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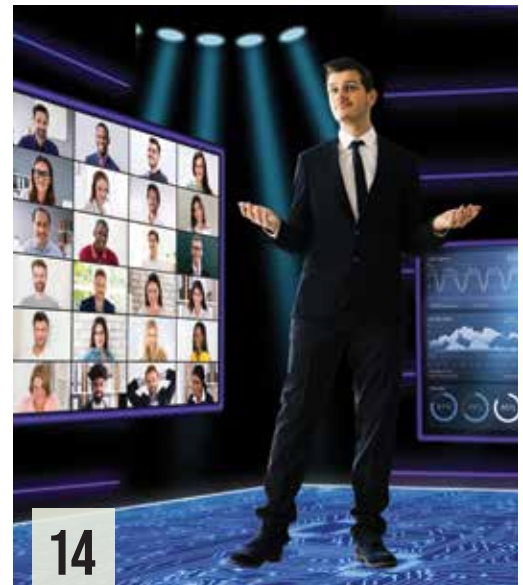
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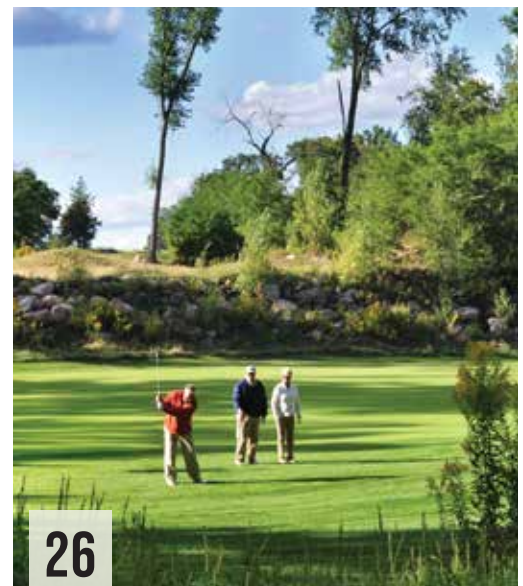
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ON THE COVER: Payne's Valley Golf Course, one of five courses at Big Cedar Lodge, near Branson, Mo.



Does it seem like people's moods are better? I've noticed a bit more spring in my own step, as I'm now able to enjoy dinner at my favorite restaurant, meet up with friends and finally share long-overdue hugs with family. More than 135 million Americans have been vaccinated as I write this, the number of newly reported COVID cases continues to decline, and states are lifting capacity limits and mask mandates. We can see the light at the end of this long, dark tunnel!

Optimism for better days to come seems to be prevalent throughout society, and this is especially true within the meetings and event industry. Meetings Professionals International recently released its "Spring Outlook" report, a quarterly survey of meeting planners from around the world. The report shows the largest positive overall business projection in its history. Meeting planners feel they are turning a corner and are beginning to envision what in-person meetings will look like. While this is extremely positive news that deserves celebration, the industry continues to face challenges and planners will need to be agile in order to navigate the murky, post-COVID 19 event landscape. Read more about the MPI "Spring Outlook" report in Industry Insights on page 8.

In this issue of Midwest Meetings, we explore a variety of venues that you'll want to consider as you prepare to return to in-person events. Golf outings are a staple of any association, not to mention corporations, and in this issue we explore some of the most posh, upscale Midwest resorts that feature golf courses, as well as high-end restaurants, luxe accommodations, state-of-the-art meeting facilities and spas. Read more on page 26.

Because hybrid meetings aren't going away anytime soon, be sure to read meetings industry technology guru Corbin Ball's "37 Tips to Bridge Virtual and In-Person Meetings" on page 14. And on page 18, we talk to suppliers to find out what new safety protocols are being implemented to welcome groups back and offer them the safest, most secure facilities possible.

Lastly, be sure to peruse our State Spotlight showcase beginning on page 32. These destinations and properties are eager to welcome your group when you are ready to return. Reach out to any of them to find out more about what they are doing to prepare for in-person events and how they can meet the needs of your groups.

As always, please contact me with news about your events, personnel changes or other meetings industry-related news. And if you are a planner that would like to be profiled in an upcoming issue, please reach out to me at bpeck@ntmediagroup.com.

Regards,

Becky Peck
Editor



www.midwestmeetings.com
Volume: 30 Issue: 2

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Printed by LSC Communications

Midwest Meetings is a publication of
Nei-Turner Media Group, Inc.
Gary E. Nei, Chairman; William Turner, President.

Midwest Meetings is distributed via direct mail five times per year to Professional Meeting Planners; Corporate Executives; Social, Military, Educational, Religious and Fraternal Organizations; Corporate Travel Agents; Sales and Marketing Executives; and Association Executives by Nei-Turner Media Group, Inc., 400 Broad St., Unit D, Lake Geneva, WI 53147. Volume 30, Issue 2 is dated June 1, 2021.

Nei-Turner Media Group, Inc. publishes Arizona Meetings & Events, Wisconsin Meetings, Experience Wisconsin, At the Lake, Lakeshore Living, BRAVA and custom publications about Midwestern states.

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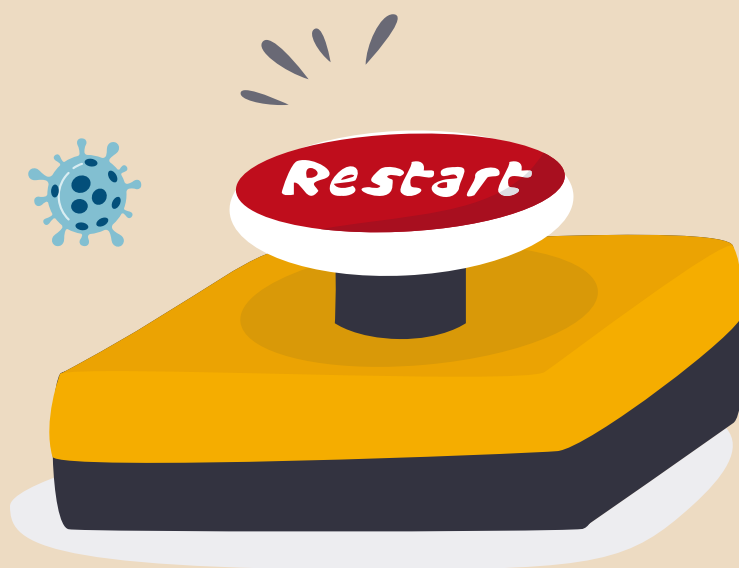
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MPI RELEASES SPRING OUTLOOK REPORT

According to the recently released quarterly industry report from Meeting Professionals International, "The overall business outlook for the next 12 months is the most favorable seen in the history of the Meetings Outlook survey with 81% of respondents predicting a positive 12 months ahead. There's surely a lot of hope and optimism tied to that result, however, with more industry professionals clearly envisioning a post-pandemic business landscape as vaccine availability continues to grow and businesses begin reopening."

When asked whether their employers would mandate COVID-19 vaccinations for staff, only 19% responded that they expected that to occur. And fewer, 12%, expected their organizations to require that of participants of in-person meetings and events. However, according to the report, many planners are still uncertain as to their employers' intent on future policy, with 35% not knowing whether vaccines will be mandated for staff and 43% unsure as to whether their employers will mandate vaccines for in-person events.

It's no surprise that the industry was one of the hardest hit in terms of employment losses. According to respondents, 24% of meeting planners and 40% of suppliers were either laid off or furloughed in 2020. Of those, 30% of planners and 29% of suppliers remain furloughed. And for those laid off, 58% of planners and 43% of suppliers have been unable to secure new employment.

Despite the industry's challenges, the survey showed increasing optimism with 81% of planners predicting favorable business conditions and only 12% predicting negative. This is up from 65% and 26%, respectively, in the winter survey.

To read the full report, go to mpi.org.

NEW CLASS OF CMPS ANNOUNCED

The Events Industry Council's (EIC) Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) program has announced 51 professionals who earned their CMP designation in April 2021.

The program was launched by EIC in 1985. EIC initiated the CMP-HC subspecialty in 2014. Both provide continuing education, increase professionalism and enhance career opportunities in all sectors of the industry by: Identifying a comprehensive body of knowledge in the meeting management profession; promoting industry standards, practices, and ethics; stimulating the advancement of the art and science of meeting management; increasing the value of CMPs to their employers; and maximizing the value received from the products and services provided by CMPs.

EIC expanded testing options in 2020, including year-round testing and remote proctoring, as part of ongoing efforts to support industry professionals seeking to earn this designation. More than 11,000 meeting professionals from 40 nations hold the CMP or CMP-HC designation. Midwest meeting planners who received their CMP designation in April, include:

- Kelly Crutsinger, CMP, Maritz Global Events, Brentwood, Mo.
- Sandi Heaney, CMP, Crowe LLP, South Bend, Ind.
- Anne Campbell, CMP, Ohio National Financial Services, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Alison Connell, CMP, Braden Heidner Lowe and Associates, Topeka, Kan.
- Emma Heydlauff, CMP, National Association of State Treasurers, Grandview, Ohio
- Whitney Nelson, CMP, International Association of Plastics Distribution, Prairie Village, Kan.
- Beth Rees, CMP, REES | Resource Exhibit & Event Services, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Kimberly Richard, CMP, Alpha Sigma Alpha, Indianapolis, Ind.
- Kennedy Rostenkowski, CMP, Indiana University Alumni Association, Bloomington, Ind.
- Elisa Stritt, CMP, National Conference on Weights and Measures (NCWM), Lincoln, Neb.
- Anna Thomson, CMP, St. Louis Park, Minn.

SKYDECK CHICAGO REOPENS

Skydeck Chicago at Willis Tower re-opened to the public recently after undergoing an extensive redevelopment. The complete transformation encompasses the attraction's lower level, delivering an interactive experience that celebrates the unique personality, history, neighborhoods and sites of Chicago. The lower-level museum is further complemented by a visit to the internationally recognized observation deck to take in the city from 103 floors up and step out on The Ledge; the four thrilling glass floor balconies extending from the Tower.



The complete transformation on the 103rd floor observation deck includes fresh design features and interactive monitors, providing a space to inspire guest poses and allow visitors to upload and display their Ledge social media photos. Along with the stunning views, guests can indulge in informational videos about the city's growth, travel patterns, cultural attractions and the making and history of The Ledge. Guests are invited to leave a mark on the city by creating drawings or messages on the interactive sequin wall. Screens also feature the impressive eastside views from the 103rd floor, allowing visitors to discover more about local sights, no matter the weather.

Before or after a visit to Skydeck Chicago at Willis Tower, guests are invited to enjoy Catalog, a new five-level, curated dining, retail and entertainment experience at the base of the Tower.



Resch Expo

RESCH FACILITY OFFICIALLY OPENS

The \$93 million Resch Expo is open for business in Green Bay, Wis. The innovative, multi-purpose design boasts 125,000 square feet of floor space, with another 135,000 square feet of pre-function, meeting, networking and outdoor plaza space. The facility replaces an aging arena and flat show building previously on the same footprint.

Situated next to historic Lambeau Field, the facility is perfectly placed in a walkable entertainment district. Resch Expo offers a free flow design from its first-floor pre-function space directly into the lobby of the 10,000 seat Resch Center. Resch Center offers the region's premier concert/large conference stage set up. Additionally, it hosts sports tournaments like basketball, volleyball and hockey. Having the ability to combine the two venues is a huge advantage for large events looking for a Midwestern venue. There isn't another space like it in the state of Wisconsin.

The building is flexible, allowing for a variety of events. The exhibit hall can be divided into a three, two or one hall design, and can accommodate trade and industry shows with 600, 10' by 10' booths. A continuous show floor with no columns can host sports events like wrestling, volleyball, billiards, gymnastics, cheerleading and cornhole.

On the second level, the six breakout suites can be used for educational seminars, event storage or show headquarters. Equipped with its own state-of-

the-art kitchen facilities, plated, buffet and quick food service is available. An upstairs cocktail bar accommodates private parties. Attendees can stroll the wraparound outdoor deck on the second level.

There are several event spaces on the building's outdoor plaza, with amazing views of historic Lambeau Field. Indoor/outdoor networking events and receptions have all been thoughtfully planned for the space. Planners interested in offering something a little different could have an early morning yoga session on the turf or food trucks adjacent to the beer garden. The spaces are well lit and can be tented.



