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ROUGH RIDE AHEAD
How America’s crumbling transportation infrastructure is impacting the meetings industry

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Portland is an easy city to navigate on foot, by bike, or public transportation.

Alex P. Doyle, CMP, vice president of national accounts for 21st Century Group, offers some insider tips on Portland:

What’s the best thing about holding a meeting in Portland? Portland has a great airport, good public transportation, outstanding hotels, the world-class Oregon Convention Center, and great value. It’s about half the price of San Francisco. We also have a very sophisticated meeting network of services that includes OMG, destination, AV technology providers, florists, designers, and local musicians, entertainers, and speakers.

Another notable distinction about Portland is its easy accessibility to a variety of different landscapes and experiences, says Smith. “Portland, like every city in the Pacific Northwest, is all about the outdoors. Within an hour from here, we can get you to the Pacific. In 45 minutes, you can be on top of Mount Hood.”

In recent years, Portland’s food-and-drink scene has gained international acclaim. One of the city’s most popular nicknames is “Beervana,” a nod to Portland’s position as the beer capital of the world, with some 53 breweries within its city limits alone. In 2010, the city topped Budget Travel’s list for the “World’s Best Street Food,” thanks to the more than 600 food carts parked throughout the city, often in “pods” of multiple vendors. The City of Roses is also home to a coffee scene that rivals Seattle’s and is the birthplace of Stumptown Coffee.

“What’s the best thing about Portland? The multitude of activities that you can do, including the great outdoors, the great cultural scene, the outstanding culinary scene, and the vibrant wine industry. In short, the options of lifestyles that you can have.”

Houston is a fast-changing city. Or, as Greg Ortale, president and CEO of the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau, puts it: “If you haven’t been to Houston in the last five years, then you haven’t really been to Houston.”

The past few years, the city has taken big steps in expanding its offerings to visitors, and groups in particular, with new hotels adding more than 2,300 rooms to the city’s inventory; an expansion of Houston’s MetroRail line, and a complete transformation of Buffalo Bayou Park.

“Especially for the major cities in the country, the Bayou City offers a cosmopolitan experience rich with the arts, including opera, ballet, symphony, theater, and museums,” adds Ortale. “Visitors now have easy access to a thriving downtown and to the city’s vibrant arts and cultural scene, fantastic pro sports teams, and world-class restaurants.”

Houston is moving fast to ensure its hotel inventory and infrastructure is world-class well ahead of its moment in the national spotlight. The fourth-largest city in the U.S., in the state that continues to lead the country in job growth, Houston is proving to be a vibrant destination for meetings.

Downtown Revival

There is a lot of development happening in Houston, in particular throughout the city’s downtown district, which is enjoying a renaissance, with a number of new meetings-ready properties recently opened or under construction.

Opening in the area in August is the JW Marriott Houston Downtown. Almost $81 million is being spent to gut and renovate the 102-year-old space that once housed the Samuel F. Carter building (the city’s first skyscraper). The result will be a 323-room, 50-suite property with nine meeting rooms.

Nearby, in Houston’s Central Business District, Houston has expanded its travel and hospitality options in recent months.
Horizon

Essential Toolbox

Convention Centers & Facilities

George R. Brown Convention Center (1.8 million sq ft)
NRG Center (1.4 million sq ft)

Room Tax
7 percent

Readers Recommend

Pinnacle Awards Go To:
- Greater Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau
- The Woodlands Resort & Conference Center

Conveniently located and connected via skywalk to the George R. Brown Convention Center, will be the new 1,000-room Marriott Marquis Houston. Opening in summer 2016, the property will offer 104,000 square feet of meeting space. Along with the existing Hilton Americas Houston, it will播种Discovery Green Park, a 12-acre park that hosts numerous events and activities throughout the year, and that can be secured for meetings. The Hilton (which connects to the convention center via skywalks) offers 91,500 square feet of meeting space in addition to its 1,200 rooms.

Other properties expected in the area are Aloft Houston Downtown, coming on board in June 2016, as well as a new 261-room Hyatt Place, expected in January 2016. Joining these properties in the downtown area will be a new complex consisting of a 168-room Hampton Inn and 132-room Homewood Suites. It will cost $50 million and is planned for completion in January 2016. Next year, meeting planners can look forward to the redevelopment of the Humble Tower Apartments into a 166-room SpringHill Suites Hotel (expected in summer 2015), and redevelopment of the Savoy Hotel into a 215-room Holiday Inn.

Adding to the city’s luxury offerings is the just-announced Hotel Alessandra, which will anchor Houston’s GreenStreet — a mixed-use destination of restaurants, retail, and office space. The hotel will be 225 rooms and 25 stories and sit within walking distance of the convention center, Toyota Center, and Discovery Green Park.

Existing properties have also opened after extensive renovations. The stylish Hotel Derek recently completed a multimillion-dollar renovation of its 312 guestrooms, as well as meeting and public spaces. The 135-room Hotel Icon, located inside the historic 1912 Union National Bank building, also competed a $5-million renovation recently.

But the bigger story may be the expanding transportation options. Southwest Airlines is investing $150 million to upgrade William P. Hobby Airport, adding a parking garage, roadway modifications, and an expanded terminal, in an effort to accommodate international flights to and from Houston. “Getting to Houston has never been easier,” says Ortale. SM Questions or comments? Email alca@alexpalmerswrites.com

Exceeding Your Meeting Expectations

A surpass convention hotel designed for meeting planners, the Hilton Americas-Houston is the perfect choice for your next event. Only 30 minutes from Houston Intercontinental Airport, we are also just steps away from Houston’s spectacular attractions. With the best in accommodations, amenities, and technology, the Hilton Americas-Houston is ready to make your meeting a great success:

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