The historic 238-room Battle House Renaissance Mobile Hotel & Spa has 28,539 square feet of event space, including two ballrooms; The Admiral, a luxury boutique hotel, has 156 guest rooms and 6,000 square feet of event space; the 149-room Hampton Inn and Suites Mobile-Downtown Historic District has 1,542 square feet of event space across three meeting rooms; and Holiday Inn Downtown Historic District has 206 guest rooms and 10,000 square feet of event space. In addition, the Fort Conde Inn is a boutique collection of historic 19th-century homes in downtown with 19 guest rooms and an event capacity of 150 guests.

Unique excursion or event venues include Bellingrath Gardens and Home, USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park, Alabama Aquarium at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, and AWF Delta & Bay Conservation Center at 5 Rivers, a 70-acre property at the headwaters of Mobile Bay that includes a new conference hall.



Set on the Mobile River, the 317,000-square-foot Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center connects to the 373-room Renaissance Mobile Riverview Plaza Hotel.

Courtesy Visit Mobile

Visitors can enjoy the spirit of Mardi Gras year-round at Mobile Carnival Museum, but planners should note the city is very busy during the actual Mardi Gras season (usually falling between late January and early March).

Approximately an hour northeast of Mobile, Wind Creek Casino & Hotel Atmore has a 237-room AAA Four Diamond hotel with multiple event spaces, a 2,200-seat amphitheater, a hands-on culinary studio, and a garden venue. The resort includes a full-service spa, a multi-screen cinema, bowling, live entertainment, and more than 1,700 casino games.

Foley

VisitFoley.com; @VisitFoley

Seven miles north of Alabama's beaches, Foley offers planners a walkable downtown with museums, shops, and local restaurants, according to VisitFoley.com. The city is home to OWA, a 520-acre theme park with shopping, dining, and entertainment, including 23 rides, an outdoor wave pool, and the region's largest indoor waterpark. In Downtown OWA, the 402-seat OWA Theater has lobby and mezzanine space for gatherings. The TownePlace Suites by Marriott at OWA offers 150 recently renovated suites and a small meeting room.

Adjacent to OWA, Foley Event Center is a 90,000-square-foot multi-use indoor sports facility. Coastal Alabama Farmer's and Fisherman's Market has open-air space to host up to 300 guests, and Alabama Gulf Coast Music Hall has seating for up to 1,000. The 600-acre Graham Creek Nature Preserve has 10 miles of trails, boardwalks, a kayak launch, disc golf, archery, and other activities, along with indoor event space for up to 200 guests.

Alabama's Beaches – Gulf Shores and Orange Beach

AlabamaBeaches.com/Conventions-Meetings; @AlabamaBeachesMeetings

What makes Gulf Shores and Orange Beach unique is the combination of beachfront meeting venues and authentic coastal experiences, says Michelle Russ, STS, TMP, vice president of sales for Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism. "Attendees can step from a conference room to the sugar-white sand, then enjoy fresh Gulf seafood, outdoor adventures, and genuine Southern hospitality. Planners continue to return because the destination offers an ideal balance of value, accessibility, and memorable experiences, creating meetings that are both productive and enjoyable."

The 344-room Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach was recently purchased and rebranded as a Marriott property; it offers 44,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor meeting and banquet space. A new Margaritaville Resort at The Wharf is under construction and expected to open in late 2027.

A new Intercoastal Waterway bridge opened in spring 2026, and a $24 million pedestrian bridge is projected to open in early January 2027. Gulf Shores International Airport (GUF) has new nonstop flights from multiple U.S. cities.

The Lodge at Gulf State Park, a Hilton Hotel has 350 rooms and 40,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space, including the area's largest beach-view ballroom, which can accommodate 1,200 reception guests. The Gulf State Park Learning Center has multiple spaces for meetings and retreats, including living classrooms, an auditorium, and six meeting rooms.

Opened in summer 2025, the 257-room Embassy Suites by Hilton Gulf Shores Beach Resort is positioned directly across the street from Gulf Shores' West Beach, with 21,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor event space.

Owned and operated by the City of Orange Beach, the Orange Beach Event Center has 18,000 square feet of flexible meeting and function space. The facility is located at The Wharf, a waterfront shopping, dining, and entertainment district that includes a 10,000-seat amphitheater, condominiums, and the 132-room SpringHill Suites Orange Beach at The Wharf.

Gulf Shores and Orange Beach offer more than 18,000 accommodations, including hotels, resorts, condos, and vacation rental homes.

Meeting and event attendees are encouraged to download the new Show Your Badge Pass, instantly delivered via text and email, to take advantage of exclusive discounts at restaurants, attractions, and retail shops.

Experience Montgomery



Courtesy Experience Montgomery

Alabama's capital city provides a dynamic meetings backdrop, combining history, culture, music, and Southern hospitality. Planners can choose from more than 7,000 hotel rooms, flexible meeting spaces, and distinctive venues, while attendees can enjoy the city's walkable downtown, a growing culinary scene, and fun nightlife. Discover Montgomery's music history, with roots to Hank Williams and Nat King Cole, or explore its Civil Rights legacy at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and other historical attractions. The Experience Montgomery team works alongside planners throughout the entire process to create seamless, memorable events.

ExperienceMontgomeryAL.org

Visit Tuscaloosa



Courtesy Visit Tuscaloosa

Nestled along the Black Warrior River in the heart of west Alabama, Tuscaloosa blends history and tradition with possibility and Southern hospitality. Tuscaloosa's walkable downtown—filled with live music, outdoor spaces, and local flavors like barbecue and bread pudding—invites visitors to explore, connect, and belong. The legendary University of Alabama provides unique experiences and meeting spaces, including 30,000 square feet at Bryant Conference Center. Just minutes from the university campus and downtown, Mercedes-Benz Amphitheater hosts concerts and events, and is available for private rentals.

VisitTuscaloosa.com

Destination Spotlight



U.S. Space & Rocket Center®, Home of Space Camp®

Want to learn more about the destinations and venues featured in our state spotlights? Scan the QR Code here to access our expanded online coverage, including sponsored content from the region's top destinations and venues for meetings and events. Our online Event Planners' Guides include extensive information about destinations, hotels and resorts, unique venues, cultural attractions, activities, history and heritage, dining, and entertainment to enhance your event experience. Scan the QR Code now to find out what's in store for your next meeting or event!