RAMIREZ AND PAWLOWSKI NAMED TO MANAGEMENT TEAM

Hampton Inn and Homewood Suites by Hilton Indianapolis Canal IUPUI, a SUN Development & Management Corp. project, has appointed Ashley Ramirez as the hotel's General Manager and Andrew Pawlowski as the hotel's Director of Sales. The dual-branded hotel is currently under construction and is scheduled to open in early fall. The seven-story hotel will house both brands under one roof, with a

combined total of 231 guest rooms. Located at 414 W. Vermont St., the hotel is on the Canal Walk and across the street from the IUPUI Campus.

The dual brands offer traditional overnight accommodations at the Hampton Inn and extended stay accommodations at the Homewood Suites. Guest will enjoy access to an indoor pool and fitness center, over 11,000 square feet of meeting space, an outdoor terrace, bistro bar, retail outlets and on-site parking garage.

HEIDEL HOUSE SET TO REOPEN

After being closed for more than two years, a Wisconsin resort is set to reopen under new management. Green Lake Hotel Group, LLC, purchased the Heidelberg House in 2020 and is expected to invest \$11 million in renovations. The property includes 115 guest rooms, more than 12,000 square feet of conference spaces, as well as two bars, two restaurants, an indoor pool, fitness center, game room and conference facilities. According to its website, the Heidelberg House is currently accepting reservations beginning July 15.

DÖRR HOTEL OPENS

Door County, Wisconsin's newest hotel, The Dörr, recently opened offering a uniquely distinct guest experience. The property was named to honor the area's Scandinavian heritage. The property's 47 rooms boast contemporary finishes and each includes a balcony. The Dörr Hotel is located just steps away from Green Bay. *M*

Thriving in a Digital World

Planner Jodie Daugherty tackles pandemic challenges by pivoting Barnes & Thornburg LLP events to virtual.

BY RONNIE WENDT

It's said variety is the spice of life, and it is variety that has kept Jodie Daugherty in her role as marketing services manager with Barnes & Thornburg LLP, a corporate legal firm in Indianapolis, for over 16 years. In her position she produces unique events that build community and professional engagement, including artists' receptions, events that celebrate diversity, and networking and social events.

But she never thought variety would include taking her work entirely into the digital realm during a global pandemic. The task stretched resources and capabilities as her team presented nearly 300 virtual events in 2020 and is on track to exceed 300 in 2021.

In an average year, Daugherty plans around 200 in-person events and 20 webinars. Most events average 15 to 20 attendees; though some went to a small, targeted audience of two and others to a crowd of 250. "We now attract over 530 people to a single webinar," she says.

Barnes & Thornburg events educate clients on changes in the law, compliance and regulatory issues. "Our education helps our clients stay compliant, so pandemic or not, we still had to keep them up to date."

The team pivoted to virtual after government shutdowns began in March 2020. Fortunately, Barnes & Thornburg had updated its webinar software in 2019. "We quickly took what we normally do in person and made it virtual because we'd updated our software and had trained our team to use it," she says.

But because presenters sometimes lack experience with webinar platforms, Daugherty found her team had to provide added support during presentations. "We have at least two marketing people on every webinar to manage presenters," she says. These team members guide presenters on camera placement and microphone issues, while a third marketing person works behind the scenes operating the software

and providing access to resource materials. All three professionals monitor the chat room.

"There is always someone ready to jump on the phone to help," she says. "We don't want anyone frustrated on the attendee side or on our side. And the last thing we want is someone trying to answer questions in the chat room, while trying to help someone log in, while trying to answer presenter questions. We have three people on every webinar. And we have nine webinars a week!"

Zoom fatigue describes the burnout people feel over the recent explosion in virtual meetings. This fact puts Daugherty on a constant mission to mix things up. Barnes & Thornburg often sends out boxes filled with goodies. Maybe there's a notebook to write in and a pen, books written by presenters, or fun things like "how to build your own charcuterie board" or "journaling tips when stuck at home and tired of your family."

"We make sure our events involve more than staring at a screen while someone talks at you," she says. The webinars might include trivia time or Q&A sessions, or breaks meant to liven things up.

Hosting volumes of webinars makes Daugherty eager for a return to live events. But she still plans to keep a virtual element, even when meetings return to face-to-face.

"Our virtual events reach more of a national audience, which is good because we are a national law firm. We cannot go back to in person then tell a Colorado attendee we have nothing for them. In addition, not everyone is going to feel safe at an in-person event. I have attendees telling me they don't think they'll feel comfortable at a live event for another year or more," she says. "The next step for me is to figure out how to present events in a hybrid format."

Another area of focus for her is the ROI of virtual events. It's not enough to present events, Daugherty also tracks how often events translate into law firm business. She accomplishes this through a mix of surveys and personal follow-up on social media, phone calls and thank you gifts.

"The time we spend on follow-up has increased," she says. "That personal touch is so necessary when you cannot meet face to face." *M*

Ronnie Wendt is a freelance writer based in Waukesha, Wis. She specializes in writing about meetings and events across the Midwest.



Uncork Your Next Event

Wineries offer a unique setting where guests can disconnect and relax.

BY KRISTINE HANSEN

From a Tuscany-inspired estate near the Mississippi River in Wisconsin to an open-concept floor plan flaunting 360-degree views from the top of a Kansas hill, you might be surprised at the event space options available at Midwestern wineries. This section of the country may be thousands of miles from Napa and Sonoma but the ability to grow, harvest and make wine from estate grapes is quickly moving from hobby to serious craft.

Along with that deeper dive into winemaking comes hospitality. Winemakers and vineyard managers love to open their doors to the public for tastings. As well, meeting planners are invited to coordinate a memorable event, which is especially attractive during the summer and fall months when outdoor spaces (paired with vineyard views) can be better utilized.

Here are four unique winery venues across the Midwest.

VILLA BELLEZZA Pepin, Wis.

When approaching this estate, you just might do a double-take when you spot those red Spanish-tile roofs and villa-style buildings. Is this Tuscany? Nope, it's western Wisconsin — specifically, a tiny town along the Great River Road, one of America's most scenic routes, hugging the Mississippi River.

Derick and Julianne Dahlen's winery dreams were inspired by a visit to their friends' winery in Italy. That experience sealed the deal to turn Derick's backyard viticulture hobby into a viable business. His career shifted from CEO of Avant Energy to winemaker, while Julianne's marketing background has fueled their sales and marketing. Earlier this year, the winery's 2019 Cotes du Pepin (blend of La Crescent and Prairie Star grapes) won a gold menu at the San Diego International Wine & Spirits Challenge. Villa Bellezza's wine portfolio features around 30 selections, including ice wine and a sparkling wine, and they are all made



Villa Bellezza



Liquid Art Winery

from cold-hardy wine grapes such as St. Pepin, Edelweiss, La Crescent and Prairie Star.

The couple opened the tasting room in 2012, which includes a restaurant, dedicated chef and event space for weddings and corporate groups. Up to 320 people can be seated for a meal in the Great Hall or opt to serve lunch or dinner — as a breakout from using the winery's spaces — in the Tower Reception Hall. AV rentals are arranged through a list of preferred vendors and any food can simply be catered from within. Selections include seven signature pizzas, including one topped with smoked salmon, as well as paninis, salads (including the Bellezza salad: cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, fennel and Greek dressing) and antipasti (artisan Wisconsin-made cheeses of Italian varieties are a nice marriage of the two cheese-making cultures). The food and beverage service also includes sweet endings that are odes to Italy, like Crostat di Mandorle, a traditional Florentine almond tart; and a perennial favorite, Tiramisu.

Groups of up to 20 can participate in an onsite cooking class led by the winery's chef. Or, for more relaxed activities, guests can taste wine in the tasting room or stroll through the adjacent vineyards.

LIQUID ART WINERY Manhattan, Kan.

Kansas' topography is similar to that in Bordeaux, France, one of the world's most storied wine regions. It's what inspired founders David and Danielle Tegtmeier — who both have Kansas roots and worked in the wine industry in Colorado, California and Washington — to debut Liquid Art in 2014, followed by Dave & Dani Craft Cider four years later.

Private rentals have always been part of their plan, with an Event Center and tasting room opening in 2016. The loft-style Event Center is bookable for a five-, eight- or 10-hour block and accommodates a minimum of 50 guests. If your group is smaller

Feature Facilities



Black Star Farms

than 50, a cozier option is exclusive tasting-room access with bar-height seating and a couch set. Views of the Flint Hills and the 20 acre vineyard accompany sips of the wines, which include Tropical Brianna's crisp tropical-fruit notes and a Cabernet Sauvignon in the brand-new 20/20 series, the Tegtmeiers' cheeky ode to an accident that left David blind in 2018.

Groups can spread out further in both spaces via a bocce-ball court and extensive patio space. Because the tasting room's only available Monday through Thursday (before it opens on Wednesday and Thursday), it serves as the perfect excuse to break away from the office. For both spaces, a menu of seven signature artisan pizzas cooked in-house makes the arrangements that much easier.

BLACK STAR FARMS Suttons Bay, Mich.

Northern Michigan is home to the Leelanau Peninsula and Old Mission Peninsula American Viticultural Areas (AVA) and is not only Michigan's most commercially successful wine region, but its labels (Arcturos, Red House and Black Star Farms) are quickly becoming known nationwide. Black Star Farms makes wines (from a light and fruity Pinot Gris to a sultry Pinot Noir) as well as spirits (fruit-infused brandies).

A group can find many ways to experience the winery on a visit to the 160-acre estate. Maybe it's reserving the inn's 10 suites for a retreat-style meeting or coordinating with the Hearth & Vine Café's chef for a wine-paired dinner of five courses, or simply wood-fired pizzas. For a more traditional space, the Arcturos Room (the winery's largest) comes with a full bar set-up and two candle-lit marble fireplaces, plus access to a

covered patio overlooking the gardens.

Something less conventional is the rustic Pegasus Barn, overlooking horse pastures. A popular wedding venue choice, the barn's raw interior can be amped up with fresh flowers, lights and additional décor. While facility fees don't include vendors, Black Star Farms' preferred vendors list is provided.

Unique team-building opportunities may include cooking classes or special wine tastings. And when it is time to take a break, hike or snowshoe Black Star Farms' trails through forest, orchard and vineyard.

GERVASI VINEYARD Canton, Ohio

This 55-acre winery and vineyard emulating a Tuscan village offers more than a wine-tasting experience: there's also three restaurants, a coffeehouse and cocktail bar, a spring-fed lake, and suite-sized lodging in The Casa and The Villas

(with breakfast delivered right to your room). For a small group, reserving the four-bedroom, two-bath 1830 Farmhouse provides a sweet setting for a retreat.

Founded by father-son team Ted and Scott Swaldo in 2008, and built from the ground up, the winery offers three dedicated buildings for corporate groups. An open-air, 4,000-square-foot pavilion is suited for events and luncheons while The Villa Grande (with a ballroom, conference room, board room and atrium) can accommodate up to 120 day or night. Reclaimed barn wood was used to construct The Bistro, inside a renovated 200-year-old barn, with three private dining rooms, plus two private spaces at The Crush House and a glass-enclosed Conservatory. At all venues, of course, Gervasi Vineyard's 20-some wines — crafted by Calabria, Italy, born winemaker Andrew Codispoli — are poured.

In case you have beer drinkers, Gervasi Vineyard partners with Thirsty Dog Brewing in Akron to offer four exclusive beers only found on property, including Sawmill IPA, an ode to a sawmill that once operated on the land. A new building modeled after the 17th century St. Gervasio Church in Denno, Italy, complete with a bell tower, functions as a coffee shop by day and a cocktail bar by night. *M*

Based in Milwaukee, Kristine Hansen covers wine, travel and the arts (often in the Midwest) for publications that include Milwaukee Magazine, Experience Wisconsin magazine, ArchitecturalDigest.com and Fodors.com. She's also author of "Wisconsin Cheese Cookbook: Creamy, Cheesy, Sweet, and Savory Recipes from the State's Best Creameries and Wisconsin Farms" and "Farmers Markets: Tours, Trails and Attractions."



