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Guide

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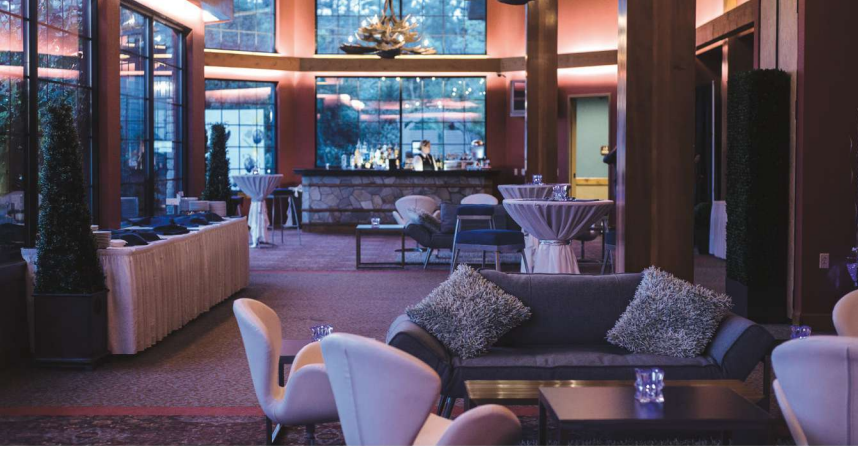
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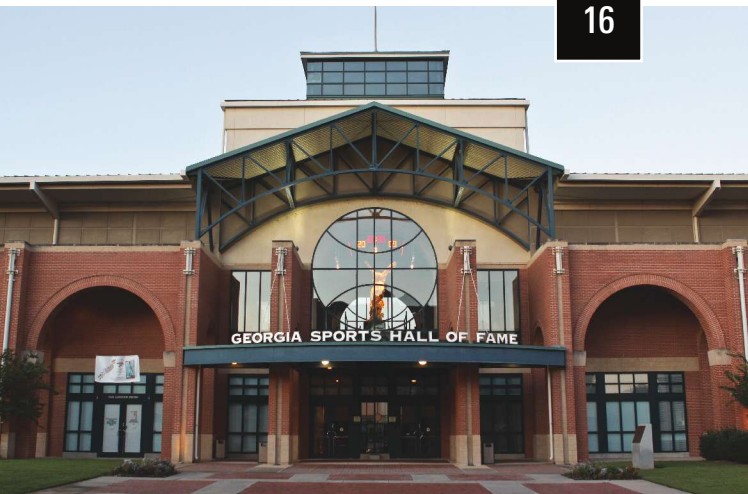
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Volume 18



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Courtesy Galveston Island CVB



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Courtesy Macon CVB



### On the cover:

The Jekyll Island Club in Georgia, once a billionaire's playground, is now a historic site and public resort. Photo by Gallogly.

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Courtesy Travel Juneau

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# Hotel Chaco debuts in Albuquerque



Photos Courtesy Hotel Chaco

Hotel Chaco's architecture is inspired by the art of New Mexico's ancient Chaco Canyon.

ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico – Hotel Chaco, a contemporary luxury hotel inspired by the architecture and ancient civilization of Chaco Canyon, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is on schedule to open in Old Town Albuquerque in April, offering a variety of meeting spaces.

The state-of-the-art meeting room on the first floor off the lobby has expansive glass doors that open to a courtyard. The room can be divided into two spaces and has dedicated high-speed internet ports. This venue, encom-

temporary custom furnishings. The Terrace Suite has private staircase access to the rooftop restaurant and lounge, and provides an idyllic setting for up to 150 guests. The intimate garden courtyard area, which seats up to 25 guests, is paired with a quaint reception space.

Hotel Chaco, located adjacent to sister property Hotel Albuquerque at Old Town, with which it shares a pool, a wedding chapel and 62,000 square feet of additional meeting

passing a total square footage of 1,450, can accommodate up to 60 guests. The 2,070-square-foot rooftop terrace suite offers panoramic views of the Sandia Mountains, downtown Albuquerque and historic Old Town. It includes an indoor living area and two adjoining suites, all with con-

space, is now accepting group and individual bookings.

"We're creating a hotel where guests will experience the true culture of New Mexico in a way that has never been done before," said Jim Long, CEO, of Heritage Hotels and Resorts. "We are blending ancient building techniques from New Mexico Native Americans with modern amenities and designs from the best designers in the world to create a new hotel that will redefine and advance the architectural building style in our state. The services, sacred architecture and accommodations this hotel will provide will embrace the native people's artistic sensibility and oneness with nature."

The restaurant, located on the hotel's fifth-floor rooftop, is called Level 5 in honor of Chaco Canyon's legendary Pueblo Bonito, which also had five stories. It will feature unobstructed views of the nearby Sandia Mountains and accommodate up to 250 guests for breakfast, lunch and dinner, while also providing room service.

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

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## Hotel LeVeque Opening in Historic Columbus Tower

COLUMBUS, Ohio – An iconic star on the Columbus horizon is being transformed into a new boutique hotel. Hotel LeVeque is expected to open this month with 149 guest rooms and suites in the historic LeVeque Tower at 50 E. Broad St. in the heart of downtown in Ohio's capital city. Part of Marriott International's boutique collection of hotels, this hotel will have sweeping views of the city's skyline and a new ribbon of park land that hugs the Scioto Mile riverbank.

Hotel LeVeque will occupy floors five through 10 of the 47-story Art Deco building, with a gleaming lobby welcoming guests on the first floor and a fine-dining destination restaurant occupying the second-floor mezzanine. Other floors of the building will feature residential and office space.

The hotel's three meeting rooms will offer a combined total of 1,741 square feet of meeting space and accommodate up to 71 attendees.

"Hotel LeVeque will shine a light on Columbus' incredible design, art and creativity, really bringing the spirit of the city to life for our guests," said general manager Geri Lombard.

"We're looking at everything from having a local maker create a special line of soaps, lotion and amenities for our guests to working with a Columbus fashion designer to create signature staff uniform features."

In addition to special locally crafted features, Hotel LeVeque is also crafting guest experiences designed to immerse them in Columbus' creative culture. Special getaway packages and offerings, such as culinary tours or a fashion immersion experience, will ensure that every hotel guest can experience the city's essence.

Originally built in 1927 as the American Insurance Union Citadel, the LeVeque Tower was architect Charles Howard Crane's masterpiece and, at the time, was the tallest skyscraper between New York City and Chicago and the fifth-tallest building in the world. It became known as the Lincoln LeVeque Tower, then simply the LeVeque Tower after it was purchased in 1945. Clad in unusual terra-cotta relief tiles, the LeVeque Tower's spectacular Art Deco architecture remains the city's most recognizable feature and is among Columbus' most photographed architectural treasures.

[www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/cmhak-hotel-leveque-autograph-collection](http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/cmhak-hotel-leveque-autograph-collection)



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By Vickie Mitchell

# Local Flair

Kindred executive shares four ways to give meetings local panache

**B**ree Brostko is managing director of Kindred Hotels and Resorts, a 65-member collection of independent accommodations created two years ago. Properties are all over the board in terms of size, style and location, from ranches in the West to clapboard inns in the East. They sit on beaches, in the mountains, in deserts, by lakes and on Main Streets.

As individual as snowflakes, their commonalities are private ownership and a distinct sense of place.

"The reason this group bands together is to promote independent properties and the experience they offer within the group meeting space," said Brostko.

Because of her work with Kindred, Brostko has become a popular guest columnist and speaker about ways to localize and personalize meetings.

Here are some of Brostko's tips for meeting planners who want to inject their meetings with local flair.

## Look for a venue that gets it.

Attendees want to leave a conference with more than swag. They want experiences that connect them to the city or region where they are meeting. A venue that understands the importance of making these deeper connections with attendees will be willing to work with planners to incorporate a sense of place. "A property that recognizes the importance of engaging in the local community will put that front and center, and talk about it in its proposal," said Brostko.

## Bust out of the indoors.

Getting some fresh air can do wonders for brains pent up too long in a boardroom. And what better way to understand a place than to be outdoors? Brostko recommends seeking properties that have outdoor venues or that partner with nearby wineries, brew pubs, historic properties or other off-site venues. Two examples from Brostko's personal experience are a beach resort on the Pacific coast that sets up breaks next to the surf and a Vermont lakefront resort that has a large tented dock expressly for floating dinners.

## Fill up with local food and drink.

Venues that are tied to where they live will stock their larders with local meats, vegetables and beverages. Look for localness in everything from eggs and homemade granola bars to local beers. Given the popularity of food trucks, Brostko suggests working with the venue to include local trucks in an event. Just remember that large groups can quickly overtax a truck or two. "It almost always works even better to augment food truck offerings with food and beverage from the hotel," Brostko said. For example, a food truck could supply the grilled burgers while the hotel handles the sides and beverages. What's an easy way to incorporate local spirits? "Incorporate them in a signature cocktail," Brostko said. Attendees get a taste of a local spirit, the meeting planner saves money by offering a single cocktail, and the property is a hero for making a planner's job easier.