Auburn-Opelika Tourism



Courtesy Auburn-Opelika Tourism

Auburn-Opelika is a welcoming destination offering genuine hospitality and responsive service from trusted partners. With standout properties, walkable downtowns, chef-driven dining, and Auburn University energy, the setting feels polished yet authentic. Auburn-Opelika Tourism works alongside planners, as well as venues, hotels, restaurants, and local partners, to help ensure events run smoothly. From finding the right property and building local relationships to identifying offsite experiences, dining options, visitor resources, and ways to make attendees feel welcome, the Auburn-Opelika Tourism team helps simplify the planning process.

AOTourism.com/Meet

South Carolina gives meeting planners considerable variety across destinations and meeting inventory. An agenda can pair a historic downtown with a beach, a university campus with a mountain lake, or a conventional general session with a driving experience, a paddle trip, an oyster roast, or a chef-led outing. Large convention centers can support exhibits and citywide components, while oceanfront resorts, full-service downtown hotels, restored industrial buildings, and cultural venues give planners options for breakouts, receptions and executive retreats. Charleston, Columbia, Greenville-Spartanburg, and Myrtle Beach all provide commercial air service, while interstates 20, 26, 77, 85, and 95 offer drive-in convenience.

EVENT PLANNERS' GUIDE TO

SC South Carolina

BY KEITH LORIA



Caesars Head State Park is one of five state parks within driving distance of downtown Greenville.

Michael Gibbons Media/Courtesy VisitGreenvilleSC

Lowcountry

Charleston, Folly Beach & Kiawah Island

MeetCharleston.com; @MeetCharleston

Charleston's downtown delivers walkability, architectural character, award-winning dining, and nightlife. North Charleston provides airport access, shopping, and a major convention campus, and nearby Folly Beach and Kiawah Island shift the mood to an oceanfront retreat. The area has approximately 19,000 guest rooms.

"What truly sets the Charleston area apart is its unmistakable sense of place," says Chris Hendrix, vice president of sales for Explore Charleston. "Groups can gather in thoughtfully restored historic buildings, waterfront hotels, rooftop venues, and manicured gardens, then extend the experience to nearby beaches, barrier islands, and scenic waterways."

The Charleston Area Convention Center offers 148,000 square feet of meeting space, including a 77,000-square-foot divisible exhibit hall, along with the conjoined 255-room Embassy Suites Charleston Convention Center. Also on the convention center campus are the North Charleston Coliseum and North Charleston Performing Arts Center. Charleston Gaillard Center combines performance and function space, including a theater seating 2,734 guests. Charleston International Airport (CHS) is nearby, and Tanger Outlets Charleston gives attendees an easy shopping option between scheduled functions.

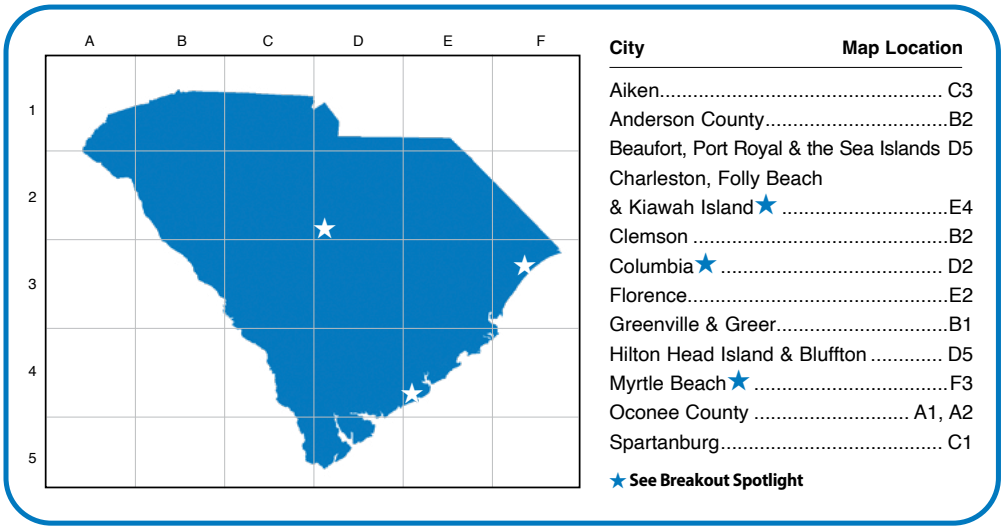
The Charleston Place has 434 rooms and approximately 40,000 square feet of event space, while the Charleston Marriott offers 344 rooms and nearly 20,000 square feet of

event space. Across from Marion Square on King Street, the historic Francis Marion Hotel has 235 rooms and suites, 18,000 square feet of function space, three ballrooms, and eight breakout rooms. The Vendue Charleston offers art-filled spaces for intimate gatherings, along with fine dining and a rooftop bar. Other properties include The Cooper, Live Oak Hotel, and Lowline Hotel Charleston.

For a retreat that keeps Charleston within reach but puts the Atlantic just outside the meeting room, Tides Folly Beach Resort offers 5,490 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space and can accommodate up to 200. Its oceanfront guest rooms, direct beach access, and location at the end of walkable Center Street make it practical to combine sessions with surfing lessons, paddleboarding, kayaking, fishing charters, dolphin tours, beach games, or yoga. The property can also stage oceanfront cookouts and receptions.

Kiawah Island Golf Resort, located 21 miles from historic Charleston, offers nearly 90,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor function space, including the West Beach Conference Center and its 10,000-square-foot ballroom. The resort's five championship golf courses, beaches, waterways, and resort dining provide plenty of options for multiday agendas.

Charleston groups also can consider harbor cruises, historic home tours, indigo-dyeing workshops, Casual Crabbing with Tia, and challenge programs from On Purpose Adventures. The result is a destination that can move naturally from convention business to cultural immersion and coastal recreation.



Hilton Head Island & Bluffton

HiltonHeadIsland.org; **@VisitHiltonHead**

Hilton Head Island pairs the flexibility of a resort destination with ample inventory. The island offers more than 12,000 accommodations across hotels, vacation homes, and villas, along with more than 150,000 square feet of event space.

"Nestled between Port Royal Sound and Calibogue Sound, Hilton Head Island encompasses a magic far beyond a beach vacation," says Heather Woolwine, vice president of communications for the Hilton Head Island & Bluffton Chamber of Commerce & Visitor and Convention Bureau. "The lush and abundant natural environment inspires our identity, guides the preservation of our past, and centers our efforts to conserve the natural beauty, culture, and heritage that make the South Carolina Lowcountry unlike anywhere else."