Gervasi Vineyard

Meals on Wheels

Consider food trucks as a way to set your event apart and impress your guests.

BY CANDICE WEGENER



We've hit peak season in the Midwest for outdoor events, which will most likely be an even more popular option this year as we continue to work around COVID-19 guidelines. What better way to add some flair to your outdoor happening than by bringing in some food trucks? Trendy and fun, food trucks can set your event apart. Here are a few considerations as you start your planning.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY

There is a wide diversity in cuisines that are possible when you bring in food trucks. From the old standard ice cream truck to the dependable taco truck to hottest trendsetters serving everything from spring rolls, bubble tea, pasta and grilled cheese, there is a food truck for everyone. Depending on your event, you can choose a truck that honors someone's favorites.

"We're really creating experiences," says Jamie Billow, founder and lead event producer of Chicago Food Truck Hub, an organization which plans private events. "It's important that the host or the people that are being celebrated have the food that they really enjoy the most."

NUMBERS MATTER

It's key to have a solid idea of how many people you're expecting at your event, because it will become a determining factor in how many trucks to offer as well as any minimums that might apply. Billow says it could help you narrow down how you want to plan out your catering as you may find one option is more cost effective than another, depending on the size of your group.

ALWAYS ASK

If there is something you want but you don't see it listed as a standard option, that doesn't mean it's not possible. "Always ask if you don't see something you want," advises Billow.

You want to make sure that all your attendees can have an enjoyable, safe experience, so be sure to

ask your guests about dietary restrictions and allergies, and communicate this information with your catering crew.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

When you bring in food trucks, location becomes a big factor. If you're hosting your event on private property belonging to you or someone affiliated with your group, it shouldn't be an issue. However, if you're planning on hosting your event on public grounds, you'll need to ensure you meet any regulations and have all the proper permits that may be required to do so.

"Always check in advance and look at local ordinances," says Billow. "A good place to start would be to call the local village hall and check with the departments of building and zoning."

And be sure to talk through any location challenges with the truck operator. Do they need power? Is the terrain difficult to navigate?

SAFETY AND EFFICIENCY

Food trucks are an especially nice option in the time of COVID-19, because they provide point-to-point service and can be implemented safely in a well-planned environment. But Billow strongly suggests planners consider implementing some sort of staffing to help with service and clean up. "While that certainly adds another component to the budget it also adds another component to the event experience and reflects on the host," says Billow. "The last thing a host wants to be doing is cleaning up and managing the party."

WHERE TO FIND FOOD TRUCKS

Utilizing companies like Chicago Food Truck Hub, which works to find and curate events and experiences for guests to enjoy and has access to a full array of food trucks and carts, takes a lot of the busywork out of planning these types of events. If you are able to find a service like this in your area, it seems like the most seamless route.

Otherwise, looking into the food trucks in your area and determining which ones have the best reviews and are available for private events is another good starting point. Ask for recommendations from others in the event industry who may have hosted similar events. And start making those connections because food carts and outdoor events are sure to see a surge in popularity this year. *M*

Candice Wegener is a freelancer based in the Madison, Wis., area, who loves writing about great food, unique places and inspiring people.

The Hybrid Challenge

37 tips to bridge virtual and in-person events

BY CORBIN BALL

A hybrid event is one that combines a face-to-face event at a physical location with a “virtual” online component for remote attendees. Hybrids will likely see widespread adoption as face to face meetings reemerge from the pandemic for a number of reasons:



As in-person events reemerge, meeting designers will face a dilemma: How do you arrange an event with two radically different audiences? The onsite group has social connectivity, focus and high sensory input. On the other hand, the virtual audience, often times interacting individually on screens, will likely have shorter attention spans, may be in different time zones and with a limited sensory experience usually just looking at a screen.

Here are several ideas and suggestions for event designers and planners to consider to address this dilemma and other issues when planning hybrid events.

- *Some attendees may not wish to travel to the event for fear of contagion or other health and safety concerns.*
- *There will likely be reduced travel funds available for event attendance due to economic downturns.*
- *Some attendees may simply accept remote event attendance as an acceptable substitute with no travel time, no travel costs and reduced environmental impact.*
- *A virtual component offers the possibility of opening up to a much larger audience with new and/or geographically dispersed markets not easily available at a face to face event.*
- *There may not be enough space to hold large events at venues due to reduced occupancy from onsite physical distancing guidelines.*

CHOOSING A HYBRID EVENT PLATFORM

1. Choose a hybrid event platform from a provider with significant event planning experience, that thoroughly understands the complexities of a wide range of events and has lots of experience running digital and hybrid events.
2. Choose a hybrid event platform that can also manage virtual and in-person events to standardize your process and data collection.
3. One of the strengths of the online component of a hybrid event is the opportunity for detailed analytics. Nearly every remote attendee's actions (clicks, poll responses, texts, feedback, time spent and more) can be tracked. Choose a hybrid platform that can provide these detailed analytics.
4. Look for a hybrid event platform that provides all attendees with personalized agenda setting.
5. For remote attendees at larger events, have a separate "help" button different from the chat area going directly to technical help support.
6. A hybrid event is more complex than a face to face event, with many actions and deadlines expected. Use an event platform or project management system that can help manage these actions.
7. Look for a platform that allows remote attendees to interact with speakers, exhibitors, each other and face to face attendees as well.
8. Look for a platform that integrates with a mobile event app providing another channel for interactivity including remote polling, chat, push notifications, networking and gamification options.
9. Look for a platform with strong privacy and security provisions, including PCI and GDPR compliance.

PROMOTING THE HYBRID EVENT

10. As you start to promote the event, make it very clear that it will be a hybrid event and what the specific offerings for the in-person and digital components will be.
11. Distribute a detailed online schedule with specific presentation start and stop times with local time zone adjustments for geographically dispersed remote attendees.
12. As soon as your full schedule goes online, consider building viewer interest through regular, timed releases of content building up to the event. When done properly, this can build both the virtual and the in-person audiences.
13. Be flexible in your registration offering, allowing attendees to switch to a face to face or the digital component depending on changing circumstances.
14. Promote the event on social media before and encourage social media hashtags during the event to build networking for all attendees.
15. Many virtual events held in the past few months have seen audience counts that were many times larger than the face to face events they replaced. If you feel confident of a large remote audience for your hybrid event, then sponsorship revenue could increase substantially. Look for ways to highlight sponsors, including banner ads, acknowledgments, short sponsor videos, sponsor-hosted sessions, an event website sponsor page and lead generation options.

BEST PRACTICES FOR HYBRID EVENTS

16. Consider using an experienced emcee for the remote attendees to provide a unified voice throughout the event, to explain how to use the system and to create continuity.
17. Use online moderators to manage the chat rooms and encourage discussion and input.
18. Invest in speaker and moderator training; focus on including remote attendees in polls, Q&A and in other comments during the presentations. Questions from remote attendees should be recognized by name and location from the stage and included as much as those in the room.
19. Consider shorter presentation times and sessions – most remote viewers simply have shorter attention spans than those sitting together in face to face meeting rooms.
20. For larger events with multiple sessions and viewers from disparate time zones, consider prerecording some of the presentations and bringing both the face to face and remote audiences together during a keynote address or general sessions.
21. For repeat sessions, consider playing the prerecorded session at designated times for different time zones and asking the presenters to go live at the end of the recorded presentations for Q&A.
22. Punctuality of presentation start/stop times is crucial for hybrid events.
23. If your hybrid event includes an exhibition, provide a tour of the exhibit hall specifically for remote attendees. Educational sessions streamed from the show floor are also a possibility.
24. Consider developing separate content for remote attendees. There are times at the face to face event that may not be well suited for remote attendees, including receptions, exhibition breaks and coffee breaks. Interviews with speakers and thought leaders, and exhibit tours are among the possibilities. Also, schedule breaks for remote attendees.





DRIVING ATTENDEE ENGAGEMENT

25. Audience engagement for remote attendees is probably the biggest challenge in hybrid or virtual meetings. Methods for keeping and measuring their attention should be high on the desired features list for your hybrid event platform.
26. Make sure that both the face to face audience and the remote audience use the same polling system with combined tallies. Text-based Q&A with social upvoting should be available for all attendees as well.
27. In addition to chat and text Q&A, look for a platform that provides real-time presentation feedback from remote attendees similar to social media functions such as: like, applause, standing ovation, don't understand, etc. Analytics that track these and related items such as length of viewing and when an attendee leaves can be very useful in gauging speaker effectiveness and attendee engagement.
28. High production values with good graphics, videos and presentation visuals are especially important to keep remote audience interest.
29. Train speakers and set expectations for them to fully utilize these interaction tools.
30. High-energy speakers are always good, but especially so to help keep a remote audience engaged.
31. Break up the presentations with different format types. For example, consider incorporating breakout sessions similar to Zoom breakout rooms for your virtual attendees. Discussing event content with small groups of other remote attendees can be effective ways of engagement and learning.

Corbin Ball, DES, CMP, CSP, is a speaker and independent consultant focusing on events technology. Previously, Corbin ran international citywide technology meetings for more than a decade. For the past 23 years, he has helped clients worldwide use technology to save time and improve productivity through his speaking, consulting and writing services. Corbin was inducted into the EIC Hall of Leaders in 2018, the premier recognition program for the events industry. He can be contacted at his extensive Corbin Ball & Co. - Meetings Technology Headquarters (www.corbinball.com) and followed at [www.twitter.com/corbinball](https://twitter.com/corbinball).

AT THE EVENT SITE

32. Use a production or AV team that has significant experience with video streaming and running hybrid events.
33. Sessions streamed to remote attendees can be recorded easily, which can be a benefit for face to face attendees who missed a session or would like to see the session they attended again. It also provides a menu of on-demand viewing options and times for remote attendees.
34. Make sure that the venue has sufficient bandwidth, technical support and fail-safe backup options to manage multiple video streams. The minimum upload speed for a quality video stream is 7Mb/second.

AT THE EVENT

35. Use the recorded content generated during the event to promote future events, build membership and/or create online community.
36. Promote future events to online attendees encouraging them to become face to face attendees in the future.
37. Offer your content on-demand after the event. This is especially helpful for remote attendees with shorter attention spans allowing the freedom to access the content at convenient times.

Face-to-face, in-person meetings will reemerge after this pandemic passes. As they do, hybrid meetings will be a bridge for those not able or wanting to attend the event in person. In the long term, hybrid meetings will likely remain a significant component for many events as we all learn best practices and benefit from the many innovations currently being developed at this time. *MB*



A COVID-19 PLAYBOOK FOR VENUES

Midwestern venues adopt new strategies and invest in new technologies for safer meetings and events.

BY RONNIE WENDT



Editor's Note: Please note facility policies regarding COVID-19 are rapidly changing as we go to press with this issue and some of the policies discussed in this article may no longer be in effect.

"Immediate, dramatic and surreal" are the words Visit KC's Senior Vice President of Sales & Services Nathan Hermiston uses to describe the pandemic's impact on Kansas City, Mo.

The Midwestern city, known for its jazz music and culture and distinctive Kansas City-style barbecue, was knee

deep in hosting the Big 12 basketball tournament when COVID concerns escalated in March 2020. "We went from having a city bursting at the seams, overflowing with people and excitement, to completely shut down overnight," he recalls.

Visit KC used the closure to prepare its market for reopening. "The industry we serve was decimated and needed our help," Hermiston says.

The organization, and the restaurant and venue community, partnered to create the KC Clean Commitment to help limit the spread of COVID-19. The

plan assists the recovery efforts of the city's travel and tourism industry, which employs over 48,000 residents. Visit KC updates the program weekly to keep venue partners up to date on ever-changing health guidelines and regulations, cleaning technologies and protocols, and best practices for mitigating the virus' spread, particularly during its peak in the Midwest in fall 2020.

Visit KC understands that navigating the new normal requires a combined effort designed to jumpstart the industry. Venues that keep their focus on health and safety protocols, social distancing requirements, safe food and beverage, and cleaning/sanitization technologies will emerge from the pandemic stronger than those that do not.



KEEP IT CLEAN

Event planners and their guests always expected clean hotels and venues, but today they desire even more stringent cleaning and safety standards. Venues are responding in kind.

