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# meetings

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## *Making a Difference*

Hotel legend Harris Rosen shows us that success should be shared



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# COASTAL CONNECTIONS

By Maria Lenhart

## Monterey and Santa Cruz provide idyllic environments for inspiration

TEAMBUILDING AT CHAMINADE RESORT & SPA,  
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

**W**hile within easy reach of San Francisco and Silicon Valley, Santa Cruz and Monterey are a world away. Offering a meditative environment in a glorious natural setting, the communities around Monterey Bay are where tech companies and other organizations go to rejuvenate and find inspiration.

However, this laid-back demeanor doesn't mean that groups won't find state-of-the-art infrastructure geared for serious business. Whether the choice is Santa Cruz, Aptos, Carmel, Carmel Valley, Monterey or Pacific Grove, a slew of recent and upcoming enhancements to venues and resort properties are giving the region more appeal than ever.

### Monterey County

The big news in downtown Monterey is the anticipated reopening this spring of the Monterey Conference Center, which has been closed since December 2015 for a \$60 million renovation. The transformed facility will be LEED certified and offer 40,000 square feet of meeting space accommodating up to 3,200 people.

"It's the same footprint as before, but it's being reconfigured to be more flexible," said Mark McMinn, vice president of sales for the Monterey County CVB. "Updating the technology was a major consideration as was bringing the outdoors in. We've created spaces with more natural light, including rooms with glass walls and more access to the outside."

Outdoor spaces at the conference center will include a main terrace overlooking the porte cochere and a reconfigured Jefferson Terrace, a rooftop garden that attaches to breakout space at the Portola Hotel & Spa. The hotel is also scheduled to complete a

property-wide renovation this spring.

Despite the temporary closure of the conference center, meetings business is booming in Monterey County, particularly from the tech sector, according to McMinn.

"It's not just Silicon Valley companies, but a wide spectrum that also includes agriculture tech as well as tech associations," he said. "The groups coming in are looking to create the future for their companies and associations. They are looking for retreat places that are not ordinary, places that are comfortable, interactive and engaging."

Monterey County is abundant with properties that are ideal for retreats, while also providing immersive experiences, he added.

"For example, Quail Lodge & Golf Club in Carmel Valley has the Range Rover Institute, which is great for teambuilding," he said. "Guests can drive Range Rovers through the golf course and over the mountains. At Carmel Valley Ranch, groups

LONE CYPRESS, MONTEREY COUNTY



QUAIL LODGE & GOLF CLUB, CARMEL VALLEY

can spend time with the beekeeper and in the organic garden.”

Also in Carmel Valley, Holman Ranch welcomes executive retreats at its historic hacienda-style lodge that was once a getaway for Charlie Chaplin and other stars of the silent movie era. The property also includes an estate winery, pool and landscaped grounds available for outdoor events.

In Pacific Grove, Asilomar Conference Grounds, an inspirational retreat property for over 100 years, encompasses 107 acres of protected forest and coastal dunes. The 313-room property offers 65,000 square feet of meeting space, some of it in banquet halls designed by Hearst Castle architect Julia Morgan, as well as outdoor barbecue areas, a large central meadow and expansive beach.

Another option for groups is to take over one or more of the small inn-like properties nestled among the pines in Carmel village, McMinn said.

“We’re seeing planners go for three or four different properties within walking distance of each other in Carmel,” he said. “Groups of 10 or 20 can stay together and have their own dynamic and then come

together for a central meeting.”

Among new retreat choices in Carmel is The Hideaway, formerly the Cobblestone Inn, which was acquired last year by The PlumpJack Group, a company known for wine production as well as restaurants and small resorts. The Hideaway reopened last year following a renovation that redesigned and updated its 24 rooms and suites.

The property, which offers a complimentary breakfast buffet as well as a nightly wine and cheese reception, has a large common area with a fireplace and a seating area for catered events and meetings.

There is also a central courtyard paved with stones from the Carmel River with lounge seating and a fire pit. For groups that need dedicated conference space, The Hideaway has a partnership with the Sunset Center located a block away.