The island's 12 miles of beaches, world-class golf and tennis facilities, maritime forests, tidal marshes, and extensive leisure-pathway network provide natural settings for receptions, outdoor recreation, and companion programs. Attendees can explore the island by bicycle or on foot, kayak through salt marshes, take a dolphin-watching or sailing excursion, fish local waters, or play a round on one of the area's celebrated golf courses.

Hilton Head Island's visitor experience is also shaped by its living history. Gullah Geechee traditions remain an important part of the community's identity, while historic landmarks, cultural festivals, arts organizations, and storytelling programs help visitors understand the people and experiences that formed the Lowcountry. Group itineraries can include the Coastal Discovery Museum at Honey Horn, Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park, local galleries and artist studios, Harbour Town, and the shops, restaurants, and entertainment at Shelter Cove Harbour & Marina. Daufuskie Island excursions, oyster roasts, beach clean-ups, and conservation-focused activities offer additional options for offsite events and team engagement.

Among the island's principal meeting properties, The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa features 416 renovated guest rooms and suites and more than 37,000 square feet of upgraded event space. According to Woolwine, the resort will be temporarily closed as it undergoes additional renovations, which are expected to be completed in early 2027. Other full-service options include Hilton Beachfront Resort & Spa Hilton Head Island, Omni Hilton Head Oceanfront Resort, Sonesta Resort Hilton Head Island, and The Sea Pines Resort. Nearby Montage Palmetto Bluff adds another luxury option in the greater Lowcountry.

For a more secluded teambuilding experience, Outside Hilton Head conducts corporate programs on Page Island, its private chain of islands near Hilton Head. Removed from the everyday workplace, the setting allows teams to focus on communication, productivity, creativity, organizational culture, and appreciation. Outside Hilton Head can develop anything from an executive leadership retreat to a larger company outing using Page Island. Its offerings have included *Survivor*-style challenges that require participants to collaborate, solve problems, and complete tasks together.

"What makes Hilton Head Island so special is the combination of world-class amenities, extraordinary natural resources, and a rich cultural heritage," Woolwine says. "Together, these elements create memorable experiences for visitors while helping preserve the character and quality of life that residents value and work hard to protect."

Beaufort, Port Royal & the Sea Islands

BeaufortSC.org; **@Visit_Beaufort**

Located approximately 70 miles south of Charleston and 40 miles north of Savannah, Ga., Beaufort supports both drive-in meetings and air arrivals through Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport (SAV). The compact historic district and waterfront provide small and mid-size groups with a walkable base, with

locally owned restaurants, galleries, shops, and preserved architecture all close together.

The Beaufort Inn campus remains one of the area's most flexible choices, with Tabby Place, patios, courtyards, and breakout options that can support a meeting, reception, or private dinner. Historic inns, such as Anchorage 1770 and the Rhett House Inn, suit executive retreats and smaller groups, while the Holiday Inn & Suites Beaufort, Hilton Garden Inn Beaufort, and Fripp Island Golf & Beach Resort broaden the lodging and function-space inventory. The University of South Carolina Beaufort Center for the Arts and waterfront properties provide additional settings for gatherings.

Outside the meeting room, planners can arrange carriage, walking, or film-location tours, paddling and boating, and visits to the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park and Penn Center on St. Helena Island for meaningful Gullah Geechee history. The Spanish Moss Trail offers an accessible route for cycling or a wellness walk. In Port Royal, the boardwalk, observation tower, community beach, and natural areas work well for a relaxed excursion. Hunting Island, salt marshes, and the surrounding Sea Islands add coastal scenery, wildlife, and opportunities for nature-focused companion programs.

Midlands

Aiken

VisitAikenSC.com; **@VisitAikenSC**

Aiken sits near Interstate 20, offering regional accessibility for attendees based in Charleston, Atlanta and Savannah, and Asheville, Charlotte, and Greenville, N.C., and is convenient to both Columbia Metropolitan (CAE) and Augusta Regional (AGS) airports. The city's walkable downtown, oak-lined streets, and equestrian history bring a quaint yet polished charm.

Stable View, a 1,000-acre training property with access to more than 2,000 adjoining conserved acres, includes a pavilion to support business conferences of up to 200 guests and onsite accommodations for up to 50. In town, The Willcox combines historic accommodations, dining, and intimate event rooms.

The Aiken Center for the Arts offers galleries, classrooms, and a pavilion, while Hopelands Gardens and Rye Patch provide garden settings tied to Aiken's Winter Colony heritage.

Horse-farm tours, polo, and steeplechase traditions can shape a signature excursion. Hitchcock Woods supplies miles of trails for walking and horseback riding, while downtown adds antiques, boutiques, galleries, and locally owned restaurants.

Columbia

ExperienceColumbiaSC.com; **@ColumbiaSC**

Located where interstates 20, 26, and 77 meet, the capital city of Columbia is one of the state's easiest drive-in destinations. Columbia Metropolitan Airport is a manageable gateway.




Courtesy ExploreCharleston.com

Outdoor gatherings allow groups to experience Charleston's natural beauty and Lowcountry traditions.

The downtown meeting district is compact; approximately 2,400 hotel rooms are within a mile of the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center, with more than 12,000 rooms across the greater area.

"The ease and charm of flying in and out of Columbia Metropolitan Airport, our culinary scene, friendly and hospitable locals, walkability of the downtown area, and top-notch hotels are all experiences that keep clients returning to the Columbia region year after year," says Charlene Slaughter, director of communications for Experience Columbia SC.

Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center has 142,500 square feet of meeting and event space across 19 rooms, including a 23,700-square-foot exhibit hall and a 16,704-square-foot ballroom. More than 2,000 hotel rooms and more than 60 restaurants and bars are within walking distance.

Nearby hotels include the 300-room Marriott Columbia, which has approximately 26,000 square feet of space and can host up to 700, depending on setup. The 144-room Cambria Hotel Columbia Downtown the Vista adds 1,662 square feet for smaller functions. The Lantern Hotel opened in January 2026 in a former fire station, bringing 59 rooms and Ladder 13 restaurant to the district.

Offsite options include Central Energy, with 6,200 square feet for up to 500 guests; The Laundry, with approximately 8,000 square feet indoors and a half-acre outside; and the historic 701 Whaley, with more than 15,000 square feet. Segra Park, home of the minor league Columbia Fireflies, can host receptions and large outdoor events. Riverbanks Zoo & Garden, the Columbia Museum of Art, South Carolina State Museum, and EdVenture can turn an evening function into an attendee experience.

