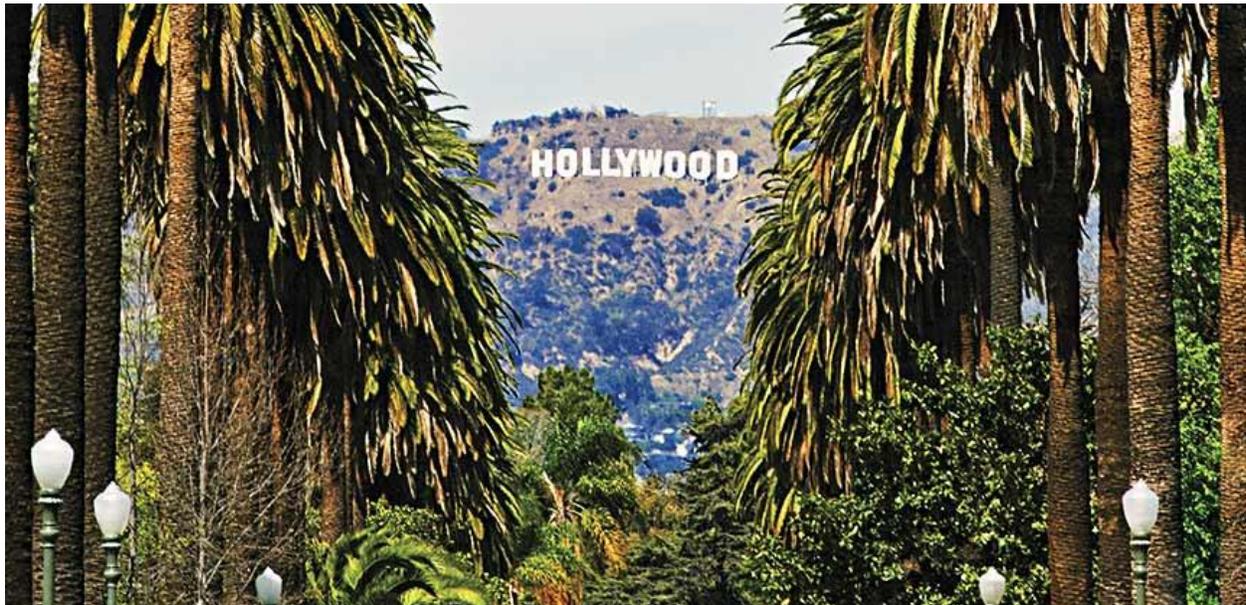


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## California

### *Golden Opportunities for Meetings*

By Karen Brost



There's a saying that's available on t-shirts, art prints and posters that says, "California is always a good idea." Judging by the popularity The Golden State has attained as a meeting destination, many planners and attendees would agree — and maybe even grab one of those t-shirts to take back home.

California is one of those versatile destinations where a group could meet over and over again, yet have a totally different experience each time. From San Jose all the way down the coast to San Diego, virtually every type of hotel, venue, setting and activity can be found here under the California sun.

## Monterey

When spectacular scenic beauty, history and sustainability are on the agenda, Monterey is a natural choice for meetings and events. Food and beverage also plays a starring role here, since there are more than three dozen wineries in the area, and the abundant farms in the Salinas Valley have earned Monterey County the nickname the "Salad Bowl of the World." When it comes to the fresh and local cuisine trend, it's hard to get better than that.

"Monterey County is the ideal location for corporate meetings and events," says Tammy Blount, president and CEO of the Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau. "Set on California's Central Coast, planners will find that our destination offers multiple options and activities for every group's size and budget. The county has a legacy of hosting

innovative meetings and provides a setting that inspires leaders to open minds and create new beginnings for their teams.”

Monterey is a “bucket list” destination for golfers, with 26 public and private courses, including the legendary Pebble Beach, being located in the area. It’s also a haven for nature-lovers. Monterey County has 99 miles of shoreline, and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is so expansive that at its center lies an underwater canyon that’s twice as deep as the Grand Canyon. Attendees can take a break and view the local sea life at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, a world-class facility that is home to 300,000 marine plants and animals and includes a million-gallon tank that portrays the open ocean. It also can be booked as a spectacular venue for private corporate events.