Kellen Seitz serves as general manager for Stormont Vail Events Center in Topeka, Kan. This venue, which hosted groups from 350 to 1,000 pre-pandemic, upped its cleaning frequency upon reopening. "The amount of times we clean during an event and how often we clean high-touch areas has increased," Seitz says. "We go through every half hour and sanitize surfaces, like elevator buttons and door handles."

Stormont also increased its hand sanitizing stations from 20 to over 50 so people encounter a hand sanitizing station every 50 to 100 feet. The company invested in better HVAC filters to clean the air and cleaning technologies, like backpack sanitizer sprayers, to sanitize surfaces. The venue also hopes to add electrostatic sprayers, which spray

an electrostatically charged mist onto surfaces and objects to kill germs, viruses and other bacteria.

The venue's housekeeping staff received advanced training and an ample supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) including masks, hand sanitizer, gloves

"Every property has to make their own decisions based on what they can afford. But if they want to get through this and attract as much business as they can, they need to make some investments."

**—KAREN FULLER, DIRECTOR OF SALES,
LIED LODGE & CONFERENCE CENTER**

and face shields. "Staff members who interface with the public receive PPE for every event," Seitz says.

Visit KC's Hermiston reports the Kansas City Convention Center invested in Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) certification. The performance-based, accredited program helped

the venue launch a comprehensive cleaning, disinfection and infectious disease prevention effort.

"We invested in many of the GBAC-recommended technologies, including electrostatic cleaners and other cleaning tools, and touchless technology," he says.

Some venues even clean the air. For example, Lied Lodge & Conference Center in Nebraska City, Neb., invested in a plasma air filtration system from Global Plasma Solutions, which uses needlepoint bipolar ionization (NPBI) technology to clean the air. The patented technology uses an electronic charge to create a plasma field filled with high concentrations of positive and negative ions. As these ions travel in the air, they attach to particles, pathogens and gas molecules to filter out contaminants.

"The system targets pathogens and deprives them of life-sustaining hydrogen so they are no longer a threat," says Karen Fuller, director of sales, Lied Lodge & Conference Center. "Our cleaners also perform a 10-step cleaning process that covers every high-touch surface in meeting and guestrooms."

Fuller stresses technology investments set venues apart. "Every property has to make their own decisions based on what they can afford," she says. "But if they want to get through this and attract as much business as they can, they need to make some investments. Masks and signs are not expensive, neither is more frequent cleaning."

For capital-intensive upgrades, venues can leverage available coronavirus relief funding. Stormont Vail used this funding to invest in contactless scanning ticket pedestal machines; a contactless parking payment system that uses a QR code and accepts Apple, Android and Google pay options; and walk-through metal detectors with built-in thermal detection readers.

"These systems allow us to take guest temperatures while ensuring guests follow our policy and procedure guidelines," Seitz reports.



KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

Lied Lodge & Conference Center rests on 260 acres of Arbor Day Farm, providing a pastoral setting for socially distanced meetings and events. The center, an hour's drive from Omaha, offers both indoor and outdoor spaces for people to gather.

Though the lodge provides a naturally socially distanced setting, Fuller reports the resort trained employees gently remind guests about their distancing and masking guidelines. "We enforce social distancing here," she says. "We encourage people to keep their distance and abide by the mask mandate on the grounds."

This process begins with signage reminding guests to social distance and mask up. During the reservation process, guests must sign that they acknowledge and agree to the mask requirements. The company then sets up every meeting room in configurations that keep guests at least six feet apart.

Stormont Vail also requires masks and social distancing but takes things a step farther with mandatory temperature checks for every vendor, event producer and employee. "We mandate these temperature checks daily," Seitz says.

Ensuring social distancing must be intentional, Seitz adds. People congregate at restrooms, concession stands, and entry and egress points. "We began releasing people in sections to minimize the traffic flow at egress points. We also alternate which egress point we send people to," he says.

The center limits restroom lines by keeping all restrooms open, even with capacity limits of 500 versus 3,000. "It would be a far greater challenge to keep people socially distanced at restrooms if we had 3,000 people attending an event," he says.

Playing public announcements that remind attendees to socially distance helps, Seitz says. Employees also remind patrons of the rules. "We have had few problems with social distancing," he says. "Most people willingly comply to regain some social normalcy."

Hermiston explains, "Social distancing requirements limit our capacity. We have had to expand the space groups use. If we have 100 people meeting, we need a room that can accommodate 300 people to properly social distance attendees."



KEEP THEM FED

According to "Considerations for Events and Gatherings," by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

(CDC), there's no evidence that COVID-19 is spread through food. However, that same CDC document finds "people sharing utensils and congregating around food service areas poses a risk."



"We have had few problems with social distancing. Most people willingly comply to regain some social normalcy."

**—KELLEN SEITZ, GENERAL MANAGER,
STORMONT VAIL EVENTS CENTER**

The CDC advises against offering self-serve food or drink options, such as buffets, salad bars or drink stations. Many venues opt for cafeteria-style buffets where waitstaff dishes up plates for attendees. They also forego buffets and passed hors d'oeuvres, having servers deliver plated food to individuals.

Fuller says, "Lied Lodge used to be a place that had a lot of buffets. We are not that place anymore. If a group insists on a buffet, we have servers load plates for our guests. With other meals, everyone gets a boxed lunch with disposable utensils."

COVID-19 also led to a reversal in sustainability practices. The CDC recommends using disposable food service items such as utensils and dishes. In response, venues offer individually packaged meals and utensils.

"The goal is making things more touchless, so we use a lot of prepackaged food and disposable utensils," says Hermiston. "We have gotten creative with seating, so that tables are more spaced out. We installed plexiglass dividers between bartenders and guests, and all our servers wear PPE."

Concessionaires at Stormont Vail added touchless ordering and payment options. Guests use an app to order and pay. The app notifies guests when their order is ready for pickup. "It's contactless and everything is pre-boxed," Seitz says.

Though the pandemic will change meetings and events for the foreseeable future, Midwest venues are finding social distancing, masks, technology and better cleaning protocols go a long way toward making people feel safe and comfortable at events. *M*

STEPS TO SET YOUR VENUE APART

Investing time and technology into new policies and procedures that keep venues cleaner and safeguard attendee health sets venues apart. Here are a few suggestions to start venues on a path toward healthier meetings.



ADD THERMAL SCANNERS:

Venues equipped with thermal scanners provide an added layer of security for attendees. Thermal scanners show when attendees have elevated temperatures, making it possible to quarantine them.



PARTNER WITH LOCAL AGENCIES:

COVID guidelines are in a constant sea of flux. Working with local and state health departments and government agencies keeps venues on top of current guidelines to avoid problems later. These officials also know when community caseloads are increasing and can identify times when it may be necessary to postpone or reschedule an event.



DEVELOP CLEANING AND SANITIZATION PROTOCOLS:

Venues that establish cleaning policies are a step ahead of those that don't. Regularly clean and disinfect high touch surfaces throughout the day. Invest in new technologies that kill germs, viruses and other bacteria.



GET CERTIFIED:

Invest in Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) certification to show your commitment to clean. This accredited program helps venues develop a comprehensive system of cleaning, disinfection and infectious disease prevention.



GO TOUCHLESS:

Touchless registration technologies that require attendees to complete a health questionnaire and supply contact information for later contact tracing work well. Supply a QR code that allows attendees to check in and print badges before arriving on site. Invest in technology that scans their badges as they arrive. Install touchless metal detection and thermal imaging scanners to identify sick individuals.



BY GREG GERBER

COMPETITIVE EDGE

Communities take advantage of COVID downtime to build bigger sports venues

Sports competitions and tournaments have been especially affected by the events of the past 16 months, however, as the country continues to reopen, many tournaments and sports events are planning for a big return this summer and into the fall. And what's more exciting than being able to hit the field or take to the court, is that a number of communities across the Midwest will be able to welcome players and teams to brand-new facilities. These facilities represent some of the latest technologies and trends venues of their kind are implementing in order to maximize player experience and comfort. Here's a roundup of some of the most recent facilities built and renovated, as well as a few that are scheduled to open later this year.

LAURIDSEN SKATEPARK

Located along the Des Moines River and within walking distance of the Principal River Walk, Lauridsen Skatepark is a world-class competitive facility that opened this spring in Des Moines. Built at a cost of \$6.1 million, the skatepark creates an engaging outdoor environment where youth interact with one another, forge relationships and improve interpersonal skills. Designed by champion skateboarders Lance Mountain and Colby Carter, the park is managed by Polk County and features 88,000 square feet of attractions spread over five acres to challenge

professionals and amateurs alike.

Put to immediate use, the facility has already hosted the Dew Tour street skateboarding competition to determine who will represent the U.S. at the Olympic Games in Tokyo this summer. (The 2020 Olympics mark the debut of skateboarding as an official sport.)



Lauridsen Skatepark



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The main features include:

- A street course with 10 ledges, 11 types of rails, four stairs and an array of connecting skate areas.
- A nearly quarter-mile-long, 38-foot-wide concrete Skate Promenade that includes cantilevered quarter pipes, a mini-ramp, beginner street section, curbs, banks and ledges.
- The specially-tiled Amoeba Pool, offering depths ranging from 5' 10" to 8' 6", allowing skaters to enjoy the challenges of pool skating in a safe, legal way.
- The Flow Bowl, a junior-sized course designed for recreational skating where beginning and intermediate skaters can improve their skills.
- A WOW skate art feature, constructed of 3/4-inch steel plates that is 84 feet long, 4 feet wide and 12 feet tall. Each letter in the word "WOW" is designed for various skateboarding activities.

"The park has the ability to host a variety of events including demos, competitions and concerts. Attention has been given to incorporating a safe pedestrian walkway and inviting viewing/socializing areas," says Laura Jass, event experience sports coordinator for Catch Des Moines.

GRIMESPLEX OUTDOOR SPORTS CENTER

Not too far from Lauridsen, the \$250 million mixed-use GrimesPlex development is expected to open in Grimes, Iowa, this fall and will include hotels, restaurants, retail space and an outdoor sports tournament venue scattered over 200 acres.

The development's anchor is a privately-owned, 50-acre sports tournament complex with 70 soccer fields, 26 baseball and softball fields, as well as 13 football fields. The GrimesPlex will include lighted fields, concessions, restroom facilities, and areas for food trucks and vendors.

Hope Development & Realty is spearheading the project and CEO Reza Kargarzadeh expects the turf sports venue will be the Midwest's largest



Spooky Nook Champion Mill

complex for soccer, baseball, softball and football.

"As a young, growing community, we are proud to provide athletes and their families in Grimes, the Des Moines metro, and across the country with a high-quality complex in which to compete and grow," he says. "Grimesplex is estimated to draw 1.5 million visitors per year, making the Hope District a destination for sports, food and entertainment."

"This project will transform youth sports and entertainment in the Des Moines metro area. I am excited to see the many lodging, dining and entertainment options that will come to the Hope development in the months ahead," adds Mayor Scott Mikkelsen.



BENDIX ARENA

One of the most unique projects is the Bendix Arena in South Bend, Ind. As the region's only dedicated esports facility, it is more than just a meeting space — it is a virtual gamer's paradise.

Located in the downtown Century Center, the arena provides 100,000 square feet of convention space. The key

attraction is the 4,200-square-foot LAN Center that can host 60 people engaged in livestream gaming while spectators view the competition in a 600-seat theater.

The facility features 36 interconnected gaming computers, each with a 27-inch monitor capable of running any virtual game over high-speed fiber internet connections. With state-of-the-art lighting and sound equipment, competitors and spectators are drawn into the action.

It's not just for competitive gamers, the LAN Center is set up for casual gaming, too, which makes it a fun break for friendly competitions.

"While we were touting this as a new concept, it was anything but new," says Jeff Jarnecke, executive director of venues for the City of South Bend. "We didn't want it to feel like someone was just walking into a meeting room inside a convention center that we had turned into a gaming center. It needed to look different and feel different with a unique vibe that was exciting and genuine."

SPOOKY NOOK CHAMPION MILL

Perhaps the most ambitious project is Spooky Nook Champion Mill in Hamilton, Ohio, which will become the largest indoor sports complex in North America.