Columbia's food story reaches beyond banquet service. MICHELIN-recognized Di Vino Rosso and Motor Supply Co. Bistro join James Beard Award-winning wine bar Lula Drake in a scene spread among the Vista, Main Street, Five Points, Devine Street, and west Columbia. Newer concepts include Ikie Lu Record Club, godspeed coffee, Lavender Café, Honey Market, and Ladder 13. Saturday's Soda City Market makes an easy introduction to local makers and food vendors.

For activity, the Three Rivers Greenway spans 15.5 miles and reaches the Boyd Island Sanctuary; outfitters can add paddling on the Congaree, Saluda, and Broad rivers. Congaree National Park provides a larger nature excursion outside downtown. Game Show Challenge can accommodate groups, and Dorsia Pasta Co. offers hands-on pasta classes. Reopened Finlay Park adds green space and an amphitheater downtown, giving planners another nearby option for informal gatherings and wellness breaks.

Pee Dee & Grand Strand

Florence

VisitFlo.com; **@VisitFlorenceSC**

At the intersection of interstates 20 and 95, Florence is a practical regional hub and midpoint for many East Coast travelers. Florence Regional Airport (FLO) serves the market, while Myrtle Beach and Columbia provide additional air options. Hotels, restaurants, and national brands cluster in the hospitality district, and downtown is approximately eight minutes from the primary convention campus. The area boasts 4,500 guest accommodations and venues for groups of 10 to 10,000.

The Florence Center is the largest convention, exhibition, and entertainment facility in northeastern South Carolina. It offers more than 79,000 square feet of versatile space, including an outdoor courtyard. Nearby hotels include the Hilton Garden Inn Florence, Staybridge Suites, Hyatt Place Florence/Downtown, and Aloft Florence.

Darlington Raceway offers groups a distinctive offsite venue, with suite and club seating overlooking the track. The 676-acre Lynches River County Park combines a community building with trails, a canopy walk, environmental programming, and outdoor recreation. Downtown Florence adds the Bean Market, Florence County Museum, galleries, boutiques, and performances at the Francis Marion University Performing Arts Center and Florence Little Theatre. The South Carolina Revolutionary Rivers National Water Trail features guided paddling and Revolutionary War history associated with Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox."

Myrtle Beach

VisitMyrtleBeach.com; **@MyMyrtleBeach**

Myrtle Beach turns a coastal meeting into a full attendee proposition: 60 miles of beaches, more than 90 golf courses, more than 2,000 restaurants, and 10 theaters give groups reasons to arrive early or remain after the closing session. Nearly half of the U.S. population is within a day's drive, and Myrtle Beach International Airport (MYR) offers service to more than 50 nonstop destinations. The airport is approximately one mile from the ocean, so the destination experience starts quickly after arrival.

"Myrtle Beach offers meeting planners an exceptional blend of business and leisure, creating a dynamic destination where attendees



At Kiawah Island Golf Resort, team meetings aren't attended—they're experienced. Rolling surf replaces the clatter of keyboards and warm Lowcountry breezes inspire every agenda.

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Courtesy Hilton Head Island & Bluffton Chamber of Commerce & Visitor and Convention Bureau

Located within The Sea Pines Resort on Hilton Head Island, Harbour Town features the iconic lighthouse and museum, a marina, shopping, dining, and more.

can easily transition from productive meetings to memorable experiences," says Bob Harris, executive vice president of group sales for Visit Myrtle Beach. "With 60 miles of pristine beaches and warm Atlantic waters, the destination is one attendees will be genuinely excited to visit."

The Myrtle Beach Convention Center offers more than 250,000 square feet of event space, including a 30,000-square-foot outdoor events plaza. It connects to the 400-room Sheraton Myrtle Beach Hotel, creating a concentrated convention base near the beach and downtown entertainment.

The oceanfront Myrtle Beach Marriott Resort & Spa at Grande Dunes has 400 guest rooms, approximately 45,000 square feet of meeting space, multiple indoor and outdoor venues, pools, spa services, beach access, and onsite dining. Kingston Resorts adds another substantial beachfront campus with Hilton and Embassy Suites accommodations, convention space, dining, pools, and Black Drum Brewing. Ocean Reef Resort completed a $15 million renovation in 2025 that modernized guest rooms, the lobby, and event areas.

The destination is expanding its offsite inventory. Brookgreen Gardens' new welcome center and $17 million conservatory project include a 5,500-square-foot great hall and courtyard within a National Historic Landmark known for sculpture, gardens, and Lowcountry history. Pelicans Ballpark has undergone a $20 million renovation; with approximately 9,200 square feet of meeting space, it allows planners to pair a function with minor league baseball.

Team activities can be as structured or relaxed as the agenda requires. A Murrells Inlet eco-tour can take up to 80 participants into salt marshes for wildlife and marine-life interpretation, then continue to group dining along the MarshWalk. PopStroke, Topgolf, and more than 30 miniature-golf courses provide friendly competition. River Island Adventures adds ropes elements, kayaking, and outdoor challenges. Broadway at the Beach and Barefoot Landing combine shopping, restaurants, nightlife, and attractions, while Ripley's Aquarium and the area's live theaters work well for ticketed evening programs or companion outings. For golf groups, the depth of courses makes tournaments and split-course play practical even at larger sizes.

Upstate

Anderson County

VisitAnderson.com; **@VisitAndersonSC**

Anderson County offers approximately 2,500 guest rooms, a walkable downtown, and access to Lake Hartwell.

"Anderson County sits at the base of the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of South Carolina," says Whitney Ellis, sales manager for Visit Anderson. "There are many lakes near or in Anderson County, including the vast Lake Hartwell, a nationally recognized bass-fishing destination that has hosted some of the sport's largest tournaments, giving planners opportunities to build fishing, boating, and waterfront activities into their programs."

Downtown Anderson combines public art and murals with locally owned shops, restaurants, and breweries. Anderson University's tree-lined campus is also near the center of the city, making it easy for attendees to explore the area between scheduled activities.

One of downtown's principal options for meetings and events is The Bleckley Inn, a boutique property with 14 rooms at the inn and eight Plaza Rooms overlooking Main Street. It offers several distinctive gathering spaces, led by the 10,000-square-foot Bleckley Station, which accommodates 500 people banquet style. Designed to recall New York's original Pennsylvania Station, the venue incorporates exposed steel beams, brick, and other historic architectural elements.

