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Best of 2018

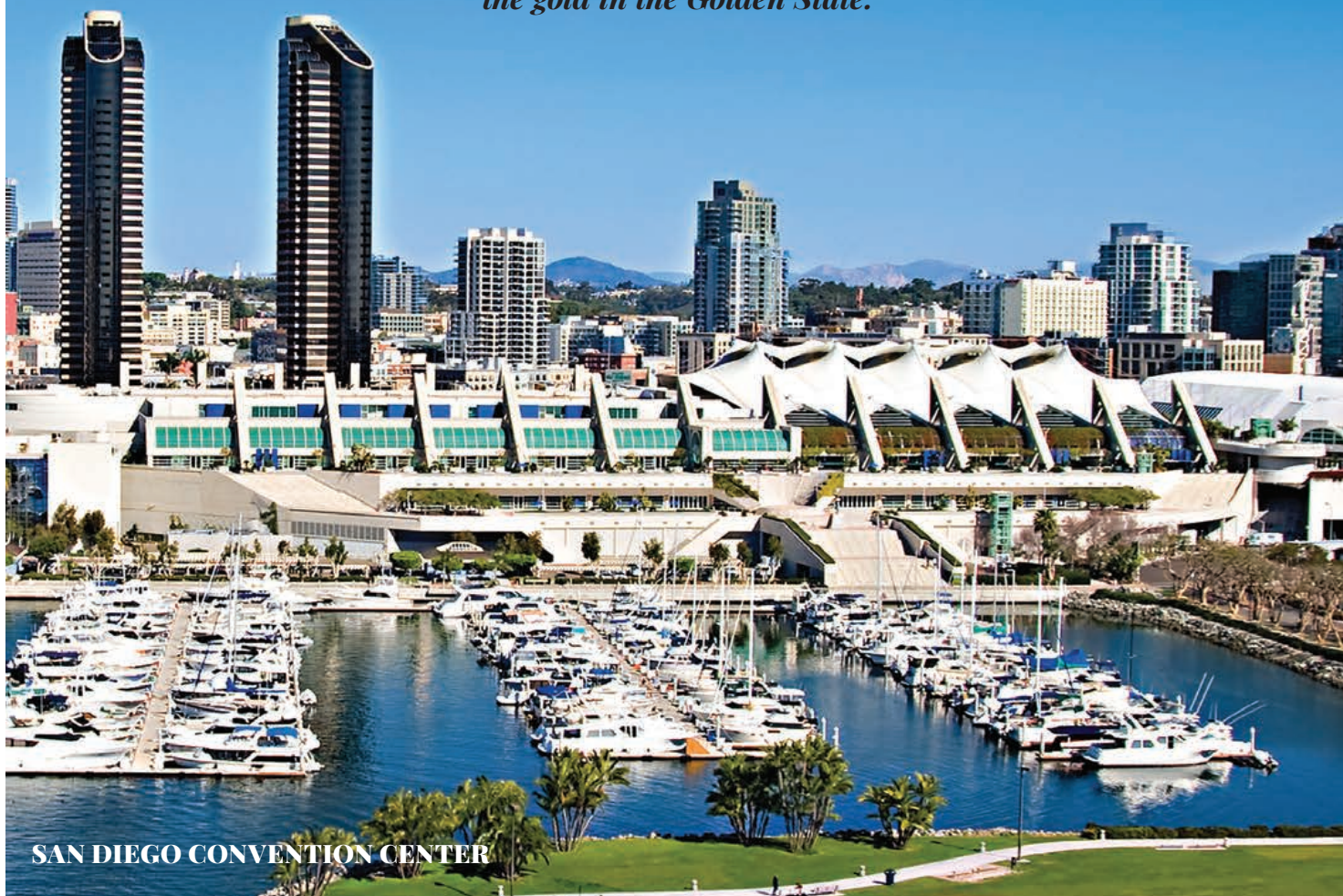
26 categories including: BEST CONFERENCE/CONVENTION CENTER, WINERY WITH MEETING SPACE, RENTAL PROVIDER/EVENT DÉCOR, NEW VENUE, ATTRACTION/THEME PARK, TEAM-BUILDING ACTIVITY & MORE!



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BEST OF 2018

BEST OF THE BEST

These properties, vendors and activities take the gold in the Golden State.