Located just north of Cincinnati, the \$165 million, 1.2 million-square-foot sports, entertainment and event complex is about two hours from Indianapolis; Louisville, Ky.; Lexington, Ky.; and Columbus, Ohio.

The proximity to those cities promises to make the venue a sports destination capable of accommodating 10,000 athletes and spectators utilizing indoor courts and fields to host soccer, volleyball, basketball, baseball and field hockey tournaments of all sizes.

Augmenting the sports complex is a 225-room hotel and conference center overlooking the Miami River. The project overhauls an old paper mill into a complex of supporting businesses, including restaurants, stores, a fitness center, childcare facilities and training areas for athletes.

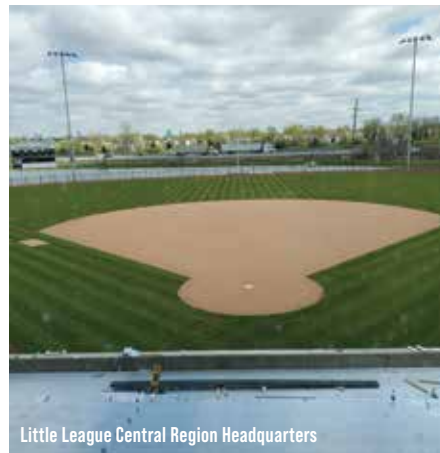
The conference center will have 20 meeting spaces capable of accommodating groups from 12-person board meetings to banquets for 1,000 people and will become Greater Cincinnati's second largest convention space, behind only the Duke Energy Convention Center.

The project incurred a setback in late March when high winds toppled a section of steel structure that was to

house an indoor turf field. "Despite some setbacks, we're really pleased with the progress that they've been making, and pretty happy with where we are," says owner Sam Beiler. "The progress has been significant since the work really got under way in earnest last year." It's projected to open by the end of this year.

LITTLE LEAGUE CENTRAL REGION HEADQUARTERS

Started in July 2020, construction of the new Little League Central Region



Little League Central Region Headquarters

Headquarters in Whitestown, Ind., is expected to wrap up by the end of June. The 15-acre facility northwest of Indianapolis features a full-size lighted Little League field with stadium seating, bleachers and a press box. Batting cages, restrooms, concessions and a gift area will enhance the area.

A 10,000-square-foot, on-site administration building will orchestrate all Little League baseball and softball activities involving 26,000 teams and 375,000 players in the 13-state Central Region.

"Upon completion of construction, we are planning to work with the Town of Whitestown on a ceremonial ribbon cutting event, but until we have a better idea of what the state/local COVID protocols will be at the time, we won't be able to share any details," says Nina Johnson-Pitt, senior strategy executive for Little League International. *M*

Greg Gerber is an author, speaker and owner of Faithfire Media, reporting on faith-based topics. He splits his time between Wisconsin and Arizona. He is also the former owner of RV Daily Report.

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TIME to TEE UP

HOLD YOUR NEXT EVENT AT ONE OF THESE GOLF RESORTS

BY MELANIE RADZICKI MCMANUS

Golf has always been a popular activity for groups. And as planners are looking for ways to bring people together safely, golf will be a popular option, allowing groups to connect in an outdoor setting with plenty of space for social distancing.

Not surprising, the Midwest offers groups a variety of options. You can find everything from courses that have hosted championships, to those with amazing scenic beauty, to those offering four star lodging and convention facilities, and everything in between.

Here we highlight a few worth considering for your next outing.





THE GRAND RESORT WARREN, OHIO

When you stay at The Grand Resort in Warren, an hour southeast of Cleveland, you become a member of the adjacent Avalon Golf and Country Club during your stay. This means you have access to the club's four courses: Avalon Lakes, Avalon at Squaw Creek, Avalon at Buhl Park and Avalon Field Club at New Castle, all created by golfing greats.

The resort's premier course is Avalon Lakes, designed by the legendary Pete Dye. This gently rolling course, dimpled with numerous bodies of water, has five sets of tees to accommodate golfers of all abilities. Avalon at Squaw Creek is considered one of the Midwest's oldest championship-caliber courses. Buhl Park, which has been around for more than a century, is considered the club's toughest course, while New Castle, created in 1923 by famed golf course architect A.W. Tillinghast, has survived the decades relatively unscathed. In addition to these courses, the golf club also offers indoor golf simulators that allow you to tackle the world's top 50 courses.



On the meeting side, The Grand Resort and Avalon properties have more than 41,000 square feet of meeting space via 24 conference and meeting rooms. One of the more unique meeting sites available is a wine lounge with 600 varieties of wine; you can also reserve the property's salon and spa for a company retreat. The Grand Resort has 132 guest rooms and suites.

HILTON CHICAGO/OAK BROOK HILLS RESORT & CONFERENCE CENTER OAK BROOK, ILL.

Sitting just 25 minutes from O'Hare International Airport, the Hilton Chicago/Oak Brook Hills sits on a serene 150-acre parcel of land that's also home to the Willow Crest Golf Club. The resort offers 42,000 square feet of meeting space spread throughout 33 rooms, plus an impressive 20,000 square feet of outdoor event space. The full-service hotel, meanwhile, has 386 guest rooms, two restaurants, a spa, and tennis, basketball and volleyball courts, among other amenities.

The rolling, 18-hole Willow Crest golf course, favored by locals, is a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. This means the par-70 course's land, water, wildlife and natural resources are protected. A snack shop is open seasonally between the 9th and 10th



holes, and the golf club also has practice facilities, two golf simulators and a pro shop. Golf instruction is available, too.

WILDERNESS HOTEL & GOLF RESORT LAKE DELTON, WIS.

When the Wilderness opened in 1995, it quickly became popular for its indoor waterpark, one of the first in the nation. Today, the resort, which sits 40 minutes north of the Dane County Regional Airport, has expanded exponentially. The sprawling property includes conference facilities, more than 30 different lodging options – guest rooms,

condos, villas and cabins – several restaurants and the much-acclaimed Wild Rock Golf Club.

The 18-hole Wild Rock championship course is one of the few in the nation to be created in and around a former quarry. “From one of the holes, you actually shoot over the quarry,” says Shannon Timmerman, sales director for the resort's Glacier Canyon Lodge conference center. The course is challenging, but one payoff is the elevated 6th tee, which offers views of the Baraboo Hills, 30 miles distant. “It's just breathtaking,” says Timmerman.





Crystal Mountain

The conference center contains more than 56,000 square feet of meeting space, with the largest banquet room able to accommodate 1,200. Small groups can elect to gather at the more intimate Wild Rock Clubhouse, which can seat 160 for a dinner. When you book a golf outing here, you have access to both a meeting planner and tournament coordinator.

In addition to the popular golf club, the Wilderness also has four indoor waterparks, four outdoor waterparks, go-karts, bumper boats, a zipline and a sky ropes course, among other amenities. It's also affiliated with nearby Sundara Spa, which routinely receives accolades as one of the best spas in the nation.

CRYSTAL MOUNTAIN THOMPSONVILLE, MICH.

Crystal Mountain in northwestern Michigan is a popular spot. Sitting 30 minutes south of Traverse City's Cherry Capital Airport, visitors throng here in winter to ski. Once the snow melts, though, it's golf season. The resort features two very different 18-hole courses: Mountain Ridge and Betsie Valley, both of which carry a four-star rating from "Golf Digest."

As its name implies, Mountain Ridge sits atop fragrant Crystal Mountain, which is covered with pines. The course is designed to offer golfers incredible

vistas from the mountaintop, along with pleasant strolls through the forest. While Betsie Valley also winds through a mature pine forest, it's designed for more advanced players, with small greens, many of which are severely sloped. The resort also has a golf practice and learning center that offers a driving range, putting green and two multi-tiered chipping greens with bunkers.

When it comes to business, the property contains more than 20,000 square feet of meeting space spread between the Crystal Center, Lodge and Lodge Pavilion. Guest accommodations include a combined

250-plus hotel rooms, suites, condos, townhomes and resort residences. In addition to golfing, attendees can enjoy a wealth of other activities, such as chairlift rides, ziplining, archery and a climbing wall. Crystal Mountain is also just 35 minutes from Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, famed for its towering sand dunes.

BIG CEDAR LODGE BRANSON, MO.

Big Cedar Lodge is tucked into the Ozark Mountains, just shy of the Arkansas border and an hour south of the Springfield-Branson Airport. The



Big Cedar Lodge



brainchild of Johnny Morris, founder of Bass Pro Shops, the 4,600-acre gem features loads of traditional and unique meeting spaces, plus 317 private accommodations via lodges, cottages, cabins and camping-style units. There are also five golf courses, a spa, numerous restaurants, two full-service marinas and much more.

The facility's meeting space is spread throughout the vast campus. The Grandview Conference Center can accommodate 1,000 and features a ballroom with a hand-painted mural, plus floor-to-ceiling windows that look out onto beautiful Table Rock Lake. Big Cedar Lodge can accommodate 150 in its Cedar Creek rooms. The Worman House, a railroad executive's 1920's retreat, offers meeting space for 160 in a charming, rustic setting. And The Stables at Integrity Hills, a renovated barn, can hold 300.

On the funkier side, you can elect to conduct business at Fun Mountain, a 50,000-square-foot activity center with laser tag, bumper cars and a golf simulator, or at the Bass Pro Shops Shooting Academy. There's even meeting space on a yacht, wine cellar and a 150-year-old barn that once sat in Arnold Palmer's hometown and is filled with his memorabilia.

Big Cedar's five golf courses were designed by golfing legends, including Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer. A Jack Nicklaus Signature Course, the par-3 Top of the Rock, features waterfalls and ponds. The 18-hole Buffalo Ridge is filled with native grasses and natural rock formations; you may even spy some free-ranging bison from a nearby nature park. Mountain Top is a 13-hole short course offering some of the best views of the Ozarks, while Ozarks National is a challenging course with many visually appealing shots. Finally, Payne's Valley has the distinction of being the first public-access golf course designed by Woods and his design firm. *M*

Melanie Radzicki McManus is a freelance travel writer who has written for a variety of travel publications and is based in Sun Prairie, Wis.



TIPS FOR CREATING A MEMORABLE GOLF EVENT

Want your next golfing event to knock it out of the park? Here are three tips.

#1. FEED YOUR GOLFERS.

You get hungry when you're spending five hours on the golf course, says Shannon Timmerman, director of sales at Glacier Canyon Conference Center, part of the Wilderness Resort. And if your golfers are on the course drinking sans food, they might become tipsy by the end.

#2. INCORPORATE COURSE GAMES.

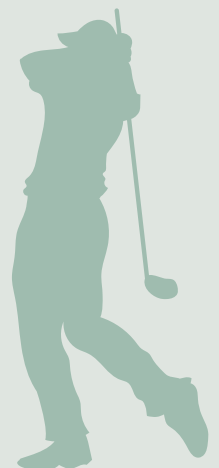
Timmerman recommends prizes for challenges such as the longest putt and longest drive. If your group includes a lot of beginners, she recommends adding humorous competitions, such as seeing who hits the ball closest to the water without going in. There's also Meet the Pro. "We have a pro at one of the holes, and all golfers who come through can bet money on whether they can out-drive our professional," she says. "Or, if it's a fundraiser, they can buy his shot."

Jeri Breen says games are definitely a popular addition. Director of administration for Wisconsin's Associated General Contractors, she's planned many golf outings. And one competition everyone loves is their hole-in-one contests on par-3 holes.

If you can make the shot, you score a whopping \$20,000. "In all the years we have done this, we've had one person win, which was so awesome. We still have people talking about it!"

#3. HAND OUT SWAG BAGS.

Breen says her company solicits donations from their sponsors — gift items such as tees, golf towels, hats and golf balls.



STATE SPOTLIGHT



With its picturesque cityscapes to its awe-inspiring landscapes, from the expansive plains of Nebraska to the valleys and rivers of Minnesota, the Midwest offers ample locales for unique meeting options. Teeming with historic sites, quaint towns and mighty metropolis experiences, the Midwest appeals to many planners because of its unique venues, distinct Midwest charm and natural beauty. And thanks to the cultural offerings throughout cities such as Minneapolis, Kansas City, Dubuque and Milwaukee, the Midwest truly has something for everyone.

