

Catching Up With CONNECTICUT

Affordability and accessibility are predicted to aid meetings in The Constitution State

BY DANIELLE LEBRECK

Like many New England locations, Connecticut was one of the first states to feel the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in March.

Despite the challenges in the past year, Connecticut may be in a good position for meetings and events when the pandemic is in the rearview mirror, thanks to its location, affordability and the efforts of the Connecticut Sport and Convention Bureau (CTCSB) team to make planning and re-booking easier for planners.

Accessibility and Affordability

Pre-pandemic, one of Connecticut's key marketing points to planners was its accessibility. The state's capital, Hartford—home to the Connecticut Convention Center—is within a

two-hour drive of 23.5 million people. Now, as vaccines roll out and meeting planners begin to gauge attendee comfort levels and plan face-to-face meetings in the back half of 2021, this accessibility may be more attractive than ever.

"Being close to Boston and New York City—that drivability is key to us," said Bob Murdock, president of CTCSB. "There has been hesitancy of people getting on airplanes, so that drive market is definitely going to come back first."

Coupled with its accessibility, Hartford and other smaller cities in Connecticut may

be at an advantage with cost-conscious planners working with smaller budgets after the economic fallout from the pandemic.

"We aren't a tier-one city," Murdock said, referring to Hartford. "So, we are emphasizing affordability and accessibility. That's always been our big selling points, but now it's even more these days. It opens up some other events for us that may not have been open to us before."

Sports Events

Though many corporate and association events came to a halt in 2020, Murdock—who also serves as CTCSB's director of sports marketing—said that sports events helped keep the events industry moving.

Some youth sports were allowed to continue with safety modifications and protocols over the summer, and the new Windsor Day Hill Dome will open more options for year-round sporting events when it opens in 2021.

Additionally, in October CTCSB announced that the state had been selected



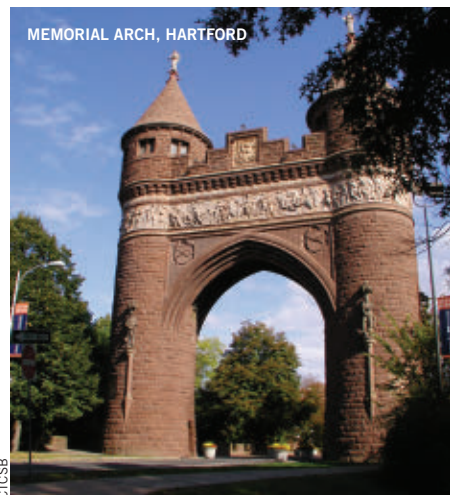
STATE CAPITOL FROM BUSHNELL PARK, HARTFORD

for five upcoming NCAA championships, including women's basketball, men's ice hockey and field hockey. The events, the first of which begins in 2022, are projected to generate nearly \$3 million in revenue in the regions where they'll play.

Reimagined Website and Planner Tools


While many hotels and event venues took the downtime to renovate, CTC SB made some updates of its own. In September, the bureau launched a refreshed website (CTMeetings.org) with the goal of making it easier for planners to virtually explore the destination and book future meetings.

"From my point of view, COVID was in some ways an opportunity for us to reevaluate where we are and strengthen some of our online marketing that we might not



have looked at as closely in the past," Murdock said, referencing the website makeover. "We thought, how can we be a better resource for planners with that online information, regardless of COVID or not? People are going in that direction."

Like other tourism bureaus, CTC SB experimented with new ways to meet planners virtually, hosting a virtual FAM experience in June.

"You have to try to find positives out of the whole experience," Murdock said, emphasizing that while the past year has been tough, the hospitality industry continues to find new, creative ways to connect with clients. 

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HARTFORD

- The new **Parkville Market** is the state's first food hall housed in the former Capitol City Lumber Company building in Hartford's Parkville neighborhood. It features 19 unique restaurants with cuisines from around the world, over 20 retail merchants, outdoor dining spaces, a hub for communal dining and gathering, plus bars and event spaces.
- At the historic **Goodwin Hotel in Downtown Hartford**, onsite Terenzo Restaurant's Chef Tyler Anderson and the nearby TheaterWorks performing arts venue created a new, unique COVID-safe dining and entertainment experience for guests, whether they stay overnight or not. Converting 21 of the hotel's rooms into private dining spaces, the new *Room Service at The Goodwin* event space pairs a three-course chef's dinner with a mystery room/dinner theater progressive dining experience. Starting January 8, guests will be transported back to the 1800s as costumed actors tell the story of the life of mogul J.P. Morgan, the late-18th century financial giant with deep ties to Hartford and the Goodwin Hotel. There is also a discounted rate for those who want to stay overnight.

GROTON/MYSTIC

- **Mystic Marriott Hotel & Spa** in Groton recently completed a multi-year renovation of the entire hotel, completely upgrading all function space, including a more contemporary look with new chandeliers, wall coverings, flooring and furniture. The multi-million-dollar project that began in 2018 also includes a refresh to all 285 guest rooms, meeting rooms, lobby, lounge

bar, fitness center and indoor pool.

NEW HAVEN

- Over the past year during the COVID-19 pandemic, **Omni New Haven Hotel at Yale** completed the final stages of its multi-year renovation project that included 22,000 square feet of function space and the Grand Ballroom. In 2020, all 306 elegant guest rooms were renovated, the lobby was refreshed with new carpeting and furniture, and new wall treatments and flooring were installed at its 19th-floor restaurant, John Davenport's at the Top of the Park.

WINDSOR

- **Marriott Hartford/Windsor Airport** in Windsor recently completed upgrades to all of its 12,000 square feet of meeting space, including its 7,500-square-foot ballroom. The ballroom features all-new carpeting and wall treatments, added ceiling lighting and new chandeliers. This is the final piece of the hotel's total renovation that began in 2017. During the past four years, completed renovations include the guest rooms, fitness center, pool, lobby and great room, as well as the addition of the M Club and Reverend's Bar & Kitchen.
- As of publication time, **Cambria Hotel South Windsor-Manchester** is planned to open in the first quarter of 2021. Prior to the onset of COVID-19, the opening was originally scheduled for June 2020. The hotel features 108 rooms and 1,400 square feet of meeting space, and a restaurant and bar.
- **Day Hill Dome** is under construction with plans to open in fall 2021. The year-round sports dome will feature 100,000 square feet of clear-span space (no poles or boards) and an 82-foot ceiling for indoor training and games for soccer, baseball and almost any sport on a full-size field. The climate-controlled facility includes the region's only full-size indoor artificial turf field, 30 quarter fields and a viewing deck. It is located next to Fastpitch Nation Park, the largest dedicated fastpitch softball complex in the Northeast U.S. with 11 fields, which opened in April 2019.



DAY HILL DOME, WINDSOR