SAN DIEGO CONVENTION CENTER

THE ENVELOPE, PLEASE. Yes, the moment has come to reveal the 26 winners and runners-up in our second annual Best of 2018 readers' choice awards. And, before the get-off-the-stage music plays, we want to thank all our readers for taking the time to vote. In a state that has such abundant excellence across all categories of venues and services, choosing which top the list is no easy task.

By Janet Fullwood, Dani Heinemeyer and Shelley Levitt

PHOTOS: SAN DIEGO CONVENTION CENTER CORPORATION;
HILTON SAN DIEGO BAYFRONT

BEST DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATION (AREA WITH POPULATION UNDER 500,000)

Winner:

VISIT SANTA BARBARA

santabarbaraca.com | 805.966.9222

Voters in this poll are far from the only ones to find the American Riviera beguiling. With its iconic red-tile roofs, 110 miles of coastline, walkable downtown, extraordinary dining and over 200 nearby wineries, demand for lodging in this surfside city exceeded the available rooms. Santa Barbara has responded with new hotels, including the just-opened Hotel Californian and the upcoming Miramar Beach Montecito. There's also a new museum, MOXI, The Wolf Museum of Exploration + Innovation, with stunning event space aplenty, and, for post-event imbibing, the hip and happening Funk Zone, where you can stroll from one boutique tasting room to another.

RUNNERS-UP» Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau; Riverside Convention & Visitors Bureau

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BEST BIG-CITY DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATION

Winner:

LOS ANGELES TOURISM & CONVENTION BOARD

discoverlosangeles.com | 800.366.6116

For the second year in a row, LA Tourism takes the top spot in this category. And, once again, the city shattered tourism records, with 47.3 million visitors injecting an all-time-high \$21.9 billion into the local economy, an increase of 6.3 percent, over 2015's tally. That upward trend will no doubt continue with the city welcoming two NFL teams, the new George Lucas museum (set to open in 2021) and the 2028 Olympic Games.

RUNNERS-UP» San Diego Tourism Authority; San Francisco Travel Association

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HILTON SAN DIEGO BAYFRONT

BEST CONFERENCE/CONVENTION CENTER UNDER 100,000 SQUARE FEET

Winner:

MONTEREY CONFERENCE CENTER

montereyconferencecenter.org
831.646.3388

The newly renovated conference center in one of California's most scenic cities can host as many as 3,200 participants. As a stand-alone facility it offers 40,000 square feet of flexible meeting and banquet space, including an exhibit hall that's over 30,000 square feet. The Monterey Conference Connection adds the next-door Monterey Marriott and Portola Hotel & Spa to the mix for a total of 80,000 square feet of flexible meeting space and 720 hotel rooms. In keeping with Monterey's sustainability commitment, the conference center is on its way to earning LEED Platinum Certification. The \$60 million spent on renovating the conference center is apparent in its state-of-the-art technology, flexibility and beauty.

RUNNERS-UP» Riverside Convention Center; Oxnard Performing Arts & Convention Center

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BEST CONFERENCE/CONVENTION CENTER OVER 100,000 SQUARE FEET

Winner:

SAN DIEGO CONVENTION CENTER

visitsandiego.com | 619.525.5000

San Diego's convention center boasts an astonishing 72 meeting rooms, two ballrooms,

and over 525,000 square feet of exhibit hall space in the sprawling 2.6 million-square-foot building. In 2017, the convention center hosted large corporate events with groups including Intel and Best Buy. It also earned an impressive LEED Gold certification and began renovation on the iconic Sails Pavilion, a 90,000-square-foot glass-enclosed, column free space with sweeping views of downtown San Diego and the bay.

RUNNERS-UP» Los Angeles Convention Center; Anaheim Convention Center

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BEST DOWNTOWN MEETING VENUE OUTSIDE CONFERENCE OR CONVENTION CENTER

Winner:

HILTON SAN DIEGO BAYFRONT

hiltonsandiegobayfront.com | 619.564.3333

Located mere steps from San Diego's breathtaking waterfront and the San Diego Convention Center, this AAA Four Diamond Award-winning hotel boasts 165,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event space. The 34,000-square-foot Sapphire Ballroom is one of the largest pillar-free ballrooms in San Diego; for smaller events, look no further than the Hilton's chic boardrooms, poolside patio, or one of many outdoor terraces.

RUNNERS-UP» Los Angeles Music Center; The California Science Center

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with outdoor showers and, in some, soaking tubs and private patio gardens with fire pits. The award-winning day spa takes it cues from elements of farm and vineyard. Olive and rosemary body scrub, anyone?