Near Interstate 85, Hilton Garden Inn Anderson and the Point Event Center provide more than 12,000 square feet of meeting and event space. The complex can accommodate events of up to 600 people and offers onsite catering and two full-service restaurants. Its Crystal Ballroom seats up to 500 theater style or 400 banquet style and can be divided into three rooms. Home2 Suites in downtown Anderson and Residence Inn near Interstate 85 provide additional accommodations and meeting space for groups of fewer than 80 people.

Lake Hartwell supplies a natural centerpiece for excursions and outdoor functions. Green Pond Landing and Event Center offers lake views, swimming, and boating access, while Sadlers Creek State Park provides campsites, walking trails, and fishing. Rocky River Nature Park supports walking, birding, and wildlife observation in an urban wetland habitat. Groups can also launch kayaks from Piedmont Riverfront Park, use the pickleball courts at Dolly Cooper Park, or arrange recreational and teambuilding activities at DL6 Sports Complex in Piedmont.

Nearby, downtown Pendleton adds antique stores, a bookstore, restaurants, pubs, and locally owned shops. Planners can also arrange programs at T. Ed Garrison Arena, the state's largest enclosed agricultural arena, or offer locally sourced attendee gifts from such businesses as Kitchen Emporium, Figs Farmacy, and Indigo Custom Framing & Artisan Market.



HOMEGROWN HOSPITALITY

From district events to citywide conferences, set your sights on finding community and fellowship when you plan your next meeting in the heart of South Carolina. Here, the unexpected becomes the expected. You might be surprised to find yourself smack dab in a walkable, buzzing urban scene at South Carolina's only downtown convention center, or enjoying year-round sunny weather while walking along our rivers that flow through our city. But to us? This is just where we've set the bar. Become inspired and discover a brand new attendee experience for yourself at **ExperienceColumbiaSC.com/Meetings-Conventions**

We're Expecting You

COLUMBIA SC



Sean Rayford/Courtesy Experience Columbia SC

Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center, in the city's downtown, features 142,500 square feet of meeting and event space.



Miles Partnership/Courtesy VisitGreenvilleSC

Cooking classes at Cook's Station offer attendees a hands-on opportunity to learn new techniques.

Clemson

VisitClemson.com; **@VisitClemson**

Clemson combines university resources, Lake Hartwell scenery, and access from Interstate 85, with Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport (GSP) as the primary commercial gateway. The destination works particularly well for academic conferences, education programs, research groups, executive retreats, and alumni organizations.

The Clemson University Conference Center & Inn complex is the anchor. The Clyde V. Madren Conference Center features 17,000 square feet of meeting space, including the 5,684-square-foot Grand Ballroom that can hold up to 600 and a tiered auditorium seating 120. The adjoining James F. Martin Inn has 62 guest rooms and 27 suites with golf-course or lake views. The campus also includes the 18-hole Walker Course, Solé on the Green, Clubhouse Grill, and an outdoor pavilion.

Smaller functions can use the Hayden Conference Center at the South Carolina Botanical Garden or hotel meeting rooms around Clemson and nearby Seneca. Campus tours, the botanical garden, lake outings, golf, and Clemson athletics give planners ready-made itinerary options. Lake Hartwell and the surrounding foothills also make boating, fishing, paddling, and trail time easy additions.

Greenville & Greer

VisitGreenvilleSC.com; @VisitGreenvilleSC

Greenville pairs a walkable downtown with a nationally recognized culinary scene, outdoor recreation, and approximately 11,000 hotel rooms. Its location along Interstate 85 places it between Atlanta and Charlotte, while Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport provides convenient commercial air service.

"For years, Greenville's culinary scene has been cited among the best in the United States, largely because of the number of quality restaurants that have earned James Beard and MICHELIN recognition," says Jonathan Brashier, vice president of meetings, conventions, and events for VisitGreenvilleSC. "The final validation that Greenville has arrived came when *Top Chef* selected it as one of the host cities for season 23."

Greenville Convention Center can accommodate groups of up to 25,000 and offers 280,000 square feet of flexible exhibit space, 60,000 square feet of meeting and conference space, and a 30,000-square-foot ballroom. The facility is approximately 10 minutes from downtown Greenville, where attendees can walk to more than 200 restaurants and shops, as well as to Falls Park on the Reedy.

The 268-room Embassy Suites by Hilton Greenville Golf Resort & Conference Center is one of the destination's largest hotel venues, with 25 meeting rooms and 46,594 square feet

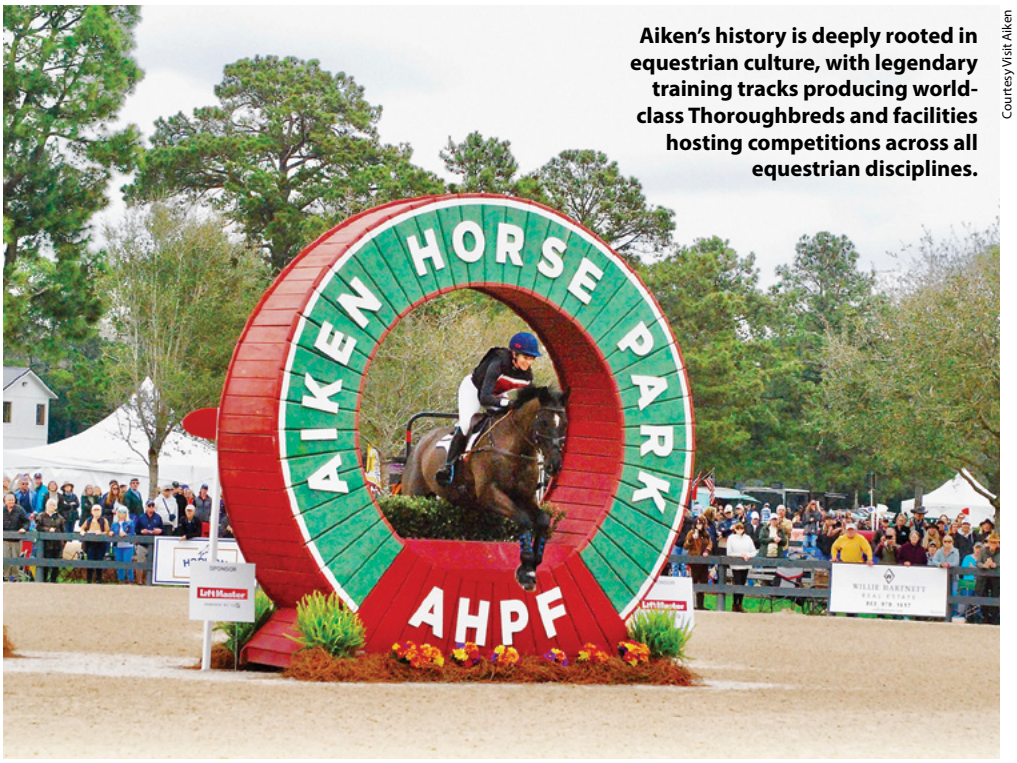
of event space. The 327-room Hyatt Regency Greenville has 17 meeting rooms and 35,000 square feet, while the 73-room Hotel Hartness offers 13 meeting rooms and 16,000 square feet. Hilton Greenville offers 256 guest rooms and 12,986 square feet of space, including eight meeting rooms.