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PHOTOS ©IOWA TOURISM OFFICE

IOWA



If you are looking for an eclectic state that offers a little bit of everything for visitors, take a look at Iowa. From its towering bluffs along the “Mighty Mississippi” to the rolling farmland to its hip metropolitan areas, Iowa is teeming with variety.

The capital of the Corn Huskers State, Des Moines is a growing epicenter for galleries, eateries and events aplenty. In addition to a wealth of different venues that are ideal places to hold events of all sizes, if you time it right, meeting and event attendees can enjoy the annual Iowa State Fair, a multi-day extravaganza celebrating “all things farming.”

The Amana Colonies are also a must-see destination, just northwest of Iowa City. These seven villages that stretch along a 17-mile loop were established as German religious communes in 1855. Today, the Amana Colonies are well preserved villages that offer a glimpse into the unique culture of the original settlers.

Of course, the Mississippi River has played a significant role in Iowa’s history. And Dubuque, located on the shores of the Mississippi River, offers an idyllic location to host gatherings of all types. The vast riverfront development includes many venues that provide visitors with an up close experience with this majestic river. Dubuque’s Grand River Center, a beautiful limestone and glass structure, situated along the Mississippi River offers an expansive meeting and conference facility and is adjacent to entertainment venues, lodging and gaming options.

If a youthful, artsy vibe is appealing, Iowa City may be the perfect option. Thanks in part to the energetic University of Iowa campus, Iowa City is filled with everything from live-music venues and swanky cocktail lounges to modern hotels and a state-of-the-art convention center. In addition, the city spills across both sides of the Iowa River, offering ample outdoor walking opportunities.

For more ideas, go to traveliowa.com

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KANSAS

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While Kansas may be synonymous with yellow brick roads and wicked witches, it is the state's stunning vistas of amber waves of grain that truly capture what Kansas is all about. And while the state boasts limitless horizons, it also features several wonderful cities and towns waiting to welcome meeting and event attendees. From the fantastic space museum in Hutchinson to the indie music clubs of Lawrence, you will find Kansas to be culturally diverse and welcoming.

The city of Wichita is Kansas' largest metropolitan area and boasts more than 8,000 hotel rooms and over 200,000 square feet of exhibition space in the city's convention center. Additional large scale event venues include the INTRUST Bank Arena and the Hartman Arena, both of which are ideal spaces for corporate functions and trade shows.

And when it's time to relax and unwind, Wichita offers everything from awe-inspiring performing arts centers to classic museums and memorable comedy clubs that will keep attendees coming back for more. To celebrate the city's historical significance, Wichita's historic all-brick Old Town is ideal for shopping, eating and learning more about the area's history.



Another favorite Kansas city that can play host to meetings and events of all sizes is Topeka. As the capital of Kansas, Topeka offers many sights and memorable experiences. The hottest area of the city is the NOTO arts district which is complete with eclectic shops, galleries and restaurants. Some additional "must see" sights include the beautiful state capitol, the Kansas Museum of History, which is packed with Kansas stories, and the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site. And while entertainment options abound in Topeka, the city is also home to wonderfully unique venue options and convention-style hotels, as well as an expansive convention center and other convention facilities that can meet the needs of various groups.

For more ideas, go to travelks.com

5 OUTINGS PERFECT FOR YOUR GROUP

- 1 No need to be Tiger Woods to have a good time at **Topgolf** in Overland Park. This futuristic driving range allows users to track where their balls land and compete against one another in several entertaining games. Giant targets and balls with microchips make it fun for everyone.
- 2 Explore the 35,000-square-foot **Flint Hills Discovery Center** located in downtown Manhattan, Kan. This culture and science museum immerses visitors within the wonder and beauty of the Flint Hills. The facility offers 10,000 square feet of interactive exhibits and exciting temporary exhibitions, as well as a one-of-a-kind theater experience and prairie-inspired outdoor plazas.
- 3 Take a walk on the wild side with a trip to the **Rolling Hills Zoo** in Salina. Come face-to-face with a majestic snow leopard, an Indian rhino, a curious orangutan, an ornery aardvark or many of the other 100+ species of wildlife that make their home at the zoo. In addition, explore the adjacent museum that shows you detailed exhibits of the natural habitats of animals found throughout the world.
- 4 Visit the **Botanica Wichita Gardens** where you can explore butterfly gardens and koi ponds, in addition to the 30 themed gardens, such as the Shakespeare Garden that features plants and flowers representative of the Elizabethan era. The 18-acre park features more than 4,000 species of plants.
- 5 Hit the kitchen at the **Culinary Center of Kansas City**, where groups can learn recipes from experts in cooking tutorials — or face off in Chopped-style fashion to create masterpiece meals.



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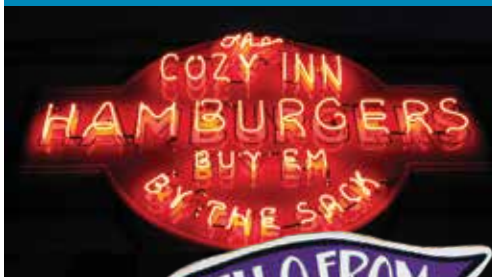


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COURTESY OF MEET MINNEAPOLIS



Is Minnesota truly the land of 10,000 lakes? You betcha! In fact, Minnesota is known for an inherent diversity in the state. Certainly, visitors can venture to outstate locales that will entertain and delight meeting and event attendees with the plethora of recreational activities and gorgeous nature adventures. But Minnesota also offers a wealth of vibrant metro areas — from St. Cloud to Duluth to the Twin Cities — that provides access to arts, pop culture, major sporting events, shopping and dining.

The state is an ideal spot for meeting and event planners looking for ways attendees can work some and play some. Some visitors come to Minnesota with one goal in mind — to experience the Mall of America. Other planners select Minnesota because of the unique historical sightseeing throughout the state.

And when it's time to get down to work, Minnesota features plenty of options for hosting memorable meetings and events. With excellent outdoor opportunities, a rich history, exceptional indoor attractions and thousands of square feet of meeting space, St. Cloud is the place for great meeting and event getaways. The people here have a style and attitude that are quietly conducive to escaping big city life.

Southern Minnesota boasts a mix of historic river towns, pastoral gems and various oddball attractions, including the Spam Museum and the world's largest twine ball. River towns feature delightful inns and B&Bs, as well as charming loft-style hotels that are ideal for smaller gatherings.

Likewise, northern Minnesota offers more resort-style getaways and is essentially an outdoor playground for nature enthusiasts. As one of the busiest ports in the country, Duluth is also a hot spot for trendy locales that will leave a lasting impression for all.

Of course, the Twin Cities are teeming with cultural, entertainment, sports and outdoor activities aplenty. In addition, the metropolitan area features all types of venue options — from the Minneapolis Convention Center to award-winning museums to boutique style hotels that boast fine dining and award-winning lodging options.

For more ideas, go to exploreminnesota.com

TOP TEAM BUILDING

Ever wanted to “solve that puzzle” or “spin the wheel?” If so, make it a reality at **Game Show Battle Room** in Minneapolis where you and your team compete in games such as Name That Price, Friendly Feud and Wheel of Phrases. Events can accommodate groups up to 64 people.

Does your group need to work out some aggression? What better way than with a Nerf battle or a round of laser tag? **Tactical Urban Combat** offers both at their Mall of America location. Nerf rivals blast foam balls at up to 80mph; enough to feel it but not hard enough to injure or bruise. Teams compete in games of elimination and capture the flag.

Explore your creative side with an afternoon at **Art Bar 39** in Alexandria, which offers classes where you can create a masterpiece. Art Bar provides all of the materials and guests can choose to create a painting, wood sign or ceramic piece. Groups can bring in their own refreshments to enjoy during the creative experience.



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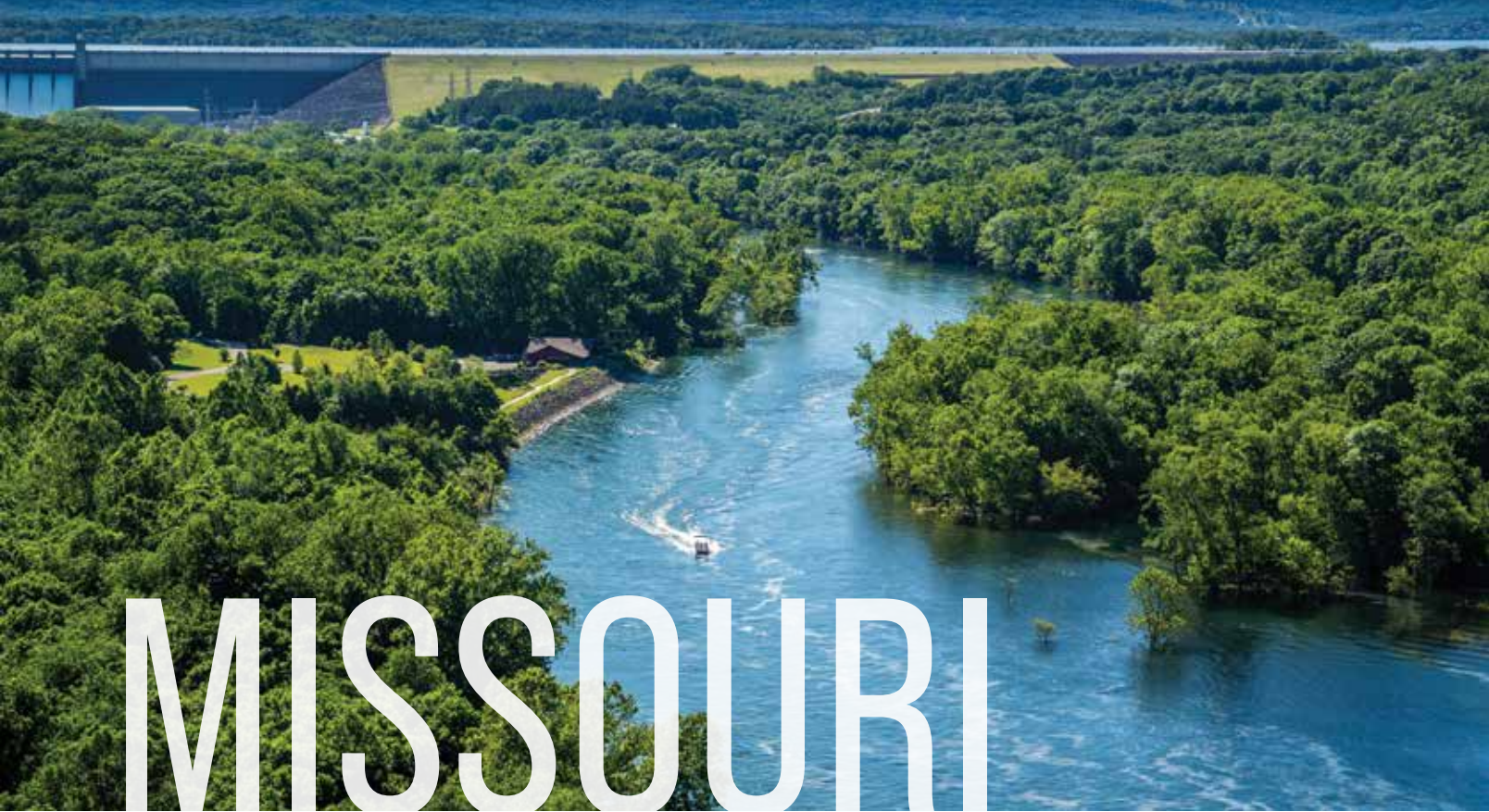


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MISSOURI



Considered a Midwest gem within meeting and event circles, the meetings arena in the St. Louis region is first rate — a blend of America's small town atmosphere and big-city amenities, with lifestyles and activities for everyone. As a modern, thriving community, St. Louis offers a complete and thorough network of meeting and event services. It is a constant focus of the community to enhance these services, as befits a modern community still growing and diversifying.