## Don't worry about importing educators or entertainers.

Every community has smart, funny and talented people, and when one of them is hired to enlighten or entertain, meeting attendees feel more connected to their meeting locale. Brostko suggests asking the venue, the local CVB, the chamber of commerce or local ASAE or MPI chapters for recommendations. Memorable local speakers and talent she has heard include the chairman of Memphis-based FedEx, who spoke at a meeting she attended in that city, and rockabilly singer Tony Perdue and his band, which played at the recent Small Market Meetings Conference in Huntsville, Alabama. Perdue's band was one of two that performed at an after-hours event at A.M. Booth's Lumberyard. "They were just incredibly good," she said.

To get in touch with Brostko, send her an email at [bree@meetkindred.com](mailto:bree@meetkindred.com). For more information about Kindred Resorts and hotels, visit [www.meetkindred.com](http://www.meetkindred.com).

*Vickie Mitchell is the former editor of Small Market Meetings. If you have ideas for future columns, contact her at [vickie@smallmarketmeetings.com](mailto:vickie@smallmarketmeetings.com).*





# Great After-Hours Events Leave Lasting Impressions

Wow your delegates with a dazzling venue or creative theme

*Courtesy Travel Juneau*

By Savannah Osbourn

Meeting planners can take groups to explore the ice caves around Juneau.

One of the best ways to ensure that a meeting leaves attendees with a memorable experience is with creative after-hours events, which can involve special tours, unique venues, team-building activities and more.

"People who are coming to a destination want to experience what the locals experience, but at the same time, they want something unique and personal for them," said Erin Degulis, director of convention services at Go Providence in Providence, Rhode Island.

From dining in the desert to yoga paddleboarding, here are some insights that convention and visitors bureaus shared about planning original events, along with five questions that planners should ask themselves as they make arrangements.

## *What is your organization all about?*

Convention and visitors bureaus often steer planners toward different ideas for their events depending on the nature of their organization. Medical groups occasionally host an evening of Tankards and

Tonics at the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary in Alexandria, Virginia, which was one of the first pharmacies in the nation and frequented by notable figures like George Washington and Robert E. Lee.

"Everybody dresses up like pharmacists with the jackets, and we have infused vodka in test tubes. It's really fun if you have a group in health care," said Lorraine Loyd, vice president of sales at Visit Alexandria.

Likewise, scientific groups, such as the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, often visit Providence to take advantage of the local research facilities.

"Rhode Island is a pioneer in wind farming and wind energy," said Kristen Adamo, vice president of marketing and communications at Go Providence. "So attendees were able to tour the site of a special wind project that's one of the first of its kind in the country."

## *What can attendees take away from the experience?*

One way to grab people's attention is with an activity that teaches



*Courtesy Visit Marina Del Rey*

**Visit Marina Del Rey staff can help meeting planners coordinate a variety of coastal activities.**

new skills or ideas to use back home. In Alexandria, planners sometimes work with a company called Fetching Photos, which leads groups on a “photo safari” through historic neighborhoods.

Before departing, members of the group download several photography apps and receive a tutorial on taking unique pictures with their phones. The guide then takes them past charming old homes and cobblestone roads to practice these new techniques. Afterward, participants can take home the apps as well as great new ideas on how to take better pictures.

In cities known for their local cuisine, groups can test their teamwork and cooking skills with a culinary challenge, which often includes a brief cooking lesson.

“You break into teams of three or four, and you’re given certain ingredients to work with, then you’re judged on presentation, taste and so on,” said Loyd.

### *What is the main purpose for the activity?*

After-hours events can have a variety of goals, but knowing the

purpose will help planners narrow their options. Groups traveling to Scottsdale, Arizona, often take off-road Tomcar tours through the Sonoran Desert, which is team building as well as educational.

“Many times, they’ll stop halfway through the tour and educate folks on the flora and fauna of the desert,” said Erika Pumphrey, senior national sales manager at Experience Scottsdale.

Other locations simply provide an outlet for relaxation and fun, such as the Port City Brewery in Alexandria, which won the title for best small American brewery in 2015.

“They do something called Peddles and Pints, where you bike first and then come back and do the beer tour and tasting,” said Loyd.

In California, whale- and dolphin-watching tours are always a great way to unwind and enjoy coastal scenery, according to Lawrence Stafford, business development manager at Visit Marina Del Rey. Another popular pastime in the area is yoga paddleboarding, which takes place on a calm section of water adjacent to the beach.

“People often fall off the boards,” said Stafford with a laugh, “but that can make it humorous.”



Courtesy Experience Scottsdale

Groups can take team-building jeep treks through Scottsdale's Sonoran Desert landscape.

### *What is unique to the location?*

Every city has its own flavor, so tapping into local culture is sure to create unforgettable memories for meeting groups. In Scottsdale, known as the "West's most Western town," visitors can make their own cowboy hats at Saba's Western Store or venture into the Sonoran Desert for an elegant Dinner in the Desert.

"We take people out to the desert in jeeps, have a beautiful white-cloth dinner and then bring out storytellers and musicians to perform under the stars," said Pumphrey.

In contrast, Juneau, Alaska, is famous for its dramatic frozen landscape. Groups can climb into helicopters for an aerial tour over glaciers in the Juneau Ice Field, which is larger than the state of Rhode Island, or ride the Mount Roberts Tramway 1,800 feet above the valley. A scenic cruise is also a great way to experience local beauty.

"Within minutes from the docks, you'll be able to see eagles, sea lions, humpback whales, orcas – all sorts of wildlife teeming in the waters," said Kirk Stagg, convention sales manager at Travel Juneau.

Meanwhile, Providence prides itself on offering a wide selection of

art galleries.

"Monthly, we have a program called Gallery Night," said Degulis. "We have a very large art scene with the Rhode Island School of Design being here, so we have a lot of galleries."

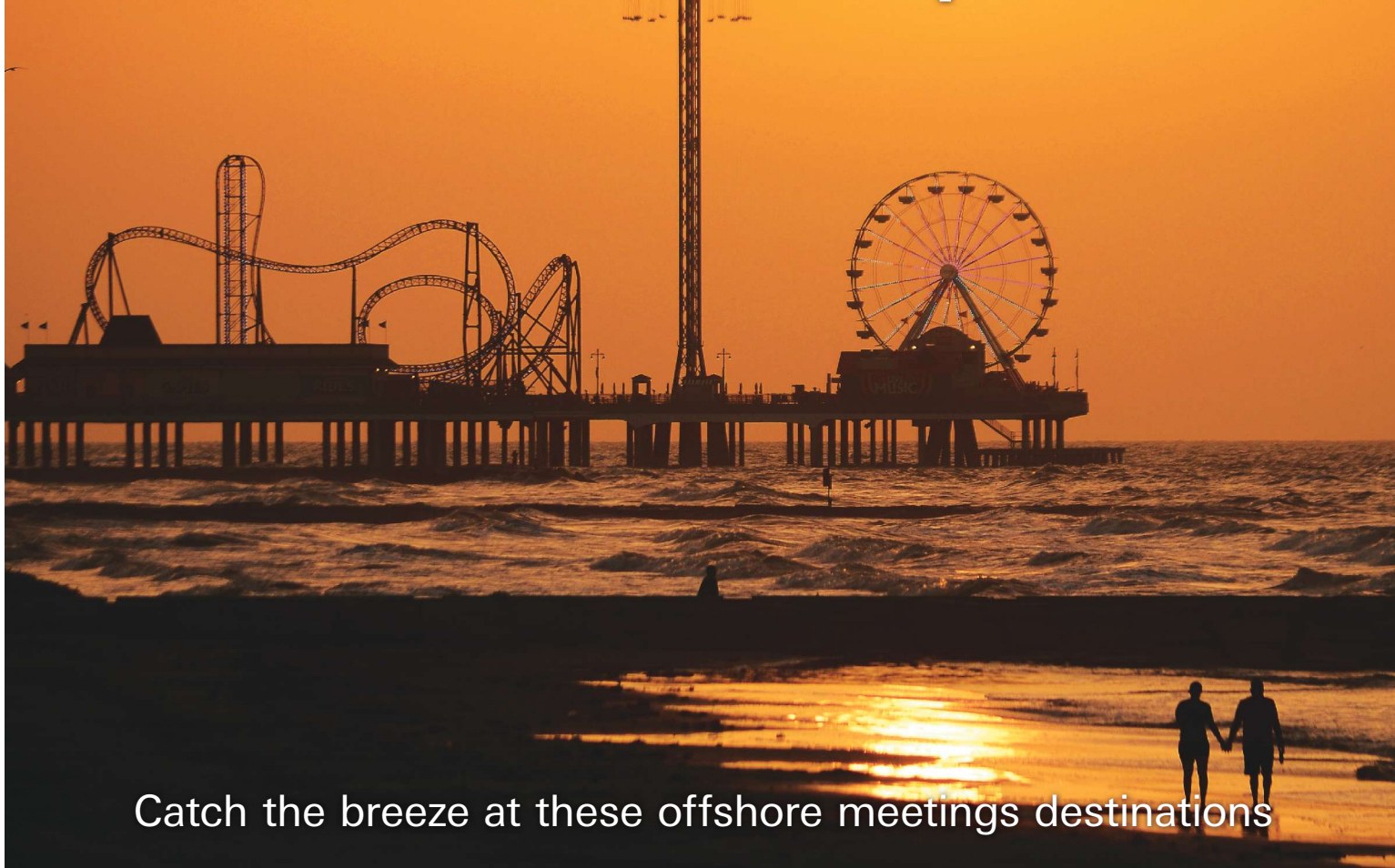
During this free evening activity, a trolley takes visitors across town to all the galleries, where attendees can enjoy appetizers, cheese and crackers.