History buffs in the group will enjoy following in the footsteps of award-winning author John Steinbeck who was inspired by characters he met at the real Cannery Row in Monterey to write his popular novel by the same name. And here’s a bit of fun trivia: a young woman named Norma Jean (who later became known as Marilyn Monroe) was crowned “Artichoke Queen” in this area in 1948.

In response to the market’s demand for more flexible meeting space, the city of Monterey has begun a \$60 million renovation of the Monterey Conference Center (MCC). It is the largest capital improvement project in the city’s history. In addition to creating more flexible meeting space, the project also will give the MCC more usable prefunction space, and its technology and systems will be upgraded. Upon its completion, the project will give groups the opportunity to hold multiple meetings in a LEED-certified building. Construction got underway in December and a grand reopening is currently scheduled for spring 2017. The two hotels located adjacent to the MCC, the 379-room Portola Hotel & Spa and the Monterey Marriott, which has 319 rooms and 22 suites, will remain open during the construction period.

“Monterey’s scenic beauty and unique characteristics provide inspiration and enhance the desire of meeting planners to book their conferences in our extraordinary destination,” Blount explains “This renovation will provide the advanced facility sought by meeting planners to complement their memorable meeting and destination experience.”

## **San Jose**

As home to the busy Silicon Valley, it’s not surprising that San Jose offers excellent airlift. In addition to San Jose International Airport (SJC), the area also is served by the San Francisco and Oakland airports. Combined, the three airports offer 1,400 flights per day. As an added advantage for attendees, SJC offers free high-speed wireless Internet throughout the airport, and 25 percent of the seats have power outlets built in.

San Jose has a compact, walkable downtown with more than 200 dining and entertainment options, and it claims to be one of the safest, cleanest big cities in America. In addition to offering more than 90 hotels and the 367,000-sf San Jose McEnery Convention Center, the city has a variety of unique venues for private events, including historic theaters, museums, sports venues and the Happy Hollow Park and Zoo. The city also was the first to be selected to test Facebook’s new Wi-Fi service called Terragraph, which will be installed in the downtown area later this year.

Planners searching for a venue that reflects the Silicon Valley’s spirit of innovation may want to book an event at The Tech Museum of Innovation, a 132,000-sf venue that offers hundreds of exhibits in seven halls on three levels as well as an Imax Dome Theater and a rooftop terrace. The venue, which is within walking distance of the convention center and downtown San Jose hotels, defines itself as “the most inventive place on earth and a showcase of the latest blockbuster exhibits, high-tech gizmos and wondrous gadgets that continue to define Silicon Valley.”

Team San Jose has developed a unique planning service model. “Team San Jose’s one-stop sales solution gives you one contact to book your entire event in San Jose,” says Mark McMinn, director of sales and destination services for Team San Jose. “We provide all your destination needs from a CVB perspective as well as from a convention center perspective. We manage hotel room blocks and housing, convention center bookings and event services, customized food and beverage menus, marketing support and technically savvy special events.”

## San Francisco

North of Monterey and San Jose, the City by the Bay is known for its unique neighborhoods and thriving arts, cultural and food scenes.

The San Francisco Travel Association (SFTA), the destination marketing organization for the city, has introduced several unique partnerships among hotels that are designed to offer planners access to greater amounts of meeting space and guest rooms than a single hotel can provide. According to the SFTA, the Meetings Neighborhood Network Connections program makes it possible for planners to create “micro-citywide” conventions and events.

The San Francisco Downtown Connection includes four adjacent hotels — the Hilton San Francisco Union Square, Park 55 San Francisco — a Hilton Hotel, the Hotel Nikko San Francisco and the Handlery Union Square — all located in the city’s popular Union Square area. Among them, they offer nearly 200,000 sf of event space and up to 2,200 rooms on peak nights.

The Nob Hill Connection, located in an upscale, centrally located part of the city, consists of five luxury properties — the Fairmont San Francisco, Intercontinental Mark Hopkins San Francisco, Stanford Court San Francisco, The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco and the Scarlet Huntington. Combined with The Masonic event venue, this connection offers more than 170,000 sf of function space and up to 1,400 guest rooms on peak night.

Other Meetings Neighborhood Network Connections include the Union Square Alliance, which includes The Westin St. Francis and the Grand Hyatt San Francisco, and the SOMA One Connection (SOMA stands for South of Market) comprised of the Four Seasons Hotel San Francisco, San Francisco Marriott Marquis and Park Central Hotel San Francisco.