Additional downtown and airport-area options include the combined 286-room SpringHill Suites and Residence Inn Greenville Downtown, with 14,228 square feet across six event rooms; 203-room Greenville Marriott, with 16,310 square feet across 10 event rooms and 14 breakout rooms; and the 200-room Westin Poinsett, Greenville, with 9,669 square feet across eight meeting rooms. The 197-room AC Hotel Greenville Downtown offers 11 event rooms and 19,166 square feet of space, while the 202-room Crowne Plaza Greenville has 8,200 square feet of flexible event space.

For smaller programs, the 144-room Aloft Greenville Downtown offers 5,621 square feet of event space. Embassy Suites Greenville Downtown Riverplace has 156 rooms, five meeting rooms and 4,507 square feet, and the 187-room Grand Bohemian Lodge Greenville, Autograph Collection offers five meeting rooms and 4,300 square feet. Upstate-based Kash Hospitality Management, now operating as Kash Hotels, also contributes hotel investment and management expertise across properties carrying major lodging brands.

Several hotels have recently made improvements or joined the market. Hyatt Regency Greenville has refreshed its meeting spaces, lobby furnishings, and Orb Lounge, and introduced Meeting Grounds: A Market & Café and a reimagined Roost restaurant. DoubleTree by Hilton Greenville Airport opened recently with 146 guest rooms and 8,047 square feet of event space, including 10 meeting rooms. Renovations at the Greenville Marriott include an expanded fitness center, reimagined Technic and Malbec private-event rooms, and Greenville's first M Club lounge; the hotel offers 16,310 square feet of event space.

Greenville's culinary momentum continues with two anticipated restaurants: Enlo from six-time MICHELIN-star chef Nico Abello and a new concept from Joe Cash, the MICHELIN-star chef behind Scoundrel. Restaurants recognized by the James Beard Foundation and MICHELIN Guide, along with a Wine Spectator Grand Award recipient, give planners strong choices for dine-arounds, private meals, and culinary-focused offsites.



Aiken's history is deeply rooted in equestrian culture, with legendary training tracks producing world-class Thoroughbreds and facilities hosting competitions across all equestrian disciplines.

Courtesy Visit Aiken

The Greenville Zoo is preparing to open the largest project in its 65-year history, including a farm with Highland cattle, alpacas, miniature Mediterranean donkeys, and giant Flemish rabbits.

Outdoor recreation is another major part of Greenville's appeal. The city has more than 30 miles of cycling trails, more than 100 nearby parks, and an average of approximately 200 sunny days annually. Five state parks are within driving distance of downtown. Groups can hike to the 140-foot Rainbow Falls at Jones Gap State Park or explore Caesars Head State Park for views extending across South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia.

Fred W. Symmes Chapel, nicknamed "Pretty Place," offers sunrise views over the Blue Ridge Mountains. More than 50 waterfalls are located within the Blue Ridge Escarpment around Caesars Head, where the mountains descend approximately 2,000 feet to the Piedmont. This proximity allows planners to pair trail outings, cycling, and waterfall excursions with an evening at one of Greenville's acclaimed restaurants.

Oconee County

VisitOconeeSC.com; **@VisitOconeeSC**

Located in South Carolina's northwestern corner, Oconee County offers 800 to 1,200 guest rooms and rentals, depending on the season. Seneca is the county's principal hotel base, just across Lake Hartwell from Clemson, while Walhalla, Long Creek, Salem, and Mountain Rest put groups closer to mountain and water experiences. Scenic Highway 11 links towns, parks, overlooks, and waterfall trailheads.

"Oconee County is almost completely surrounded by water," says Caroline Beaty, marketing coordinator for Visit Oconee SC. "From the Wild and Scenic Chattooga River with whitewater rafting, to exploring lakes Jocassee, Keowee, and Hartwell, to following trails to waterfalls, there's something for everyone."

Lakeside Lodge Clemson on Lake Hartwell has condominium-style accommodations and spaces that include a ballroom, an amphitheater, a private dining room, a gazebo, and an outdoor mini football field. Chattooga Belle Farm in Long Creek is a popular destination venue with mountain views, a bistro, farm store, distillery, and camping. Other choices include Chattooga River Lodge, the Bauknight House in Walhalla, and The Overlook at Chickasaw Point in Westminster.

The Seneca Center for the Arts is expected to open in 2027 across from the Alexander Amphitheater, adding more than 700 seats to downtown's performing-arts options.



Courtesy Visit Oconee SC

Almost completely surrounded by water, Oconee County offers ample opportunities for groups to enjoy fishing, paddling, rafting, and other outdoor activities.

Water and trails naturally drive teambuilding. Wildwater's Chattooga outpost can combine rafting with high- and low-ropes challenges. Groups can hike to waterfalls, mountain bike at Stumphouse Park, paddle Lake Jocassee, fish a quiet section of the Chattooga, or use county and state parks for a wellness break.

Seneca's Ram Cat Alley offers restaurants, taprooms, and live music. Walhalla has museums, small-town storefronts, and Freehouse Brewery. Long Creek is home to Chattooga Belle Farm Distillery. Keowee Brewing and 2 Horse Distillery add more locally rooted stops.

Spartanburg

ExperienceSpartanburg.com; **@ExperienceSpartanburg**

Spartanburg offers more than 4,000 hotel rooms in a central Upstate location along interstates 26 and 85. Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport is served by the major U.S. carriers, while Charlotte and Atlanta expand options for both fly-in and drive-in attendees.

"For us, it's the Southern charm," says Patricia Byrd, director of group sales and services for OneSpartanburg Inc. "Our location off two major interstates is really convenient."