### *What seasonal activities are available for your group?*

The season is another factor to consider when it comes to planning after-hours events. In Juneau, summer is the best time to enjoy more outdoors activities, such as hiking, kayaking and zip-line tours, though it is also the peak tourist season. Arts, theater and skiing take over the entertainment scene during colder months.

"It depends on what your group is looking for," said Stagg. "If you've got a really active bunch, then I would tell them to come between mid-April to the end of September. If they would prefer to have the town to themselves, then they could come pretty much any time of the year."

# America's Island Escapes



Catch the breeze at these offshore meetings destinations

By Savannah Osbourn

*Courtesy Galveston Island CVB*

Beaches and boardwalk entertainment make Galveston Island a popular family destination for meeting groups.

Nothing beats kicking back after a long day of meetings with a panorama of sand and breaking waves in the distance. When you hold a meeting on one of America's islands, you get the benefit of beautiful, relaxing scenery, strong destination appeal for attendees and first-rate facilities and venues.

With so many coastal locations to consider, here are five spectacular islands from which to choose for your next conference or meeting destination.

## *Galveston, Texas*

When people think of Texas, islands are usually not the first things that come to mind. Yet less than an hour from Houston, travelers will

find one of the country's most charming island towns – Galveston – characterized by temperate weather, rich architectural history and 32 miles of pristine beaches along the Gulf of Mexico.

The Galveston Island Convention Center sits along the island's iconic seawall, which was constructed following a devastating hurricane in 1900. Overlooking the crystal-clear waters of the Gulf, this 140,000-square-foot meeting space is a premier destination for events and conferences.

Planners can consider the Moody Gardens Convention Center for accommodations as well, which is conveniently located under the same roof of the Moody Gardens Hotel, making it a one-stop shop for meeting groups.



Courtesy Golden Isles CVB

Visitors can learn about Jekyll Island's marine life at the Georgia Sea Turtle Center.

One of the island's most recent additions is the Bryan Museum, which holds the world's largest collection of Southwest arts and artifacts. The museum's conservatory provides a stunning outdoor venue for receptions and other gatherings, paneled with walls of emerald-colored glass that look out into surrounding gardens.

Galveston is also home to Sea Star Base, formerly known as Sea Scout Base. Traditionally used by scout troops, Star Base offers educational marine programs for all ages, including sailing excursions.

"They took us on a schooner, and we actually participated in raising the sails and steering the boat," said Mary Beth Bassett, public relations coordinator at the Galveston Island Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Festivals and events take place nearly every weekend, among them the Galveston Island Food and Wine Festival, the Wild Texas Shrimp Festival and the third-largest Mardi Gras celebration in the nation. Every six weeks, the city hosts an art walk through historic downtown, where visitors can enjoy hors d'oeuvres at local art galleries and mingle in the streets with drinks.

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

### *Jekyll Island, Georgia*

As one of Georgia's lush barrier islands, Jekyll Island enhances the meeting experience with miles of live oaks trees, marshland and intimate beaches. Its convention center is the only oceanfront conference building south of New Jersey on the East Coast and can hold up to 2,000 people.

"The Jekyll Island Convention Center sits right on the beach, so you can actually take breaks along the shore," said Tomee Sellars, sales and service manager at the Golden Isles Convention and Visitors Bureau.

One of the most distinctive areas of the island is the Jekyll Island Club Historic District, a 240-acre site with 34 historic buildings where visitors can shop, dine and stroll across the grounds. The castlelike structure at the center of the property was once home to the famous Jekyll Island Club, which claimed members like J.P. Morgan, Joseph Pulitzer and William Vanderbilt. Today, it functions as a hotel.

For an afternoon excursion, meeting attendees can explore the winding network of paths across the island, particularly down to Driftwood Beach, where many live oaks wash up on shore to create a graveyard of bonelike branches. They can also pay a visit to the Georgia Sea Turtle Center, where sea turtles are rescued, rehabilitated and later returned to the wild.

Less than five minutes from the convention center, groups will find all kinds of delicious food at the Jekyll Market, including some great souvenirs like peach salsa and praline honey butter. For dinner, make sure to add the island's special variety of shrimp to the menu.

"We are known for our Georgia white shrimp," said Sellars. "They have a sweeter flavor because they're bred in the marshes, which are cleaned out by tides twice a day."

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



Courtesy Catalina COC

Catalina Island offers a tropical paradise just an hour away from Southern California cities.

### *Catalina Island, California*

Though situated barely an hour from one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world, Catalina Island transports visitors to a tropical environment with a culture all its own. Some of the island's many outdoor adventures are scuba diving, parasailing, fishing, biking, snorkeling and hiking.

"It's so close to Hollywood, yet it feels like you're in a different world," said Cathy Miller, director of sales and marketing at the Catalina Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau.

Although there are numerous locations to host unforgettable social events or corporate meetings, one of the most popular shoreline venues is Catherine's Terrace, which features a lovely glass wall opening onto a canopied balcony by the bay.

Later in the day, travelers can catch a show at the Catalina Casino, a circular theater and entertainment dome on the edge of the water. Each year, this romantic edifice hosts the island's largest events, including the New Year's Eve Celebration and the Catalina Jazz Festival. Though its title can be misleading, "casino" originated as an Italian word for "gathering place."

"It's iconic to our island," said Miller.

One of the most unusual aspects of the island is its bison population, which was brought there nearly 100 years ago for a film. As a result, the island's signature cocktail is called Buffalo Milk. Visitors can take tours to see the bison, along with deer and other animals, at the Catalina

Island Conservancy, which was sectioned off as a nature preserve by the island's original owners, the Wrigley family.

Another outdoor attraction is the Wrigley Memorial and Botanic Garden, which contains a memorial to William Wrigley Jr.

**[www.catalinachamber.com](http://www.catalinachamber.com)**

### *Mackinac Island, Michigan*

Known as the jewel of the Great Lakes, Mackinac Island provides meeting groups with beautiful waterfront views as well as a dynamic bar and music scene in town.

"Mackinac has a bountiful shopping selection with specialty shops and restaurants," said Amanda Greenwood, assistant director at Mackinac Island Tourism. "In addition to taking a leisurely bike ride or carriage tour, you may also enjoy our unique golf courses, water activities, hiking trails, historic Fort Mackinac and Fort Holmes."

The picturesque scenery takes many travelers back to the Colonial era. Visitors can take narrated horse-and-buggy tours through downtown to Surrey Hills, Arch Rock and other key destinations, or experience remnants of the American Revolution at Fort Mackinac and Fort Holmes, which were temporarily occupied by British forces.

The Grand Hotel is Mackinac's most recognized landmark, standing by the water like a summer palace with striking white pillars and neat rows of flags. At this third-generation family-owned manor, guests can



*Courtesy Mackinac Island Tourism*

**A parade celebrates Scottish heritage on Mackinac Island.**

enjoy the sweeping view of Lake Huron, dine at one of the hotel's various restaurants or host a lavish reception in the Grand Hotel Theatre.

Another fun attraction is the Original Butterfly House and Insect World, the third-oldest live butterfly exhibit in the United States, where guests can walk into a tropical garden teeming with hundreds of butterflies from four continents.

Sailing and biking are two of the area's most popular outdoor activities. There are numerous sailing excursions from which to choose, among them the Sip n' Sail cocktail cruise. Every year, thousands of cyclists visit the island to take advantage of the 70 miles of natural and paved trails along wooded areas and 300-foot-high bluffs.

**[www.mackinacisland.org](http://www.mackinacisland.org)**

***Puerto Rico***

As a breathtaking Caribbean island, Puerto Rico is well known for its mouthwatering cuisine, high outdoor adventure and vibrant nightlife, particularly in the historic capital of San Juan.

Planners will find everything they need here to prepare their event. With 600,000 square feet of space, the Puerto Rico Convention Center is the largest convention center in the Caribbean, containing world-class facilities and accommodating staff to ensure the success of meetings and conferences.

Reminiscent of the early Spanish Empire, San Juan features stunning architecture, walking tours and art museums. Travelers will also find no shortage of exquisite restaurants throughout the area, with favorite local dishes like "asopao," a soup similar to gumbo with chicken, shellfish, rice and other ingredients, or "arroz con dulce," a sweet, sticky rice cooked with spices, ginger, coconut milk, raisins and rum.

"Puerto Rico is very diverse, and visitors always talk about the variety and excellence of the cuisine," said Joyce Martinez, vice president of sales at Meet Puerto Rico.

With the rain forest as a dramatic backdrop, Puerto Rico gives visitors the ultimate outdoor and adventure experience. In addition to stunning waterfall hikes and day cruises in the Caribbean, thrill-seekers can try their hand at the world's highest and longest zip line or take a trolley tour into the depths of the Camuy River Cave, the third-largest underground cave system on Earth.