## Los Angeles

As California’s largest city by far, Los Angeles has plenty to offer meeting groups. Darren K. Green, senior vice president, sales, for the Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board explains, “One of LA’s major differentiators is our branding as the entertainment capital of the world. We truly roll out the red carpet for corporate meetings in a bounty of ways including our ability to offer unique ‘only-in-LA’ venues such as The Studios at Paramount and the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Additionally, getting around Los Angeles has become much more convenient thanks to our Metro system. Whether attendees are interested in seeing the stars along the legendary Hollywood Walk of Fame, enjoying the beach or exploring our booming culinary scene downtown, they can get there stress- and car-free with Metro.”

In 2015, LA attracted a record number of visitors from around the world — 45.5 million — and hosted 350 events at the Los Angeles Convention Center (LACC). But this is not a city that is content to rest on its laurels. Nearly 5,000 more hotel rooms are slated to be added between now and 2018. One of the most noteworthy developments, the 73-story Wilshire Grand Center, scheduled to open in 2017, will be the tallest skyscraper in LA. It will include the 900-room InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown hotel along with outdoor space and exterior plazas, restaurants, businesses and nightlife offerings.

Creativity just seems to be in the water in LA as is evidenced by the city's wide range of unique event venues. One is the Petersen Automotive Museum, which features a dramatic glass-and-steel contemporary design, a rooftop deck that delivers panoramic views of the Hollywood Hills and 50,000 sf of event space. The museum, which was completely redesigned in December, is dedicated to showcasing the history, industry and artistry of the automotive world and includes 22 galleries filled with interactive displays and exhibits.

Not to be outdone is the Frank Gehry-designed Walt Disney Concert Hall, which offers several spaces for private events. The venue's striking architecture features a series of stainless steel panels that mimic sails billowing in the wind. The main auditorium can seat more than 2,200 guests.

When it's time to give attendees the star treatment, The Dolby Theatre just might fit the bill (or the playbill as the case may be). The venue's 25,000-sf, art deco-style Ray Dolby Ballroom is the site of the annual Governors Ball, the star-powered gala that follows the Academy Awards ceremony each year. It can host up to 1,800 guests for a seated function and it has 10,000 sf of outdoor prefunction space that offers panoramic views of Hollywood, LA and the Pacific.

For a venue with a more rustic, Western-style ambience, there's Sunset Ranch Hollywood, the only horse ranch in the greater LA area. Promising "the best view in Hollywood," the ranch offers "Best View and BBQ" sunset trail rides and is available to host private events under the stars and the legendary Hollywood sign.

Being the home of Hollywood, LA has always had a magical appeal, but now there's a new kid in town: The Wizarding World of Harry Potter opened in April at Universal Studios Hollywood. It can host private events with up to 2,000 attendees who can explore Hogwarts castle, visit the shops of Hogsmeade and experience the wizardry of rides like the Flight of the Hippogriff and Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey.

Another new venue is scheduled to open in June. Being billed as "the only way to view LA," SkySpace LA will be California's tallest open-air observation deck and will offer panoramic, 360-degree views of the city from its location on floors 69 and 70 of the iconic U.S. Bank Tower in downtown Los Angeles. The venue, which will offer 3,500 sf of flexible space that can accommodate up to 350 guests, will be available for private corporate event bookings.

Coming in 2017 is the highly anticipated opening of the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, a six-story facility that will occupy the historic Wilshire May Company building next to the campus of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Being described as "the world's leading movie museum," the attraction will house the academy's massive collection of photographs, film and video assets, screenplays, posters and production and costume design drawings. It also will feature special event spaces and more than 1,400 special collections that showcase the work of film legends such as Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn, Alfred Hitchcock and John Huston.

The LACC is in the midst of a major modernization and expansion project that will increase its exhibit and function space from its current size of 870,000 sf to more than 1.2 million sf. The project, which is in its early stages, is being designed to attract larger conventions and add the capability to host multiple, large-scale events at one time. Construction will be done in two phases, with the final phase expected to be completed in 2020. Sustainability is an important priority for the expansion, and the design team is committed to ensuring that the project will meet the standards of a LEED Gold Certified facility. Plans also call for including an onsite hotel with at least 1,000 rooms in order to increase the number of hotel rooms available within walking distance of the convention center.