St. Louis also is a premier meeting destination because it is centrally located and offers over 250 daily departures and service to 75 non-stop destinations via its international airport. In addition, the compact convention corridor is walkable, making it easy to connect with colleagues throughout downtown. St. Louis boasts a wonderful array of sites that will keep meeting attendees engaged including the Gateway Arch, the Great Plains' own Eiffel Tower, as well as the 1,300-acre Forest Park, a center-of-the-city park that is larger than New York's Central Park, and the award-winning St. Louis Zoo.

For many meeting and event professionals, executing a memorable gathering — small or large, simple or elaborate — can depend on the venue. Luckily Kansas City, Mo., offers a plethora of splendid meeting locales — complete with beautiful décor and wonderful accoutrements that surprise and delight at every turn.



Kansas City has earned a reputation for offering some of the best barbecue eateries in the country, with dozens of joints throughout the city playing host to barbecue aficionados. In addition, bubbling fountains and blaring jazz grace the city's environs, adding to the city's cool vibe. And for a destination that includes killer scenery, entertainment a plenty and accommodations for most group sizes, check out Branson. With a 220,000-square-foot convention center, not to mention luxe spas and amazing golf courses, this city offers just the wow factor you may need to entice your attendees back.

For more ideas, go to [visitmo.com](https://www.visitmo.com)

A photograph of the Springfield, Missouri skyline at sunset. The image shows a large, multi-story building with many windows on the left, and a smaller building with a sign that says "HISTORY MUSEUM" in the middle ground. The sky is a mix of orange and blue.

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With vast fields of dinosaur remains to Native American culture to the small towns founded by hardy settlers, Nebraska is teeming with history. The state's two "main" cities, Lincoln and Omaha, offer vibrant and artful experiences for visitors.

Omaha is filled with charming sites and experiences. From the Old Market neighborhood, to the booming updated riverfront, as well as ample eateries and a lively music scene, Omaha is an up and coming Midwestern town. Known as a haven for "foodies," Omaha is also a haven for Fortune 500 companies, earning the title as being in the nation's top 10 for billionaires and Fortune 500 corporations.

And perhaps this may come as a surprise, but Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium is consistently ranked as one of the world's best zoos and is home to the world's largest indoor desert and America's largest indoor rainforest. And while Omaha's attractions will leave memorable impressions, the city's wealth of state-of-the-art meeting venues will also enhance any convention, tradeshow or general meeting.

While many people think Nebraska is synonymous with cornfields and prairies, the city of Lincoln breaks this stereotype thanks to its vibrant art and nightlife scene. Home to the University of Nebraska, Lincoln is also a college town which adds to the vibrant feel of the region.

A few miles outside of Lincoln is the Lancaster Event Center, which offers state-of-the-art facilities for conventions, tradeshows and events of various sizes. And if staying closer to the center of the city is more ideal, downtown Lincoln features many hotel and venue options to choose from. And when not participating in work-related or tradeshow activities, attendees can take in a collegiate sporting event and watch one of the University of Nebraska's athletic teams compete.

And if a smaller Nebraska town is more appealing, check out Grand Island, a town that comes bursting to life each spring when thousands of sandhill cranes converge on a critical sliver of threatened habitat just south of the city limits.

For more ideas, go to [visitnebraska.com](https://www.visitnebraska.com)



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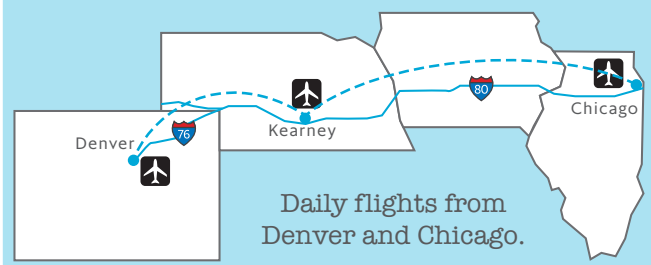
Kearney is typically home to more than 1,350 events. Everything from large conferences to state and regional sporting events as well as a number of smaller professional and educational meetings come to town every year. The reason is simple. In Kearney you'll find a combination of facilities, service, and small-town comfort that just isn't available anywhere else in the Midwest.

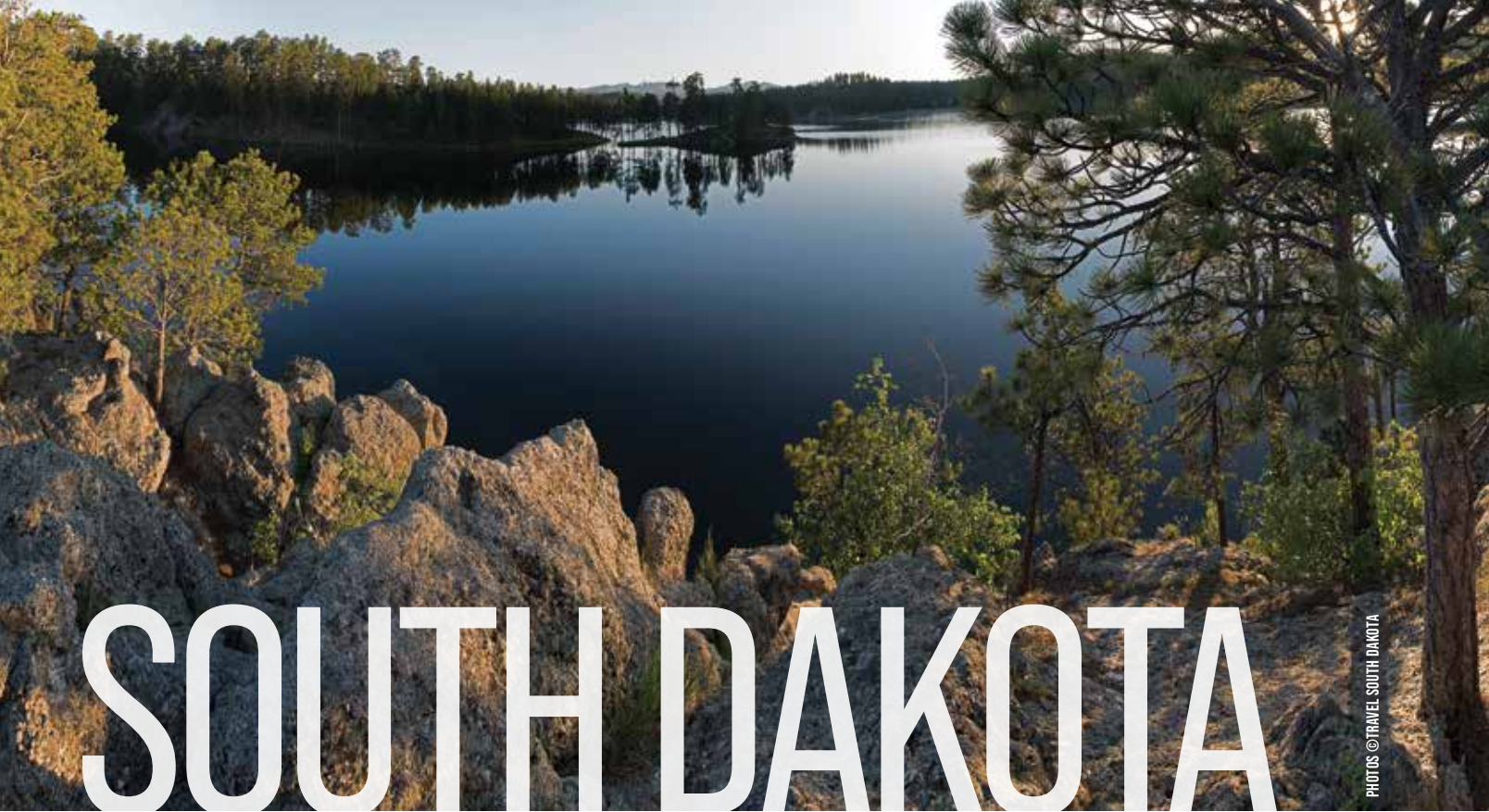
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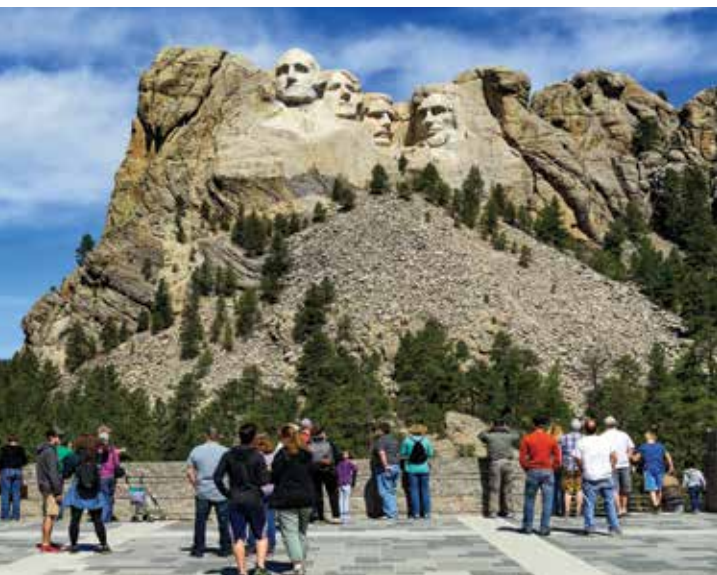


PHOTOS ©TRAVEL SOUTH DAKOTA

SOUTH DAKOTA



©CHAD COPPES/TRAVEL SOUTH DAKOTA



As South Dakota's largest city, Sioux Falls lives up to its name at the spot that the Big Sioux River plunges through the nearby rock formations. And while the natural beauty of Sioux Falls is evident at the picturesque Falls Park, the city also offers many other interesting areas that meeting attendees can explore.

The Old Courthouse Museum is an historic 1890's gem featuring three floors of changing exhibits, and during the summer, Levitt at the Falls hosts up to 50 free concerts in a variety of music genres. And Sioux Falls' Sculpture Walk, an exhibit of unique and memorable outdoor sculptures displayed year-round, is not to be missed.

In addition to more than 60 hotels in Sioux Falls that feature various accommodations for conventions, meetings and other gatherings, the city features the Denny Sanford PREMIER Center, which is an expansive venue that can host conventions, concerts, meetings, sporting events and banquets.

The Sioux Falls Convention Center is attached to the PREMIER Center and features exhibit spaces, ballroom space, and 13 meeting rooms. In addition to Sioux Falls, there are plenty of other urban gems eager to host a meeting or event. Take Rapid City, for example. Downtown, you'll find The Monument, Rapid City's 250,000 square-foot premier event center, is undergoing a major expansion. Upon completion, The Monument will offer nearly 500,000 square feet of meeting and event space.

Nearby, you'll find Wounded Knee — the Museum, which depicts the 1890 massacre between Native Americans and the 7th Cavalry, and D.C. Booth National Fish Hatchery & Archives, which includes the largest collection of fisheries artifacts but also offers a garden space that is available for rent.

Albeit small, Pierre, offers eight hotels with a total of 22 meeting rooms and event spaces. But as the capital of the state, Pierre also provides unique experiences for visitors including the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center, a completely underground exhibit space, and the state capitol building.

For more ideas, go to travelsouthdakota.com





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SOUTH DAKOTA



PHOTOS © TRAVEL WISCONSIN

WISCONSIN



From the cow-speckled farmland to the deep rustic woods to its craggy cliffs along Lake Michigan, Wisconsin has a ton to offer. Not only can meeting attendees soak in art, culture and entertainment in Madison and Milwaukee, but other locales such as the Fox Cities and Waukesha offer great options for meetings and events.

While Milwaukee has long been known as a town of polka dances, brewskis and baseball games, the city is also a hip and cool spot for eating, leading-edge shopping enclaves and entertainment aplenty. During a typical summer, lakeside festivals with various themes delight and entertain nearly each weekend. Of course, no visit to Milwaukee would be complete without a Miller Brewery Tour or exploring the Harley-Davidson plant.

And when it comes to venues for meetings and events, Milwaukee has it all — from expansive convention venues that can hold thousands of attendees to more intimate soirees at such historic gems as The Pfister Hotel. Whether it's the Wisconsin Center convention complex, the Miller High Life Theatre or the Harley-Davidson Museum, Milwaukee is home to a plethora of hotels, sports facilities and one-of-a-kind attractions.