RUNNERS-UP» *Resort at Squaw Creek; The Landing Resort & Spa*

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BEST OUTDOOR VENUE – SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Winner:
JAPANESE FRIENDSHIP GARDEN

niwa.org | 619.232.2780

Nestled in San Diego's historic Balboa Park, the 11.5-acre Japanese Friendship Garden offers a relaxing escape from city life. The garden's lush trees, tall bamboo, koi pond, waterfalls, and winding walkways provide an unforgettable backdrop to any celebration. Groups of up to 550 can enjoy the Upper and Lower Gardens, which include event spaces like the new 3,400-square-foot Inamori Pavilion, courtyard, reception plaza, exhibit hall, and more.

RUNNERS-UP» *Descanso Beach Club; The Huntington Library*

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BEST OUTDOOR VENUE – NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Winner:
GOLDEN GATE PARK VENUES

sfrecpark.org | 415.831.2700

San Francisco may offer urban sophistication, but a meeting here doesn't need to be confined indoors. Golden Gate Park, the city's 1,017-acre recreational gem, contains many outdoor venues large and small, from the romantic Chinese Pavilion accommodating up to 50 on an island in the middle of scenic Stowe Lake, to the famous Polo Field, capable of hosting concerts for up to 57,000 gyrating rock 'n' roll fans. In between are charming sites like the Fuchsia Dell, a tucked-away venue for up to 150 guests

outside the Conservatory of Flowers, and the Golden Gate Park Bandshell, seating up to 500 for presentations and events and offering stellar acoustics. Good to know: Nonprofits get a 50 percent break on the regular venue fee.

RUNNERS-UP» *Cornerstone Sonoma; Asilomar Conference Grounds*

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BEST SPORTS VENUE

Winner:
PETCO PARK

petcoparkevents.com | 619.795.5025

Have a literal field day with your (work) team at Petco Park. Located in the heart of San Diego's Gaslamp District and across the street from the convention center, Petco Park offers a homerun venue for groups ranging from 20 up to 40,000. The event options are endless: host concerts, festivals, or movie screenings on the ball field; receptions on the rooftop terrace; intimate dinners in the stadium's many clubhouse and restaurant venues.

RUNNERS-UP» *AT&T Park; Dodger Stadium*

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BEST NEW VENUE

Winner:
WALDORF ASTORIA BEVERLY HILLS

waldorfastoriabeverlyhills.com | 310.860.6666

When this long-awaited 12-story property opened its doors in June 2017, it did not disappoint. Luxury reigns here, from the personal concierge assigned to each guest, to the Rolls Royce house car that's available for complimentary jaunts into the nearby Golden Triangle. The spa is La Prairie, the restaurants by Jean-Georges Vongerichten. Each of the 170 rooms features floor-to-ceiling windows that open onto spacious private balconies. The best view is from the Rooftop Lounge, which is available for private events. Other meeting space includes the Astor Ballroom (capacity 200), the Waldorf Room (seats 50) and the

private dining room and patio at Jean-Georges Beverly Hills, which can accommodate parties of 20 to 200.

RUNNERS-UP» *Pendry San Diego; House of Blues, Anaheim*

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BEST RENOVATED VENUE

Winner:
PORTOLA HOTEL & SPA AT MONTEREY BAY

portolahotel.com | 888.222.5851

Guests may well gasp when they enter the lobby of the Portola; the giant living ficus trees that line the atrium are an awe-inspiring sight. Some \$6 million was spent on the renovation of the lobby and Jacks Monterey, the new lobby bar and restaurant. The AAA Four Diamond property, which was one of the first in the area to earn LEED certification, is adjacent to the Monterey Conference Center. Its own meeting and event space is expansive, including a ballroom that can accommodate 1,000 guests for a reception.

RUNNERS-UP» *Hotel Figueroa; Coronado Island Marriott Resort & Spa*

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BEST ATTRACTION/THEME PARK

Winner:
DISNEYLAND RESORT

disneymeetings.com | 714.520.7025

The mouse house continues to entrance park-goers of all ages. It upped the ante on high-end experiences with the opening of 21 Royal, an exclusive dining experience for up to 12 guests in what Walt had envisioned as a private residence. For large groups, with large budgets, it's possible to do a complete theme park buyout. And for an unforgettable party favor, consider hiring a Disney sketch artist who can do on-the-spot drawings of your guests' favorite Disney characters.

RUNNERS-UP» *San Diego Zoo; Monterey Bay Aquarium*