The team at the LA Tourism & Convention Board offers planners a full menu of support services, including advice on creating authentic, "only in LA" experiences and finding the right accommodations, facilities and venues for anything from small meetings to large citywide events. The organization's media relations team also can help planners generate buzz for their events by providing contacts for local media, press releases and access to a multimedia library.

## Anaheim

Already well known as the home of Disneyland Resort and Disney California Adventure Park, this city 30 miles south of LA has plenty of other unique event venues to consider, as well. The House of Blues, currently located in Downtown Disney, is relocating to a larger venue at the Anaheim GardenWalk dining, shopping and entertainment complex. The larger venue is scheduled to open this summer with an expanded main concert hall, an intimate theater called The Cambridge Room and a new VIP Foundation Room club.

The Anaheim Packing House, which was built in 1919 to serve as an orange and lemon packing house for Sunkist, has now been restored to serve as Orange County's first gourmet food hall. The building's original hardwood flooring and much of its authentic character have been preserved. The Packing House includes a large central atrium used for dining that is surrounded by more than two dozen cafés and kiosks, and a dining porch spans the length of the building.

Since the Anaheim Convention Center (ACC) opened in 1967, it has undergone six expansions to keep up with the growing demands of the meetings and conventions industry. The ACC is now embarking on its seventh expansion plan. Designed to add 200,000 additional sf of flexible meeting and event space, the project is slated for completion in the summer of 2017.

In Anaheim hotel news, Orange County's first JW Marriott is being built next to the Anaheim GardenWalk. With a projected opening date in 2018, the 12-story hotel will include 466 guest rooms.

## Irvine

Located 45 miles south of LA and 90 miles north of San Diego, Irvine is in an ideal position to offer meeting groups plenty of dining, entertainment and shopping opportunities. "America's safest big city is conveniently located in the center of Orange County and easily accessible by car or via John Wayne Airport," says Demea Metcalf, director of sales for Destination Irvine. "Our 16 Irvine hotels offer nearly 3,800 sleeping rooms and more than 138,000 sf of meeting space, ideal for corporate meetings of 10 to 1,200 people." John Wayne/Orange County Airport offers non-stop service to more than 20 cities across the U.S. as well as easy access to the area's hotels and attractions.

For offsite events, Irvine offers plenty of options such as Bowlmor Lanes, a hip, upscale bowling venue ideal for fun teambuilding activities. The Marconi Automotive Museum features a \$30 million collection of historic, exotic and classic cars. It can be booked for everything from networking events to gala dinners to theme parties. The Lyon Air Museum, located on the west side of John Wayne Airport, is available to host private events where guests can mingle amidst vintage aircraft and vehicles from the World War II era. And the Orange County Great Park Picnic Lawn offers 50,000 sf of space ideal for teambuilding and other outdoor activities.

When attendees have some downtime, they may want to head to one of Irvine's shopping centers. Fashion Island, which overlooks the Pacific, offers a blend of luxury, designer and specialty stores along with a variety of dining opportunities, many of them outdoors. Irvine Spectrum Center contains more than 120 stores and a 21-screen movie theater.

For being located in a large urban area, Irvine boasts a surprising amount of open space where attendees can take a break and enjoy nature and the local wildlife. The city's original planners understood the ecological importance of having open spaces, so visitors today can enjoy natural wonders like the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary that offers more than 300 acres of coastal freshwater wetlands and 12 miles of walking trails. The 2.8-acre Quail Hill Trailhead connects to Irvine's extensive network of trails.

Destination Irvine is offering an incentive of up to \$2,500 for groups that work with the organization and book a meeting with a minimum of 60 room nights over at least two consecutive days in one of Irvine's 16 hotels. Certain restrictions apply. Destination Irvine also is offering a "See it. Book it!" promotion that offers hosted site visits to qualified meeting planners. The promotion includes complementary airfare from most U.S. cities, accommodations, ground transportation and a customized site tour based on the RFP submitted. Visit [destinationirvine.com](http://destinationirvine.com) for complete details on both the sales incentive and the "See it. Book it!" promotions.