“We’ve had several groups buy us out, which really works well for those who want absolute privacy for brainstorming and bonding,” said Roy Crane, general manager.

### Santa Cruz County

On the sunny northern side of Monterey Bay, Santa Cruz County is known for its surfing

beaches, redwood groves and New Age vibe. Groups meeting in the county will find a combination of superb conference facilities and opportunities for enjoying the local environment, according to Christina Glynn, communications director for Visit Santa Cruz.

“Whatever the goal of the meeting, it seems groups coming to Santa Cruz County understand that showcasing the spirit of the destination, outside the four walls of the meeting space, inspires attendees and encourages creativity, collaboration and performance,” she said.

With Silicon Valley just an hour’s drive away, Santa Cruz County has become a preferred go-to destination for tech executives looking to relax and recharge in a convenient but contrasting environment, she added.

“Santa Cruz echoes the innovative pulse of Silicon Valley, but the small meeting facilities offer juxtaposition to the intentional campus experience of major tech companies,” she said.

Among popular retreat options is the 156-room Chaminade Resort & Spa, a 300-acre property spread along forested hills overlooking Santa Cruz and Monterey Bay. Chaminade, which includes IACC-approved conference facilities as well as a full-service spa, pool and hiking trails, recently completed a \$7.9 million guest room redesign. Selected rooms and suites now feature meditation alcoves with forest views, soothing lighting, Japanese Zabuton and Zafu cushions, and flameless candles.

At the same time, Chaminade introduced a Mindful Meetings package that includes a guided meditation at the start and end of each day’s meeting, yoga stretching breaks, guided afternoon hikes, discounts on massages and special menu and tea selections.

“With our close proximity to Silicon Valley—the epicenter of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit—many of our guests are seeking out mindful programs and amenities whether traveling for business or leisure,” said Kevin Herbst, general manager.

A few miles south of Santa Cruz in Aptos, Seascape Beach Resort is another favorite conference and retreat destination for tech companies and other organizations. Along with 17,000 square feet of meeting space, the recently renovated cliff-top resort overlooking Monterey Bay offers 285 suites and two-bedroom beach villas, three pools, a ropes course, a championship golf course and an award-winning restaurant. Specializing in groups ranging from 10 to 200 in size, Seascape also features a full range of teambuilding activities and catered events,

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ROARING CAMP RAILROAD, FELTON

including a clambake on the beach with volley ball, sand castle building competitions and other options.

One of Santa Cruz's newest properties, the Hotel Paradox, part of Marriott's Autograph Collection, is a downtown hotel that celebrates the region's forested environment with such elements as a front desk made from a fallen eucalyptus tree, tree stump side tables, reclaimed wood paneling and river rock shower floors with rain showerheads. Its 4,400-square-foot Sequoia Ballroom is the largest ballroom in downtown Santa Cruz.

Just a few miles inland from the coast, the Santa Cruz Mountains and its small communities of Felton, Brookdale, Ben Lomond and Boulder Creek are also places for groups

to find inspiration from the region's natural beauty. In Felton, Roaring Camp Railroad features excursions on a vintage steam train through towering redwood groves. It also offers forested picnic areas and Bret Harte Hall, a versatile 6,100-square-foot venue built in the 1880s that opens onto a covered reception area and event lawn.

Currently closed for a major renovation with a completion date not yet set, the historic Brookdale Inn & Spa, which opened in 1922 as the Brookdale Lodge, is another local property conducive for retreats. Along with the famous Brook Room, a restaurant with a stream running through it, the Inn offers several secluded meeting spaces and 46 guest rooms.

With its abundance of small farms and wineries, Santa Cruz provides many opportunities to enjoy locally sourced foods, Glynn said. Among the most popular experiences is the Downtown Santa Cruz Farmers Market, which operates on Wednesday afternoons year-round and offers produce, artisanal food products, live music, cafe seating and guided tours for groups.

For visitors with an interest in learning more about the region's unique blend of coastal and mountain landscapes, the

Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History is a good place to start. Located in a 1915 Carnegie Library above Seabright State Beach, the recently renovated museum is available for event rental and features exhibits on the native Ohlone people as well as on local ecosystems. **m**



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