Downtown's largest meeting hotel is the 247-room Spartanburg Marriott, with approximately 30,000 square feet of function space. It adjoins Renaissance Park and is within walking distance of Barnet Park, restaurants, and cultural attractions. The 114-room AC Hotel by Marriott Spartanburg brings a more contemporary option, approximately 2,515 square feet of meeting space, a notable Black Mountain College art collection, and Level 10 rooftop dining with wide city views. A new Fairfield Inn & Suites strengthens the downtown room inventory. In addition, announced projects include a Courtyard by Marriott on the west side and The Morgan, a 156-room Curio Collection hotel planned with approximately 6,000 square feet of event space.

On the west side, Hilton Garden Inn Spartanburg & 1881 Event Hall form a connected hotel-and-venue campus. The hotel has 116 rooms, while the restored former textile headquarters offers more than 10,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor space. Three other hotels are nearby, allowing planners to spread room blocks across price points while keeping attendees close to the event hall. Pinnacle Partnership, the Spartanburg-based hospitality and development company behind the campus, also operates a regional portfolio of hotels and restaurant concepts. The Four Points by Sheraton Spartanburg adds 200 rooms and approximately 4,504 square feet for smaller meetings.

Spartanburg's industrial and cultural history supplies additional venues and outings. Drayton Mills and 1800 Drayton Catering & Events provide adaptive-reuse character, while Indigo Hall, Fretwell, and Spartanburg Memorial Auditorium support gatherings of varying scales. The Chapman Cultural Center, Hub City Railroad Museum, Hatcher Garden and Woodland Preserve, Croft State Park, and downtown's new planetarium can accommodate group events.

The BMW Performance Center in nearby Greer, within Spartanburg County, is one of the Upstate's standout teambuilding choices. Programs can put participants behind the wheel for timed laps, handling exercises and team competitions, then use classroom or event areas for sessions, receptions, and other gatherings.

Fifth Third Park, home of the minor league Hub City Spartanburgers, offers another high-energy outing with group hospitality during baseball season.

Food helps connect the program to place. The Beacon Drive-In recently marked 80 years, and Wade's remains a landmark meat-and-three. Downtown and surrounding districts broaden the menu with Isla's on the Square, Lucy Anne's, Ciclops Cyderi & Brewery, Kava Culture, The Zeplin, Rigsby's Classic Rock Café, Lepore Ristorante, Wade's Jr., and Spartanburg Charcuterie.

"You can get anything in Spartanburg," Byrd says. "Just in downtown, there's such a variety of restaurant styles, so you won't get bored."

Kiawah Island Golf Resort

Courtesy Kiawah Island Golf Resort



Make every meeting moment count at Kiawah Island Golf Resort, where 90,000 square feet of gathering space meets 10 miles of pristine South Carolina coastline. From conferences for up to 800 attendees at West Beach Conference Center to championship golf, chef-driven dining at 16 eateries, and unforgettable Lowcountry experiences, this coastal retreat inspires connection beyond the agenda. Choose from luxurious accommodations at The Sanctuary, or the privacy of Resort Villas and Homes, with expert planning support to bring every detail together. Discover a destination where business thrives and team bonds grow stronger.

KiawahMeetings.com

Experience Columbia SC



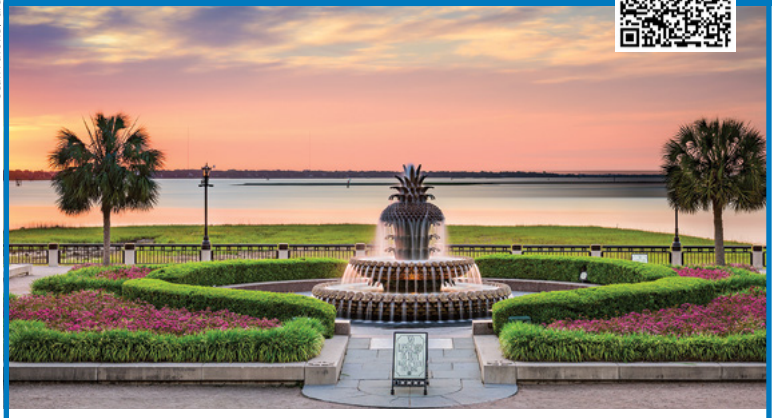
Tucker Prescott/Courtesy Experience Columbia SC

The capital city of Columbia combines Southern charm with vibrant, forward-thinking energy. Columbia offers more than 12,000 hotel rooms and versatile meeting space across historic homes, sporting venues, cultural attractions, and the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center, which features 142,500 square feet and 19 customizable meeting rooms. Attendees can enjoy James Beard-recognized and MICHELIN-recommended dining, craft breweries, exciting nightlife options, riverfront trails, and top-tier attractions like Riverbanks Zoo & Garden or nearby Congaree National Park. The Experience Columbia SC team simplifies every step of the planning process.

ExperienceColumbiaSC.com/Meetings-Conventions

Destination Spotlight

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Want to learn more about the destinations and venues featured in our state spotlights? Scan the QR Code here to access our expanded online coverage, including sponsored content from the region's top destinations and venues for meetings and events. Our online Event Planners' Guides include extensive information about destinations, hotels and resorts, unique venues, cultural attractions, activities, history and heritage, dining, and entertainment to enhance your event experience. Scan the QR Code now to find out what's in store for your next meeting or event!

Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort



Courtesy Kingston Resorts

Located within the 145-acre Kingston Resorts complex, Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort offers oceanfront views and 41,154 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space, creating a refreshing setting for conferences, corporate retreats, celebrations, and group gatherings of all sizes. Resort amenities include onsite dining, pools, beach access, Spa33, 78Fitness, and access to pickleball, tennis, golf simulators, bicycles, and more. The resort's location on the northern end of Myrtle Beach provides both convenient access to local attractions and a quiet, retreat-like experience.

KingstonResorts.com

SongTeller Hotel Brings Dolly Parton's Story to Nashville

By Helen Jacob

Photos courtesy Dolly Parton's SongTeller Hotel





Dolly Parton's SongTeller Hotel and Dolly's Life of Many Colors Museum opened Sept. 29 in downtown Nashville, Tenn., marking the debut of two new venues built around the late entertainer's life, music, and legacy.

The opening comes just weeks after Dolly died on Aug. 25 at age 80, following a brief and private battle with cancer. Dolly was involved in the development of both projects, and the museum includes a prerecorded video of Dolly guiding visitors through her story.

Created in partnership with Dolly and Herschend Family Entertainment, SongTeller Hotel features 240 guest rooms and suites, two live-entertainment venues, a café, and gathering spaces designed around Dolly's career and Nashville's music culture. The property's two unique, signature suites offer distinctly themed accommodations. The Six Sisters Suites sleep up to six guests and are inspired by Dolly's sisters, while the Acoustic Suites celebrate music and creativity with an art-focused design and a keyboard and guitar for guests to play whenever inspiration strikes.