Though some meeting attendees may be uncertain about the distance and logistics of traveling to a U.S. territory, the island is easily reached, with no flight from the States lasting longer than a couple of hours. American travelers can use their cellphones as well as U.S. currency, and no passports are needed.

**[www.meetpuertorico.com](http://www.meetpuertorico.com)**



# MEET IN THE HEART OF GEORGIA

*Music, culture  
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By Katherine Tandy Brown

Visitors explore the wetlands at Ocmulgee National Monument, one of Macon's most significant attractions.



“Our huge revitalization has brought a lot of loft living downtown. As a result, the atmosphere is vibrant, with plenty of restaurants, bars and evening entertainment.”

**M**acon is dubbed “The Heart of Georgia” for good reason. “We’re in the center of the state, and we’re easy to get to,” said Kimberly Payne-Ward, director of sales for the Macon Convention and Visitors Bureau (MCVB). “And two major interstates – I-75 and I-16 – converge here.”

A hip combo, Macon blends American pre-Colonial to Civil War history, boardroom- to arena-size meeting sites downtown and around town, art- to airplane-centric off-site venues, kids to pro sports and rock ‘n’ roll. There are big names: the Allman Brothers and Otis Redding. One of the first inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was Macon native son Richard Lee Penniman, singer, songwriter, musician, recording artist and the “Architect of Rock and Roll,” who in the 1950s helped spark the transition from rhythm and blues to rock ‘n’ roll. His stage name was Little Richard.

Located 85 miles south of Atlanta, Macon, with its downtown recently revitalized to the tune of \$5.3 million, is truly a rockin’ meetings destination.

“Our huge revitalization has brought a lot of loft living downtown,” said Payne-Ward. “As a result, the atmosphere is vibrant, with plenty of restaurants, bars and evening entertainment.”

## Meeting in Macon

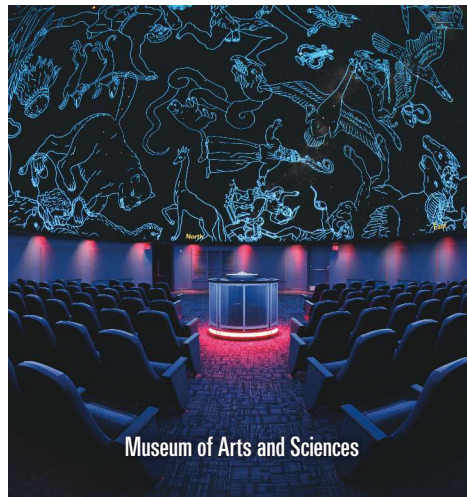
Meeting and staying near downtown is easy, thanks to the Macon Centreplex, a complex made up of the Edgar H. Wilson Convention Center, the 220-room Macon Marriott City Center Hotel and the Macon Coliseum, where greats such as Elvis, Elton John and, of course, Little Richard, have packed the house. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Macon City Auditorium, with a monumental 2,688-seat Assembly Hall, is close by.

Versatility is the convention center’s forte, as its 30,800-square-foot Exhibition Hall subdivides into two rooms, and its 9,100-square-foot ballroom breaks into five. With lots of breakout space, prefunction space and wide windows, the 102,000-square-foot facility, Georgia’s largest convention/event venue outside Metro Atlanta, has a light, airy feel throughout.

Connected to the center, the 9,000-seat Coliseum houses home ice for the Macon Mayhem hockey team October through April and hosts a novel possibility for team building:

public ice skating. Three rentable suites overlook the arena floor.

“When it’s 100 degrees outside, you can keep cool in the Coliseum,” Payne-Ward said.



All photos courtesy Macon-Bibb Co. CVB

## Macon, Georgia

### ACCESS

Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta; Middle Georgia Regional Airport; Interstates 75, 16 and 475

### MAJOR MEETING SPACES

Macon Centreplex, which comprises the Edgar H. Wilson Convention Center, Macon Coliseum, Macon Marriott City Center and Macon City Auditorium; Professional Science Building at Middle Georgia State University; Holiday Inn Macon North; Hilton Garden Inn

### HOTEL ROOMS

More than 5,000

### OFFSITE VENUES

1850s Hay House, Tubman African American Museum, Allman Brothers Band Museum (The Big House), Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, Macon Museum of Arts and Sciences

### CONTACT INFO

Macon-Bibb County  
Convention and Visitors Bureau  
800-768-3401  
www.maconga.org

The best news for planners is that the convention center is connected to the Marriott by a covered walkway, so attendees have no excuse for missing a meeting.

“The Macon Marriott City Center is a little jewel,” said Roland Biron, director of sales and marketing. “It’s the only four-diamond Marriott in the entire state.”

Located just off I-16, the Centreplex boasts a total 145,000 square feet of meeting space with full catering for up to 9,000 attendees, all a short drive across the Ocmulgee River to downtown.

## Options Around Town

The city is sprinkled with meeting sites to meet any group’s needs.

On the 400-plus acres of Middle Georgia State University, the Professional Sciences Conference Center offers 20,000 square feet of flexible space with floor-to-ceiling windows and state-of-the-art technology. A 4,500-square-foot banquet hall seats up to 400 guests, a high-tech tiered classroom accommodates 75, and a smaller boardroom overlooks a lake with a sparkling central fountain. As the entire campus is an arboretum and Macon is the Cherry Blossom Capital of the World, springtime is a gorgeous time to meet here.

Near I-475 and I-75, the Anderson Conference Center is part of a shopping center owned by Goodwill Industries and is devoted to teaching job skills; it comes complete with a cooking school, a restaurant and a coffee shop. The center’s ballroom seats 850, and its 9,200-square-foot Atrium, 650. On-site catering is gourmet quality.

Situated on Macon’s “Hospitality Highway,” the Holiday Inn Macon North has a 2,500-square-foot ballroom and is close to the 81-store Shoppes at River Crossing.

“We’ve got the best happy hour in town,” said Perry McCutcheon, director of sales. “Follow it with dinner at our restaurant, and there’s no driving involved.”

Two Macon eateries boast music history. The Tic Toc Room, where Little Richard first tickled the ivories, serves superb steaks, and the H&H Restaurant, a favorite of the Allman Brothers, has



Groups can tour and hold functions in one of Macon's historic sites, the Hay House.

been pure down-home soul food, with breakfast served daily until 4 p.m., since 1959.

### Off-Site in Macon

For off-site venues, downtown Macon is rife with offerings.

One of the buildings that garnered Macon the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Dozen Distinctive Destinations is the seven-story, circa-1885 Hay House, all red brick with white trim topped by an impressive 80-foot-high cupola.

"The Hay House was an architectural and technological marvel for the 1880s," said Jessica Thompson, rental and events manager. "It's a wonderful example of Italian Renaissance Revival, one of only a handful in the South and definitely one of the best in the country. And it was far ahead of its time technologically."

Built into the home is a ventilation system that allows air to circulate through the house, a central heating system, indoor plumbing, hot and cold running water, and a speaker tube system for communication.

Featured on CSPAN's "Cities Tour," the house can host receptions for up to 200 guests, with smaller spaces, such as its Music Room, for up to 50.

An entirely different house played a prominent role in nurturing one of Macon's musical giants. Once home to the Grammy-winning Allman Brothers Band, the founders of Southern rock, the Big House Museum now features the world's largest collection of the band's memorabilia: instruments, clothes and compositions.

"Allman Brothers fans must visit here," said Valerie Bradley, director of communications for the MCVB. "The band lived in this house for a time and wrote a lot of their songs here. Many of the docents were old roadies at the height of the Allman Brothers' career. Some are still in contact with band members. You'll hear some great insider stories."

Outdoor and indoor space can be rented.

Gathering space at the nation's largest state sports hall, the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, includes a 205-seat theater and the elegantly furnished, 1,500-square-foot Georgia Room. The facility houses 14,000 square feet of exhibits, interactive game areas and a peek into the lives of 400-plus inductees.

Groups meeting at this expansive museum can take a guided tour, test their basketball skills at an interactive station and participate in a team-building scavenger hunt.

"Our 16-minute film, 'Dare to Be Great,' is about the athletes inducted into the Hall of Fame and is inspiring for all ages," said Gwen Arrington, director of administration. "It's narrated by the Columbus, Georgia, Little League team that won the World Series and emphasizes the importance of setting goals."

### Activity Options

A Macon get-your-body-moving team-building option, Pin Strikes, is much more than bowling. To 28 lanes, the facility adds bumper cars, laser tag, billiards, a rock-climbing wall, a video arcade with redemption games, and a bar and grill.

Another history-rich venue, the Tubman Museum, was named for Harriett Tubman, the "Black Moses" who led hundreds of slaves to freedom. The once-dilapidated warehouse has grown to 49,000 square feet to become the largest museum of African-American art, history and culture in the Southeast. Home to Little Richard's piano, the facility can seat several hundred in a 4,025-square-foot rotunda and 30 in each of two classrooms.