Known as a dynamic meetings destination, Madison's claim to fame is its Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Monona Terrace convention center, located on the shores of Lake Monona, as well as the Alliant Energy Center campus. As a true college town, Madison is considered the most walkable city, as well as the most environmentally friendly city. While being Wisconsin's state capital, Madison is teeming with an eclecticism that makes everyone feel at home.

Madison is a vibrant, friendly city that is experiencing exponential growth, resulting in new hotels, new venues and updated infrastructure that will further enhance the city's appeal.

And throughout the outskirts of Wisconsin you'll even find accommodations that offer amenities right on the property like lakeside lodges, ski resorts, indoor water parks, casinos and golf resorts — making an event a one-stop experience for all.



For more ideas, go to meetinwisconsin.com or wisconsinmeetings.com

5 OUTINGS FOR GROUPS

Gather your team and your clients for a fresh-air escape into Wisconsin's beautiful outdoors. These warm weather months offer plenty of options, many of which are set up to host corporate groups.

WINGRA BOATS, MADISON AREA

We all know the best way to experience a lakefront city is by water. Madison's Wingra Boats has locations on lakes Monona, Mendota and Wingra with rental options that include kayaks, canoes, paddleboards and more. Group rentals of 10 or more boats will knock your rental rate down 20%. For casual conversation, opt for a pontoon rental, which holds up to 12 people.

MILFORD HILLS HUNT CLUB, JOHNSON CREEK

Situated on roughly 500 acres of stunning upland bird hunting with more than 13 fields, Milford Hills offers customized experiences for corporate groups. Your group can enjoy fine dining and upland hunting or sporting clays and team building exercises.

SAFARI LAKE GENEVA, LAKE GENEVA

We all have time for a little fun, right? Even better, this type of fun includes an up-close interaction with Bactrian camels, Grant's zebras, emus, water buffalo and a handful of other creatures waiting for a bucket of grain. Safari Lake Geneva, located just a few miles from downtown, is great for a little



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retreat with the crew. The drive-through experience allows visitors to see and touch these beautiful animals from the comfort of your own car.

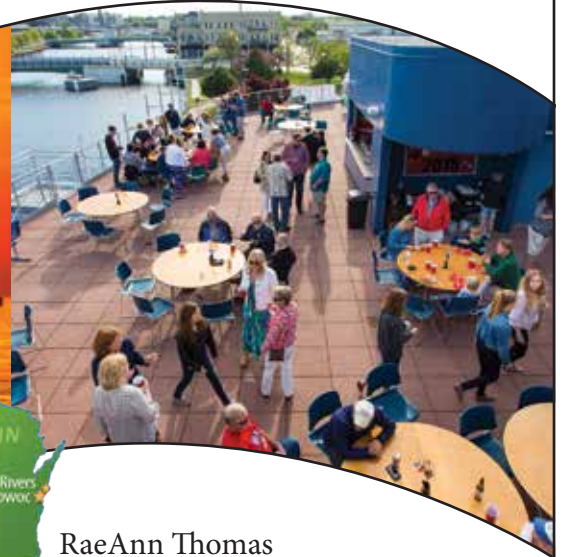
WILDERNESS RESORT ZIP LINING, WISCONSIN DELLS

For those that are a bit more daring, check out the Wilderness Canyon Zip Line in Wisconsin Dells. The tour is open year-round and is a popular option for corporate groups and team building. The Lost Canyon zip line takes visitors 60 feet in the air and spans six towers.

HIKE AROUND DEVIL'S LAKE, BARABOO

Devil's Lake via the West Bluff is considered one of the best hiking trails in the state. The 4.7-mile loop trail has an elevation gain of 997 feet and is considered a moderately difficult hike. The views of the glassy, azure lake are certainly worth the effort. The state park offers several shelters — including the newly renovated Red Oak Shelter — for group rentals that can be reserved online.

Come immerse yourself in the coastal cities of Lake Michigan, Manitowoc & Two Rivers, where we invite your group to "Connect on the Coast". Our scenic shores are filled with rich maritime history, the natural beauty of lush gardens and beaches, picturesque rivers and falls and cultural attractions that will highlight your time here on the coast and provide unique, and exciting venues to host your next meeting.



RaeAnn Thomas

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MEET WAUKESHA PEWAUKEE

Host to lively meetings.

Waukesha Pewaukee is a convenient location to meet between Milwaukee and Madison (off I-94) within southeast Wisconsin's Lake Country. Meeting planners will find more than 100,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including newly renovated spaces at The Ingleside Hotel and recent updates at the Milwaukee Marriott West. With 1,200+ guestrooms, complimentary parking and many options for post-meeting activities, planners can make their meetings a success while keeping attendees entertained during their stay.

The Ingleside Hotel offers a refreshing change of pace from conventional meeting and conference destinations. Business events are special with trails for hiking and wide-open spaces for team building outside. The hotel offers 192 guest rooms and over 40,000 square feet of flexible banquet and meeting space as well as many amenities.

The recently renovated Milwaukee Marriott West offers 281 guestrooms and suites with generous amenities. The 10,000 sq. ft. of state-of-the-art event space is ideal for receptions, special events, business meetings, conferences and tradeshows. Don't miss BLVD Kitchen & Bar an American Bistro experience.

Waukesha Pewaukee offers more than 25 activities for team building. Choose from outdoor recreation, golf, hands on workshops, indoor adventure parks, axe throwing or brewery and wine experiences. Learn more about our on-site and promotional complimentary meeting services that the Waukesha Pewaukee Convention & Visitor Bureau offers groups.



Waukesha Pewaukee Convention & Visitors Bureau

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Meet Outdoors & More

Times have changed the way we meet, but not the way we help you meet.

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Conveniently situated along I-94 between Milwaukee and Madison, and just a short drive from Chicagoland, Green Bay and the Fox River Valley.

Treat your guests to best in class meeting space at the new Brookfield Conference Center. The Connect Ballroom features 18,000 sq. ft. of modular meeting space. The 6,000 sq. ft. Collaborate Ballroom can also be divided and is well-suited for smaller events. The Celebration Atrium was designed with pre-function gatherings in mind, and the outdoor Celebration Plaza provides the perfect backdrop for cocktail parties and receptions.

All work and no play? Not a chance. Brookfield is home to the best shopping, dining and recreation in Wisconsin. Your guests will enjoy outdoor recreation, spas, first to market restaurants and retail, all within minutes of your conference.

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Rotary Botanical Gardens



Holiday Inn Express/Janesville Conference Center



The Venue

UNIQUE & MEMORABLE MEETINGS IN JANESVILLE, WISCONSIN

Along with a great location, Janesville features a variety of versatile meeting venue options including one-of-a-kind natural and historical locations that are sure to make your meeting or special event distinctive and unforgettable.

From meetings held in locations filled with a rich history such as the Rock County Historical Society's Lincoln-Tallman House or the Janesville Armory, to meetings surrounded by nature at the award-winning Rotary Botanical Gardens, to meetings held in a conference center with state-of-the-art technology, Janesville offers an impressive assortment of options. If you're looking for a fun and unique meeting venue you may also want to consider one of our breweries, wineries, our beautiful performing arts center or even a local farm.

Our selection of spaces can accommodate meetings ranging in size from 10 to 1,300 attendees. Our convenient location provides lots of transportation options to make planning even easier. Janesville is located directly off of I-39/90, less than one hour from major travel hubs Milwaukee, Madison and Rockford, IL, and less than 2 hours from Chicago, IL.

We know meeting and event planners also need diverse venues and entertainment for evening receptions and group activities. Luckily, Janesville offers alluring venues to suit groups of all kinds.

You will find a truly special experience for your group at O'Riley & Conway's Irish Pub.

It doesn't just offer fantastic Irish fare and fresh seafood, it hosts private parties and tasting events in the Twisted Chimney room. With room for up to 55 guests, this space offers great seating for conversation, as well as its own bar.

If you need a dinner for making deals or for board relations, Lark is the place to land. Locally-sourced, seasonal ingredients drive the menu with both small plate and entree items, not to mention the plethora of diverse cocktail mixology. Quiet, contemporary, and appealing to all the senses, Lark offers a backdrop for creative discussions.

Give your attendees the "In Wisconsin" experience with catering from the Milwaukee Grill. Wisconsin Cheese Curds and the all-around Best Fish Fry are staples of the state, and your group will love them too. Pair with local brewery offerings for a "Taste of Wisconsin" evening.

Rest assured that during your visit you can expect to be treated to our friendly Midwestern hospitality while enjoying comfortable, clean accommodations, low costs and no fees for parking.

Our staff at the Janesville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is here to help you every step of the way, from welcome packets and nametags to sanitizer stations and signage, to assisting you and your guests in locating the perfect venue, pavilion or overnight accommodations. Our services to you are completely complimentary.



JANESVILLE AREA
Convention & Visitors Bureau

Janesville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

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A Variety of Meeting Options

Charming historic meeting locations, lovely natural settings and traditional venues

Pictured: Carriage Barn at the Rock
County Historical Society

When you're ready to meet, we're ready to host you! Janesville, Wisconsin's Great Outside offers a variety of meeting spaces and a wide selection of hotels, restaurants and attractions, including many affordable options that provide you with great value. Janesville is easily accessible - right off of I-39/90. **Planners - call today and be sure to ask how you can earn money back when you hold your meeting in Janesville.**

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JANESVILLE

Wisconsin's Great Outside



Fox Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau

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MAKE 2021 MEMORABLE IN THE FOX CITIES

The Fox Cities are the perfect destination for your next event.

After a year of virtual meetings, 2021 brings the opportunity to wow employees, clients, and other professionals with an in-person event at an unforgettable venue and destination. From nature-inspired venues to a plethora of leisure activities in vibrant downtowns, here are four reasons to host your next original event, retreat, or conference in the Fox Cities/Greater Appleton area of Wisconsin.

Unique Spaces and Places: Urban style and amenities mixed with one-of-a-kind natural wonders create memorable and awe-inspiring venues to impress your attendees. The Lodge at Bubolz Nature Preserve is the perfect place to spark creativity and escape the ordinary. Accommodating up to 250 people, its nature-inspired design elements and large wrap-around windows seamlessly blend Bubolz's 700 acres of unique outdoor habitats into modern interior amenities and event space. Stone Arch at Riverview Gardens is set atop a bluff overlooking the Fox River just minutes from downtown Appleton. Interior wood finishes blend into the expansive outdoor views through windows overlooking the Fox River, and the adjacent property features walking and biking trails.

Convenience: Located in East Central Wisconsin, Midwesterners will enjoy the easy drivability to the Fox Cities; the greater Appleton area lies about three hours north of Chicago or just over four hours east of the Twin Cities. Prefer to fly instead? Appleton is home to the third largest airport in Wisconsin. The

Appleton International Airport (ATW) serves northeast Wisconsin via four major airlines with nonstop services to 11 locations including Chicago, Detroit, and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Business to Leisure: The spirit of authenticity and creativity run deep in the Fox Cities, creating one of Wisconsin's finest regions for food, drink, art, and recreation. For those looking to learn something new, the History Museum at the Castle or a walk along the Fox Trot Trail offer opportunities to take in the remarkable history of the region. Boasting a robust food scene, you can find restaurants specializing in locally grown and freshly made dishes and authentic ethnic food experiences stemming from the area's diverse cultural influences. From Wisconsin Timber Rattler baseball games, to Broadway shows at the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, to shopping in our thriving downtowns, there is no shortage of activities for attendees to enjoy.

Health and Hygiene: Travel confidently knowing that Fox Cities event venues and lodging establishments continue to follow appropriate health and hygiene protocols in light of the pandemic. Our group sales managers can help you find the venue that best fits your group in accordance with distancing guidelines and they will also be a resource for information on the efforts our venues are taking to ensure the safety of guests. The Fox Cities are ready when the time is right for you.



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quite like it.

FOX CITIES EXHIBITION CENTER

Built into the hillside of a park in downtown Appleton, our Exhibition Center sets a new standard for modern, beautiful, and flexible event spaces. Thoughtfully designed to highlight our region's storied history, the Center's 38,000-square-foot interior is complemented by a 17,000-square-foot outdoor plaza. The possibilities are endless! *It's the perfect place to stage your original event experience.*



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