## San Diego

The San Diego Tourism Authority has a forecast for your next meeting: "High chance of positive brainstorming, 100 percent chance of budget-friendly solutions, and blue skies and bright ideas." California's second largest city boasts a mild Mediterranean climate and more than 70 miles of coastline, and that's just the beginning. The city spans more than 4,200 square miles, but it is divided into a dozen different neighborhoods, each with its own unique personality. For example, Coronado, located across the bridge from downtown San Diego, is known for its charming small town ambiance, iconic Hotel Del Coronado resort and long stretches of white sand beach. Another popular neighborhood is downtown San Diego, which includes the historic Gaslamp Quarter dining and entertainment district, and is the site of many of the city's major meeting hotels along with Petco Park, home of Major League Baseball's San Diego Padres.

Also located in downtown San Diego, the Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego is a waterfront hotel located adjacent to the Seaport Village shopping area and less than a 10-minute walk from the San Diego Convention Center. It contains more than 1,600 guest rooms, including 76 suites, 168 Grand Club rooms, 40 accessible rooms and even a pet-friendly floor. Basic wireless Internet is complimentary in all guest rooms. The hotel also offers 316,000 total sf of flexible event space, including 136,000 sf of dedicated indoor meeting space and a total of 42 breakout rooms.

Later this year, The Pendry, part of a new hotel brand by Montage Hotels & Resorts, will open in the Gaslamp Quarter. The property will feature 317 loft-style guest rooms and 23,000 sf of meeting and event space. Other amenities will include Spa Pendry and a fitness center as well as a lobby bar, beer hall, street-side market café, a signature restaurant and nightclub.

As you'd might expect from a lively oceanfront community, San Diego offers plenty of options for offsite activities. Urban Adventure Quest offers scavenger hunts where teams of two to five people armed with a smartphone or Internet-connected tablet solve clues and complete challenges while they learn local history along the way. The company offers a choice of two locations, one in San Diego's Balboa Park and the other in downtown San Diego. Each team's score is tracked and immediately posted on the San Diego leaderboard for all to see.

San Diego is home to more than 60 wineries, 130 craft breweries and seven small-batch distilleries, making it a great location for "spirited" tours of these types of facilities. San Diego Beer and Wine Tours offers a variety of different options, including wine and food (or beer and food) walking tours and a winery train tour and a beer train trolley tour. The company also can arrange to provide an interactive brewmaster, winemaker or spirits sommelier event at the hotel or private event venue of the group's choice.

Naturally, many groups meeting in San Diego like to work in a trip to the beach, and a company called Beach Butlers is glad to provide all of the gear necessary for a fun day of sand and sun. The company can arrange for all of the necessities, such as cabanas, chairs, umbrellas, coolers and sunscreen along with sand and surf toys, and even lunch. The company offers these services exclusively at the 1.5-mile-long Coronado Beach, which is an ideal setting for swimming, boogie boarding, body surfing, volleyball and just kicking back and relaxing.

A few years after the Naval Training Center, San Diego, closed, the city of San Diego acquired the property and created Liberty Station, a center for commerce, history and the arts. Liberty Station now offers groups a choice of 11 different private event venues including Brick, a venue in the arts district that can accommodate up to 400 guests, and Luce Court and Legacy Plaza, a beautifully landscaped outdoor event venue that's highlighted with fountains, rose gardens and dozens of palm trees. Also scheduled to open at Liberty Station is The Lot, a six-theater movie house and event venue.

Permanently docked in downtown San Diego at Navy Pier is the USS Midway Navy aircraft carrier, the longest serving American aircraft carrier of the 20th century, from 1945 to 1992, when it was decommissioned. In 2004, it became a permanent museum that now hosts some 300 private events each year, accommodating from 100 to 3,500 attendees.

The San Diego Tourism Authority has streamlined the RFP process with an innovative tool called iLead. Designed for single-property meetings that require 10 or more sleeping rooms, iLead only delivers meeting specifications to San Diego hotels that best meet the group's needs. Hotels respond in real time using an electronic proposal template, and all responses are compiled in a summary format that can be downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet. Information also is linked to the responding hotels' websites, Google Maps and the San Diego Tourism Authority's Meeting Planner Guide.

## **California Dreaming**

So if, as they say, "California is always a good idea," all planners have to do is decide which California destination will be the very best idea for their next meeting. And there is certainly no shortage of options.