Fresh off its 100th birthday celebration in September, the Macon Terminal Station, built in 1916, has been beautifully renovated to accommodate up to 600 in its 14,000-square-foot lobby with original marble and gilt molding.

Five historic theaters also bring renovated shades of the past to the

downtown area. One of those is the refurbished 319-seat, circa-1921 Douglass Theatre, where Otis Redding was discovered in the 1950s. Another classic, the 1883 Grand Opera House once hosted Charlie Chaplin. It now presents Broadway plays and the Macon Symphony.

### Nearby Attractions

About 25 minutes south of Macon in Warner Robins, the Museum of Aviation, the second-largest museum in the Air Force, is an off-site venue with a 240-seat auditorium and a spacious static exhibit, "Century of Flight," where 500 can meet and eat surrounded by historic airplanes.

With space for 150, Hangar 1 features Vietnam-era planes, including a helicopter in which adults and kids can sit.

"Recently, we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the SR-71 setting the world speed record in 1976," said Karen Ross, the museum's events coordinator. "The guys who flew it climbed back up into the plane and got to talk with other SR-71 pilots. We're here to bring those stories to life."

A great place for a group to get out into nature, Ocmulgee National Monument, with a small meeting room and picnic tables, interprets Native American history from 17,000 years ago through 3 million artifacts and North America's only reconstructed earth lodge.

Later history abounds in a visitor must-see, the 1853 Cannonball House, the only home in Macon hit and damaged during the Civil War. It features fine period furnishings and a war museum.

"People who haven't been to Macon in the past five years are in for a treat," said Payne-Ward. "It's an exciting time for folks to visit and meet here."



A public statue honors Otis Redding, one of several music legends who have called Macon home.

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# An Abundance Of Riches



By Dan Dickson

## F L O R I D A ' S E M E R A L D C O A S T

### LOCATION

Northwest Florida Panhandle including Destin,  
Ft. Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island

### ACCESS

Highway 98, Fort Walton Beach Airport,  
Pensacola International Airport,  
Northwest Florida International Airport.

### MAJOR MEETING SPACES

Emerald Coast Convention Center, The Henderson,  
Ramada Plaza Beach Resort, Palms of Destin,  
Emerald Grand

### HOTEL ROOMS

Thousands, from budget to luxurious

### OFF-SITE VENUES

Gulfarium, Amusement USA – Harbor Walk Village,  
Big Kahuna's Water & Adventure Park

### CONTACT INFO

Emerald Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau  
800-322-3319  
[www.emeraldcoastfl.com](http://www.emeraldcoastfl.com)



Above: Sugary sands and deep green waters are hallmarks of Florida's Emerald Coast.

Left: Destin Commons offers shopping, dining and entertainment.

Open a bag of sugar, plunge a measuring cup inside and slowly pour out the sweet granules: That's the image tourism directors and meeting planners hope you'll take away after visiting the Emerald Coast, a 100-mile stretch of Northwest Florida's Panhandle along the Gulf Coast.

The region's name was coined in the 1980s.

"It comes from the color of the water here," said Maureen Morgenthien, deputy director of sales and marketing for the Emerald Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau. "The sunshine, combined with the pure white sand we have, creates this image of the water looking emerald green. It's that vibrant a color."

The Emerald Coast includes Destin, Fort Walton Beach and a geographic area known as Okaloosa Island. All three are located along Highway 98 between Pensacola and Panama City Beach.

Visitors love to fish, golf, boat and do a wide variety of water sports, like diving, snorkeling and sailing. Geocaching, bird-watching and other beach activities are also popular. In addition, the Gulf to Table food trend is big. There are many fine restaurants at which to dine on the freshest seafood anyone could imagine.

In addition to the thousands of tourists who flock to the Emerald Coast, the area draws local and regional events, sports teams, dance and cheer competitions, and small corporate meetings. Many government and military groups meet there as well because of the area's proximity to Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field, another Air Force installation.

"Part of my job is to increase group business, and conferences and meetings," said Morgenthien. "We welcome any and all of that business."

The community has impressive meeting facilities large and small, and outstanding accommodations to make any group members feel comfortable in their surroundings. Whether a planner is organizing a meeting, a group activity or a special event, the CVB staff is more than willing to assist.



Photos courtesy Emerald Coast CVB

## Convention Center

This corner of the Florida Panhandle may be an ocean retreat for tourists, but it's also busy enough to support its own large meeting facility. The Emerald Coast Convention Center boasts 65,000 square feet of space: 35,000 square feet of that space is indoors, and since the weather is always pleasant, another 30,000 square feet is outdoors. "That area works great for outdoor events like RV shows and boat shows," said Morgenthien. The 14-year-old center, located on Okaloosa Island, features 12 distinct meeting rooms, ranging from an intimate 450 square feet to one that can be sized to 10,800 square feet. The Emerald Grand Ballroom is popular. "It's all very flexible," said Morgenthien.

## Off-Site Venues

"The lifestyle here revolves around the water," said Morgenthien. People participate in any activity that puts them in or near it. But visitors also like to play golf at the nine golf courses. There are outlet malls and shopping centers. With so much military history to absorb, some enjoy local museums.

Gulfarium is a marine adventure park across from the convention center. There are animal encounters, dolphin and sea lion shows, and cool exhibits. Amusement USA - Harbor Walk Village in Destin has bungee trampolines and aqua spheres to amuse adults and kids, and many other family-oriented activities. Big Kahuna's Water and Adventure Park has 40 water attractions, three mini-golf courses and go-kart tracks.

## Nightlife

For meeting attendees who visit the area, the best way to "get this party started" is to head to any of the fun nightspots on the Emerald Coast for food, drinks, dancing, live music and laughs. The harbor and beachfront have a variety of bars, restaurants, comedy clubs, theaters and cultural events that keep things lively.

One hot spot the CVB likes to promote is AJ's Club Bimini, which has been regularly ranked on Nightclub and Bars' "Top 100" list. Many of the clubs and bars have outdoor decks and dance floors and live music of all varieties.

## More Meeting Sites

The area has another 40 facilities where meetings can be held. One of the newest is The Henderson, a luxury beach hotel with 170 rooms and 10,000 square feet of meeting space. It has spectacular views of the famous white beach, the ocean, a maritime preserve and its own impressive pool complex.

Other popular properties for meetings are the Ramada Plaza Beach Resort, with 335 rooms and 14,000 square feet of meeting space, and the Palms of Destin, with 416 room and 6,500 square feet in which to meet. The Emerald Grand on Destin Harbor overlooks the harbor, the ocean, the bridge and the entertainment district; it has 280 rooms and 3,100 square feet of flexible meeting space.

# Now Playing in the Heartland

By Rachel Carter



Courtesy Evansville CVB

A new hotel will connect two of Evansville's premier meeting venues.

**F**acilities are the name of the game in the meetings world, and the newest and nicest venues with the latest and greatest features often win the business.

Many cities are investing millions to expand and renovate their existing convention centers, or building new event centers and constructing new conference hotels to either stay competitive or get back in the game.

Here's a look at some of the new and renovated meeting facilities in America's Heartland.

## **DoubleTree by Hilton Evansville Evansville, Indiana**

When the Executive Inn in downtown Evansville, Indiana, closed in 2009, the city's conference and convention market "just dried up," said Laura Libs, director of marketing for the Evansville Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"We have a terrific convention facility; we just haven't had a hotel to accompany it for several years," she said.

That will change when the new 241-room DoubleTree by Hilton Evansville opens in January with sky bridges that connect to both the 11,000-seat Ford Arena and the adjacent 280,000-square-foot Old National Events Plaza (ONEP), where planners will find a 38,000-square-foot exhibit hall, 14,000 square feet of ballroom space, a dozen flexible 1,000-square-foot meeting rooms and a 2,500-seat auditorium.

The hotel will also provide its own 12,000 square feet of meeting and function space, including a 6,400-square-

foot ballroom, about 4,000 square feet of prefunction space and two breakout rooms.

The new property is already boosting Evansville's meetings business, with organizations such as the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns expressing interest in bringing its regional conference to the city.

Groups are "very excited about having the hotel downtown," said hotel general manager Tracy Wiley. Other than the Tropicana and Le Merigot hotels, both of which sit on the Ohio Riverfront several blocks from the convention center, the city hasn't had a downtown convention hotel "for a long time."

"Whether they're having an event at ONEP or having a meeting with us, they're very excited," he said.

**[www.visitevansville.com](http://www.visitevansville.com)**

## **Mayo Civic Center Rochester, Minnesota**

Construction on the Mayo Civic Center expansion wrapped up in late December, and officials are getting the new space ready for its first event in early April.

Rochester, Minnesota, "really didn't have a convention center, if you will," said Brad Jones, executive director of the Rochester Convention and Visitors Bureau. "What we did have was a multipurpose civic center; this takes us to the next level in terms of con-

ferences, meetings and conventions.”

The expansion will add 100,000 square feet, including a 40,000-square-foot ballroom and 16 flexible meeting rooms beneath it, and both levels overlook a new 8,000-square-foot riverfront plaza. The south side of the convention center “is all glass; it’s a wave wall to emulate the river,” Jones said. The project also added 28,000 square feet of prefunction space and a commercial kitchen.