Entertainment is central to the hotel experience. Jolene's, located on the top floor, features nightly performances by emerging Nashville singers and songwriters, along with cocktails, small plates, and desserts. On the second floor, Parton's Live hosts writers' rounds and songwriter sessions, showcasing rising artists, introducing guests to Nashville's songwriting community.

The hotel's opening also coincided with the debut of Dolly's Life of Many Colors Museum, a 20,000-plus-square-foot attraction occupying the hotel's entire third floor. The museum takes visitors through Dolly's life and career through interactive exhibits, multimedia installations, personal stories, and artifacts from her collection.

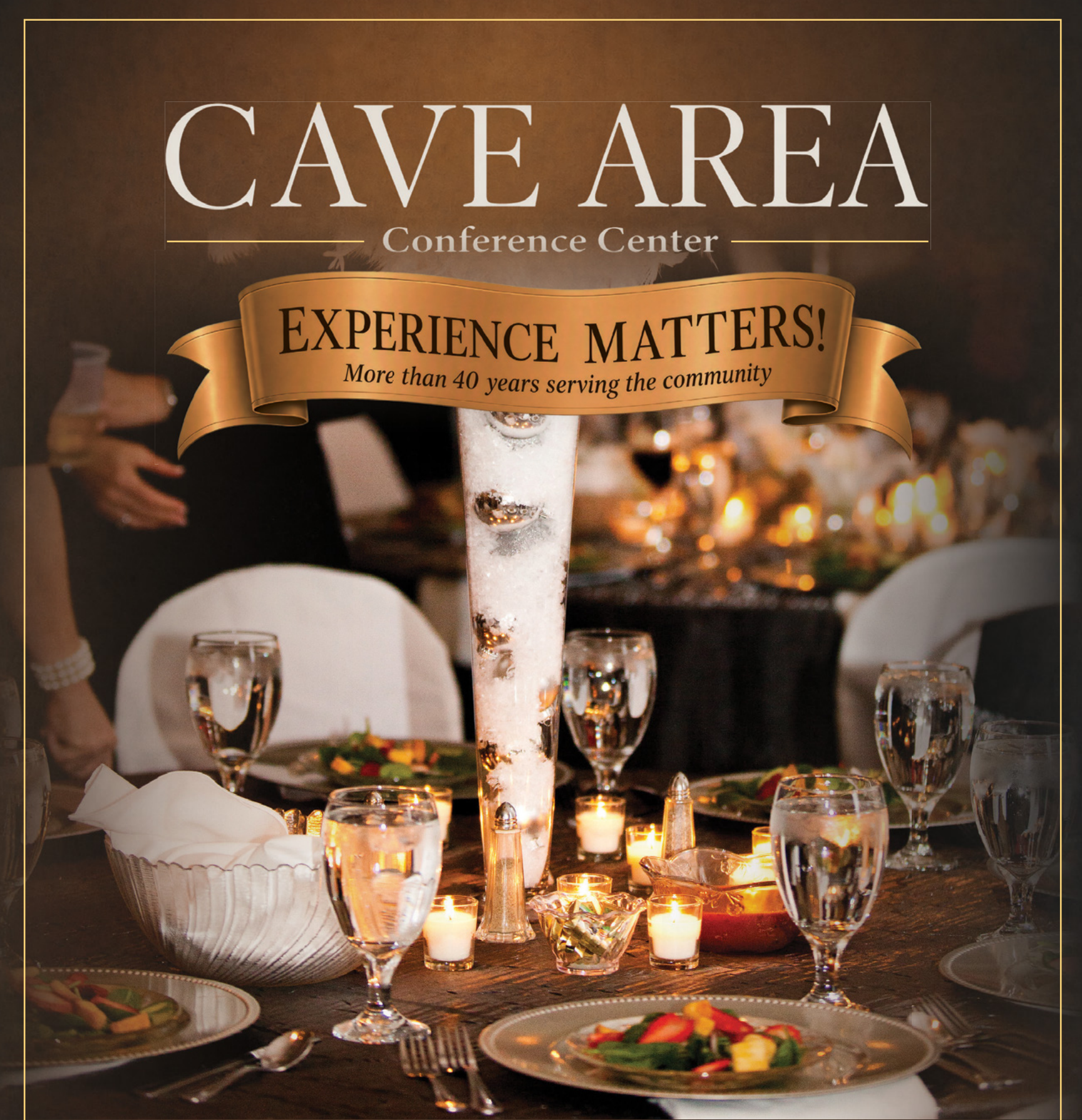
Dolly appears throughout the experience through segments filmed earlier this year, allowing her to narrate portions of her life story even after her death. The museum begins with a recreation of the small cabin where Dolly grew up in the Great Smoky Mountains and follows the people, places, and experiences that shaped her career.

The museum's design and curation are led by Dolly's sister, Rachel Parton George, and niece, Rebecca Seaver. Two retail stores feature official Dolly merchandise and exclusive collections.

Live programming at SongTeller Hotel began ahead of the official opening, with performances from Dolly's family members and emerging artists. Dolly's cousin, Richie Owens, performed at Parton's Live, and her niece, Jada Star, has launched twice-weekly performances. The hotel also is partnering with FEMcountry, a platform founded by music industry executive Leslie Fram, to present monthly performances featuring women in music.

For meeting planners, the hotel offers a range of event spaces designed for everything from conferences and receptions to smaller gatherings. The Studio, the hotel's 1,096-square-foot conference room, can accommodate up to 100 guests for receptions, 90 theater style, or 50 classroom style. Larger options include Parton's Live, with 2,719 square feet and a capacity of 125 reception guests, and Jolene's, a 2,521-square-foot lounge that accommodates up to 100 for receptions and 84 seated. Smaller groups can use the 2,673-square-foot Listening Lobby or partial lobby in the 1,056-square-foot Liner Note & Guitar Lounge. The property also offers event opportunities within Dolly's Life of Many Colors Museum and the two-story SongTeller Suite.

"SongTeller offers meeting planners something truly special, a setting where business and inspiration come together," says Brittany Fryman, director of sales. "From thoughtfully designed gathering spaces to distinctive F&B and live entertainment, every experience is infused with creativity, storytelling, and Dolly's unmistakable warmth. Whether hosting an intimate executive retreat, a corporate gathering, or a large celebratory event, we offer planners the opportunity to create meaningful experiences that bring people together and leave a lasting impression."



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