The project doubled the existing 100,000 square feet, which consists of an exhibit hall, a multipurpose arena, an auditorium, a mix of smaller meeting rooms and a 1,100-seat theater that is also being renovated.

State-of-the-art technology includes video walls, web conferencing and the ability to connect to Mayo Clinic’s IT infrastructure. But a different type of connection often wows planners, Jones said: the city’s system of skyways and “subways” (underground walkways) that connect the civic center to 2,000 guest rooms, more than 100 restaurants and plentiful parking.

The center is flanked by the Rochester Art Center and Rochester Civic Theatre Company, “so there’s culture and art on either side,” he said.

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

### Grand Event Center Grandview Heights/Columbus, Ohio

The Grand Event Center opened in September in Grandview Heights, Ohio, and the adjacent Courtyard by Marriott followed in late October. Those who aren’t familiar with the area may not realize that Grandview Heights is an “artsy, small-business-based suburb of Columbus” that’s only a mile from the bigger city’s downtown.

Although the Greater Columbus Convention Center is a seven-minute drive east and is undergoing its own expansion and renovation that will wrap up this summer, the new Grand Event Center nailed the need for “mid-size space with complimentary parking in what is essentially the downtown market,” said Bryan Wright, the center’s senior director of catering.

“It’s convenient for them to be downtown without the inconveniences of downtown, like paying for parking,” he said.

The center’s main space is a 3,900-square-foot divisible ballroom with 19-foot-high ceilings and modern light fixtures that resemble an art installation. Large windows look out onto Goodell Boulevard and the adjacent courtyard that connects to the 135-room Courtyard by Marriott.



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The new Grand Event Center near Columbus is well suited for small meetings and meals.

Courtesy Grand Event Center

Other spaces include a 1,670-square-foot meeting room that can be configured as two or three smaller rooms and 2,000 square feet of prefunction space.

The center's executive chef offers seasonal menus that focus on local ingredients from local vendors, or events can customize their own catering menu.

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

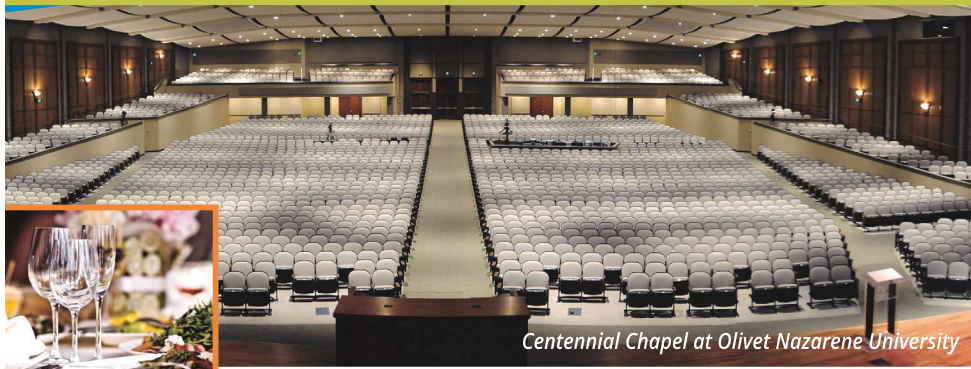
### New Hilton Convention Hotel Des Moines, Iowa

Downtown Des Moines, Iowa, has no shortage of guest rooms near the Iowa Events Center, but the city has never had a hotel that connects to its convention complex, and that has kept some planners from booking it.

"We've really had a great response, especially from national and regional planners who we've worked with in the past and tried to lure here who told us they wouldn't consider Des Moines until we have a connecting convention center hotel," said Greg Edwards, president and CEO of the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau.

That's why the new 350-room Hilton hotel will be a game changer for the market when it opens in spring 2018 and connects directly to the Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center, which has 21 meeting rooms and a 28,800-square-foot ballroom. Guests of the new hotel will also have access to Hy-Vee Hall's three exhibit halls, which can be combined for a total

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of 150,000 square feet, and the skywalk that connects to the 17,000-seat Wells Fargo Arena.

The hotel will also have its own meeting and event space, including a 10,000-square-foot flexible ballroom and 4,000 square feet of meeting and breakout rooms as well as a prefunction space, Edwards said.

The new Hilton will be a boon to Des Moines' strongest meeting markets, including agriculture and insurance industries, as well as other key niche markets, such as association, religious and hobby groups.

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

## KI Convention Center Green Bay, Wisconsin

It has been over a year since a massive expansion nearly doubled the size of the KI Convention Center in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and it's been a good year.

"The groups that have been in there have loved it," said Beth Ulatowski, director of sales for the Greater Green Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau. "They have had nothing but positive things to say."

The expansion nearly doubled available space at the downtown Green Bay convention center, from about 40,000 square feet to nearly 80,000 square feet. The project allowed groups that were outgrowing the facility to stay and convinced others to return. The Midwest Food Processors Association returned its regional conference to Green Bay last year, and the Wisconsin Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association



Courtesy KI Convention Center

Green Bay locals celebrate the opening of the new KI Convention Center.

held its convention there last spring and will return again in April.

The project added a 25,000-square-foot Grand Ballroom that can be configured in as many as eight smaller spaces and three rooms ranging from 1,300 to 2,000 square feet overlooking the Fox River. A wall of windows floods the expansion's prefunction space with natural light and views of downtown. The first-story floor plan, with 35,000 square feet of contiguous exhibit space, mostly remained the same.

The entire facility has the latest and greatest in technology, including a new "digital signage network" featuring several large interactive video walls throughout the center. An attached 135-room hotel reopened as a Hampton Inn the same time as the reopening of the convention center, and the adjoining Hyatt Regency has another 241 suites.

[www.kiconventioncenter.org](http://www.kiconventioncenter.org)

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# Shore Up Your Meetings Here

By Rachel Carter



Dubuque's Grand River Center offers sweeping views of the mighty Mississippi.

**W**aterfront destinations connect guests with nature in a way that many conference facilities can't.

Venues that are near or even on the water offer planners picturesque settings, but waterfront sites with views of lakes, sounds of running rivers and smells of ocean air also help attendees disconnect from the busyness of the daily grind and focus on the business at hand.

There's no shortage of wonderful lakefront and riverfront destinations in America's Heartland. Here are some ideal settings for waterside events.

## **Grand River Center Dubuque, Iowa**

Many people "don't realize what we have here in Dubuque," said Sue Moran, director of sales and marketing for the Grand River Center, the Iowa city's convention center. Planners and attendees arrive to find that the backs of the center and the adjoining water-park resort hotel overlook the Mississippi River with views of rolling hills, two bridges and three states: Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois.

"It's a wow factor when people show up," she said.

The Grand River Center and neighboring Grand Harbor Resort are in a riverfront area known as the Port of Dubuque, where visitors will also find the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, the Diamond Jo Casino and the Stone Cliff Winery.

The 86,000-square-foot center includes a 30,000-square-foot exhibit hall and flexible meeting rooms that can be divided into six spaces. Outside the 12,000-square-foot ballroom is a glass-walled prefunction concourse, and outside the concourse is an adjoining patio overlooking the river.

The River Room is an all-glass jewel box that cantilevers over the paved riverfront trail behind the conference center. The room can accommodate 80 for seated meals and is the facility's most popular space for receptions and VIP events, Moran said.

A skywalk connects to the neighboring Grand Harbor Resort, where half of the hotel's 193 guest rooms deliver river views and the on-site Tony Roma's restaurant offers waterfront patio dining during the summer. Dubuque River Rides offers seasonal sightseeing tours and dinner cruises aboard its paddle-wheel boat.

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

## **Blue Water Convention Center Port Huron, Michigan**

The Blue Water Convention Center sits where the St. Clair River meets Lake Huron, just at the foot of the arching Blue Water Bridge. It's not surprising, then, that the center's water-view spaces "are our most popular rooms," sales and marketing manager Gina Quade said.



Courtesy Grand River Center

Those include the divisible 1,540-square-foot Riverview Suite and the 20,400-square-foot Lake Huron Convention Hall, which has tall windows looking out at the St. Clair River. The hall can seat about 900 at rounds or be split into two spaces.

"It's such a picturesque view of the Blue Water Bridge; it adds a different touch as opposed to a regular meeting or event space that has a view of the parking lot," she said.

The Great Lakes Hall is a 5,000-square-foot prefunction area with 40-foot-wide floor-to-ceiling windows and glass doors that open onto an adjoining patio overlooking the river.

The center opened in April 2015 and has been popular for weddings and corporate events, especially for executives "trying to impress clients or higher-ups in their company."

The 149-room DoubleTree by Hilton connects directly to the center, and balcony rooms offer views of the river and the bridge. Freighters Eatery and Taproom is the center's on-site restaurant that also provides catering for events.

A short drive away, Huron Lady Cruises offers dinner cruises, specialty tours and private charters aboard the 73-foot Huron Lady II, which has two decks and can accommodate as many as 100 passengers.

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

### Lodge of Four Seasons Lake Ozark, Missouri

Sometimes people think holding a meeting at a waterfront resort means it will be "more leisure than business," but that's not true, said Frederik Houben, director of sales at the Lodge of Four Seasons on Missouri's Lake Ozark. "Natural daylight and getting out of your work ambiance is rejuvenating and raises energy levels, but we do also provide the aspect of providing fun."

The Lodge recently completed a \$15 million renovation, which included redoing all meeting rooms in 2016 as well as updating its 350-plus guest rooms. The resort has more than 65,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space, including a 20,000-square-foot exhibit hall, an 8,700-square-foot ballroom that can be split into thirds and a variety of other flexible spaces, including rooms with their own patios "where people can go get fresh air and overlook the lake."

For views of Lake of the Ozarks, the 2,000-square-foot Valencia room can be halved and opens onto the 6,700-square-foot Valencia patio. The Lakeview Patio is directly off the Cloverleaf pool and is popular for receptions, ceremonies and live music.

At the wharf and full-service marina, groups can arrange for banquets and receptions. In addition to renting kayaks, stand-up paddleboards and jet skis, groups can take narrated sightseeing tours or other specialty cruises with Celebration Cruises or Tropic Island Cruises.

The resort can also charter boats for team-building outings or cocktail receptions, or groups can stay on land near the water to play sand volleyball, disc golf or a game on the lakeside oversized chess board.

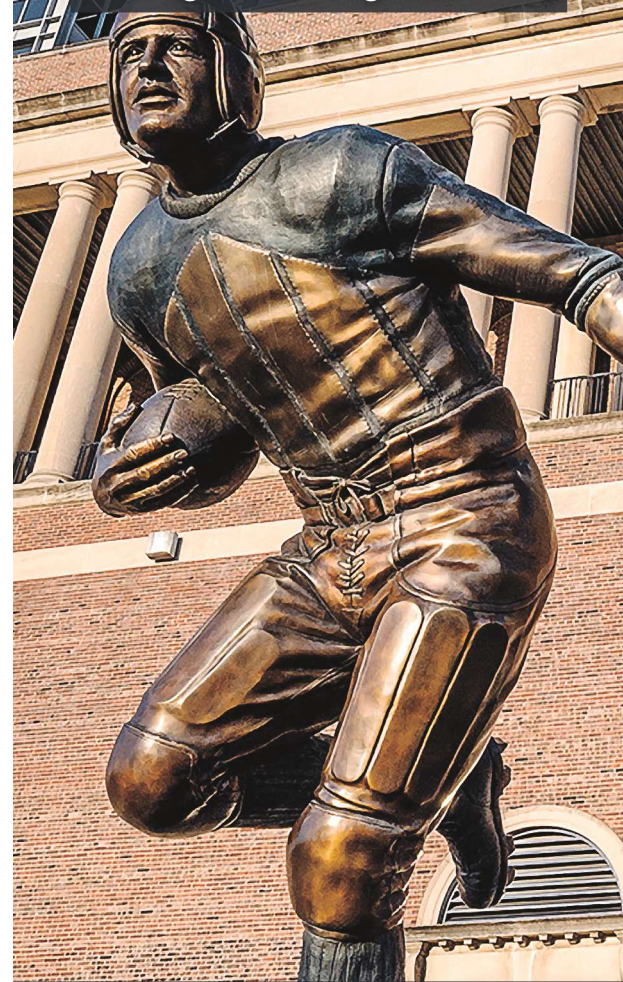
[www.4seasonsresort.com](http://www.4seasonsresort.com)

### Monona Terrace Madison, Wisconsin

Monona Terrace has a couple of claims to fame. First, the iconic building in Madison, Wisconsin, was originally designed and proposed in 1938 by famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright, even though construction wasn't complete and the doors didn't open

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until nearly 60 years after Wright first proposed the plan and almost 40 years after his death.

But the building also sits on the banks of Lake Monona, and its curving white walls and arching building-high windows front the water, making both the structure's design and its natural setting striking features.

"In addition to being located on the water, we're also in the heart of downtown Madison with restaurants and shopping," said director of sales Laura MacIsaac.

"You have the breathtaking views and the feeling being over and on the water," she said. "It helps with being receptive to the education you're receiving or contributing to the fun you're having."

The semicircular building has five indoor levels, topped by rooftop gardens, each with space where the water is the focal point. The first level includes the 3,500-square-foot Lakeside Commons, with water views as well as a 37,000-square-foot divisible exhibit hall. On the second level, the 5,500-square-foot Community Terrace overlooks the water. And the fourth level features the 7,000-square-foot Grand Terrace, with lake views as well as a flexible ballroom, an event hall and several meeting rooms.

The sprawling rooftop terrace and gardens offer groups more than 40,000 square feet of event space as well as expansive views of Lake Monona and the city skyline, and the rooftop Lake Vista Café menu features casual gourmet fare.

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



Courtesy Monona Terrace

The distinctive architecture of Monona Terrace is a signature of Madison's waterfront.

### Lake Ellyn Boathouse Glen Ellyn, Illinois

Sitting on the shoreline of Lake Ellyn, and a landmark of Lake Ellyn Park, the historic Lake Ellyn Boathouse recently underwent a \$2.8 million renovation and restoration that undid decades of "updates" and restored the 1937 building to its original appearance.

Wooden doors replaced metal ones, and a new cedar-shingle roof and new windows restored much of its period charm. The building was designed in 1935 and completed two years later as a Works Progress Administration project, the Great Depression-era federal program meant to put Americans to work.

Over the decades, various projects covered up or gnawed away at the building's original architectural features. After restoring it to its near-original appearance, a project that was completed this summer, officials planned to apply for designation as a National Historic Landmark.

Inside, the main hall is 1,840 square feet of space that can seat about 120 people for events. There, guests will find a stone fireplace, vaulted ceilings and rows of windows facing the lake and the deck, where new minimalistic cable railings replaced bulky wooden fencing to improve the view. The facility also has a kitchen and bar area.

[https://gepark.org/par\\_Lake\\_Ellyn.htm](https://gepark.org/par_Lake_Ellyn.htm)

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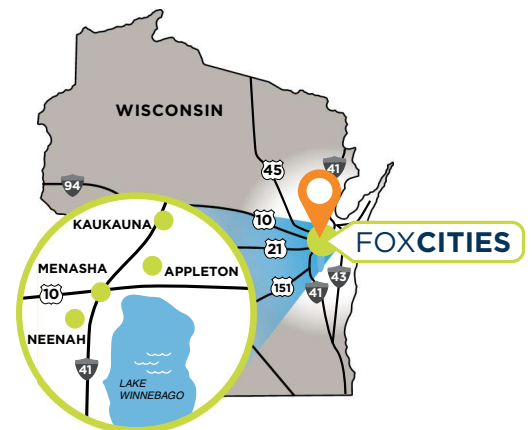
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# Check Out This Venue Menu

By Rachel Carter



Themed banquets at the Great Lakes Science Center can take on an otherworldly look.

Convention centers and conference hotels offer plenty of function space and flexible meeting rooms.

They don't provide 12-foot-tall Tesla coils and can't give people the opportunity to walk on 390 million-year-old fossil beds.

To get attendees out of the same spaces and into one-of-a-kind venues, planners arranging meetings in America's Heartland can hold events in a working train station or a limestone castle, at the only standalone presidential library in the country or at one of only 11 NASA visitor centers in the nation.

## Great Lakes Science Center Cleveland

Not every venue allows groups to form a human chain of electricity or drop an egg from 80 feet up, but Cleveland's Great Lakes Science Center can make visitors of any age feel like they're in eighth grade again.

Groups can use the Science Phenomenon gallery, with more than 100 interactive exhibits; Reinberger Hall, the center's temporary exhibit space; and NASA Glenn Visitor Center, one of only 11 NASA visitors' centers in the country.

The most popular event space is the promenade level,

with 80-foot-tall windows looking out onto Lake Erie, said sales and special events manager Kristy Papson. Reinberger Auditorium can seat 200 people, and groups can also reserve the center's outdoor deck or front lawn. For sit-down functions, the center can accommodate about 400 people; but up to 4,000 guests can be in the center during mix-and-mingle events.

The center offers a wide variety of science-centered programs and team-building activities, the most popular of which is the egg drop challenge, Papson said. Each team builds a device that will protect an egg during an 80-foot drop from the mezzanine level.

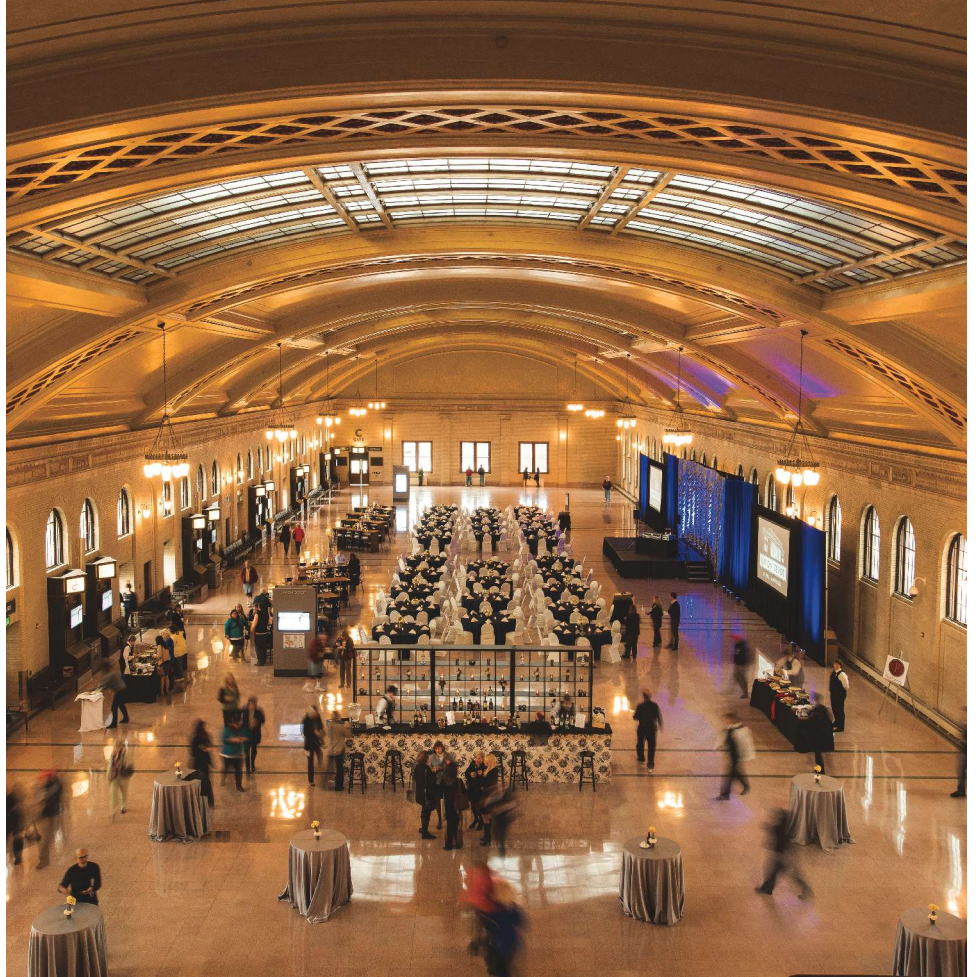
The center offers several science shows, and planners can arrange one as part of their private event. "Lift Off" explores the science of rockets and propulsion, tying into the NASA Glenn Visitor Center exhibits and artifacts, and "It's Electric" features a 12-foot Tesla coil.

"We can bring participants up out of the audience, and they make a human chain of conductivity to feel the electricity course through them," director of communications Joe Yachanin said.

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



Courtesy Great Lakes Science Center



Courtesy Union Depot

A private event takes over the main waiting room at the restored Union Depot in St. Paul.

## Union Depot St. Paul, Minnesota

Union Depot in St. Paul, Minnesota, is first and foremost a transit and transportation hub, handling hundreds of bus, train and light-rail passengers every day. But the enormous historic building is also an event venue with striking spaces and private rooms available to groups. The original depot burned down in 1915; although construction on the existing depot began two years later, it wasn't complete until 1923 because work was halted during World War I.

In addition to RiverCentre, Union Depot is the only other downtown venue that can handle large events, said marketing manager Tina Volpe. The entire facility covers about 250,000 square feet; of that, the waiting room covers 21,000 square feet, making it the largest event space. The restored room has barrel-vaulted, 50-foot-high ceilings with skylights and can seat up to 1,200 people for banquets. Organizers can use pipe and drape and security personnel to hold private events in the

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Courtesy Pythian Castle

The 1913 Pythian Castle in Missouri offers a number of elegant meeting rooms.

  
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public area, and staff will arrange for passengers to wait in other areas during functions.

The depot also offers several private spaces. On the second floor, the 3,000-square-foot Red Cap Room and the 2,000-square-foot Veterans Gallery offer views of downtown and the Mississippi River, as does a new 20-person boardroom. The Gateway Conference room can seat 48 people in a classroom setup, and planners can use two outdoor plazas for cocktail hours, live music, and food or microbrewery booths.

Depot staff can also help organizers arrange special-event excursion trains with Amtrak or private charters on the Railroading Heritage of Midwest America's historic passenger cars.

**[www.uniondepot.org](http://www.uniondepot.org)**

### **Pythian Castle Springfield, Missouri**

It may be surprising to see the towers of a gray, stone castle rising from the surrounding neighborhoods in Springfield, Missouri, but Pythian Castle is a favorite landmark and event venue among locals.

The Knights of Pythias, a fraternal organization and secret society that was founded in 1864, built the castle in 1913 as an orphanage and retirement home for members' children and widows. Originally called the Pythian Home of Missouri, the castle also served as the group's meeting hall until 1942, when the military used it as a facility to help rehabilitate and entertain troops injured in World War II.

Designed to look like a castle, the building's exterior was constructed with limestone. On the first floor, the 2,400-square-foot ballroom has a lobby for cocktail receptions and an attached buffet room. On the second floor, a theater with a stage and lobby area is also available for presentations, ceremonies and events, including the castle's murder-mystery dinners. The castle offers private murder-mystery dinners for groups up to 180 people.

Other function spaces include the Tower Room, the highest room in the building, and the West Wing, which can accommodate events for up to 25 people. The castle also offers lunch and dinner options for corporate gatherings. Groups can tour the castle during a regularly scheduled public tour, a history tour or a nighttime ghost tour.

**[www.pythiancastle.com](http://www.pythiancastle.com)**

### **Falls of the Ohio State Park Clarksville, Indiana**

Stretching along the north shore of the Ohio River in Clarksville, Indiana, just across the river from Louisville, Kentucky, Falls of the Ohio State Park is one of the few places in the world where





Courtesy Indiana DNR

Visitors can hike to fossil beds at Falls of the Ohio State Park in Clarksville.



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Courtesy Indiana DNR

The newly renovated interpretive center at the Falls of the Ohio is available for group rentals.

visitors can walk over hundreds of acres of 390 million-year-old, naturally exposed Devonian fossil beds.

The park's Interpretive Center reopened in January 2016 after being closed for a year for renovations. The \$6 million update installed new hands-on exhibits that were designed around four themes that tie into the fossil beds: An Ancient Sea, A Changing Land, Converging Cultures and The Falls Today.

Visitors can walk through a Devonian sea, hear the story of Lewis and Clark's journey from the Falls of the Ohio to the Pacific Ocean and listen to a recording of the Shawnee language. The project also renovated the Lewis and Clark Theater to improve accessibility and replaced the center's roof.

Groups can reserve a variety of spaces, including the River Room, which has glass-window walls overlooking the river and can seat 20 at tables; the library, which can accommodate up to 30 people at tables; and a classroom. The entire interpretive center is also available after hours.

While there, visitors can explore the fossil beds, either on their own or with a guide. August through November is usually the best time to visit because low river levels expose most of the 220 acres of fossil beds.

[www.falloftheohio.org](http://www.falloftheohio.org)

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## Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library Ann Arbor, Michigan

Every presidential library and museum in the country is housed under one roof in one facility, except one: the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum. President Ford wanted the museum to be in his hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan, but he wanted his documents, archives and academia to be in Ann Arbor, where he went to the University of Michigan, said Kate Murray, special events coordinator for the library.

The main event space at the library is the lobby, where groups of up to 120 can gather for seated dinners, or as many as 250 guests can mingle during standing receptions. The 1,700-square-foot auditorium has a stage and audiovisual equipment and can seat 200 people for lectures, symposiums and other presentations. The library's classroom can accommodate up to 40 people or can be divided into two smaller rooms.

Groups most often have a lecture or a symposium in the auditorium, followed by a reception or a dinner in the lobby, Murray said.

In the lobby, guests can explore a variety of exhibits, such as the Betty Ford corner dedicated to the former first lady or the Wolverine corner, which highlights President Ford's time at the University of Michigan. One exhibit goes over the timeline of his life, including how he went by his birth name, Leslie Lynch King Jr., before his mother married his stepfather.

[www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov](http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov)



Courtesy Ford Presidential Library

Events take on a stately air at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library in Ann Arbor.

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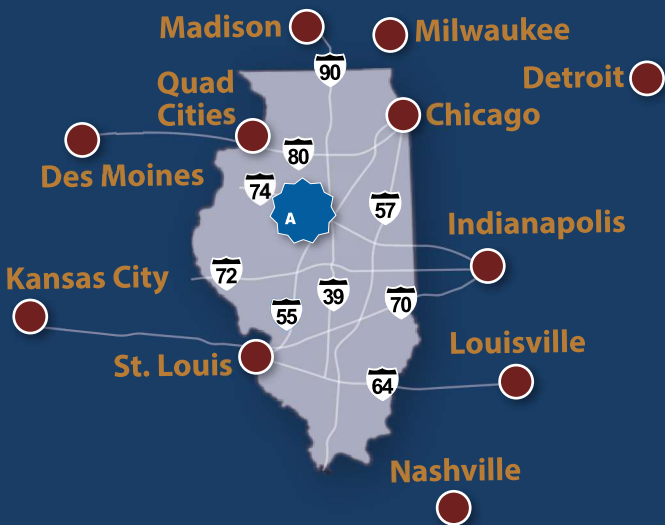
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