

SPECIAL SECTION

TEXAS

A MEETING AND INCENTIVE PLANNER'S GUIDE





TEXAS

AT&T Performing Arts Center, Dallas

SPECIAL SECTION



The Many Sides OF TEXAS

Texas' diversity keeps groups coming back to experience its many personalities. BY STEPHEN WYNNE

When planners think of Texas, what do they think of? Is it the cosmopolitan sophistication of Dallas? The towers of Houston? The Western heritage of Fort Worth? The Latin flavor of San Antonio? Is it Irving, Arlington, or Grapevine, each distinct in its own way? Galveston, which moves to its own sub-tropical beat? The answer is all of the above. Texas is so vast, and so diverse, that you can't really put it in a box. All you can do is enjoy its many sides.

Successful MEETINGS

The Authority on Meetings & Incentives

Produced by *Successful Meetings' Custom Media Department*

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MEET AND GREET

When you're talking "metroplex," you've got to start with Dallas. "We're within a three-hour flight of anywhere," says Phillip Jones, president/CEO of the Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau. "The Dallas Convention Center now has a million square feet of space, and we're adding another 80,000. We can handle big meetings—the American Wind Energy Association was here in May, with 20,000 attendees." Tariq Shane, president/CEO of American Small Business Alliance, an event planning company in Columbia, Maryland, has arranged Dallas meetings for several corporate and governmental clients. "Clients are

always asking me about Dallas," Shane says. "It's business-friendly, convenient, and has big-city amenities with mid-level prices." And Dallas is partnering with Fort Worth, Irving, and Arlington on the "DFW Meet Now Promise" (www.dfwpromise.com).

With 2.2 million residents, Houston is the fourth-largest city in America. "We're a large city with all the amenities," says Nathan Tollett, director of sales at the Greater Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau. "But we offer great value." Houston has two major convention facilities. The George R. Brown Convention Center has 1.8 million square feet of space, and Reliant Park, a 350-acre business/

stadium complex, has 1.6 million. The Museum of Natural Science. Houston Pavilions has a House of Blues and a Lucky Strike Bowling Alley, both with meeting space. Michael Hankins, manager of shows & exhibitions for industrial giant Deere & Company, believes Houston offers a full plate to meeting planners. "We had 4,000 people and 500 exhibitors at our annual Aftermarket Expo Meeting in December 2008," Hankins says. "We met at the convention center, and stayed at the Hilton-Americas. The facilities are big enough so that our dealers from all over the U.S. and Canada can network."

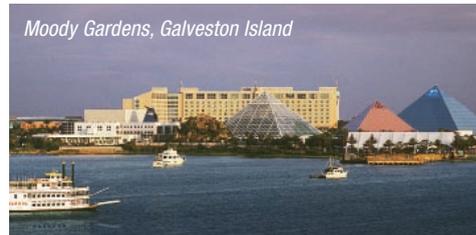
Where else but San Antonio can you get to your meeting on a river taxi?

TEXAS

San Fernando Cathedral,
San Antonio



Moody Gardens, Galveston Island



BEST GAME IN TOWN

Planners interested in Texas should check out the new Texas Tourism (TravelTex.com). The website has undergone a complete redesign, but remains an easy-to-use, comprehensive guide to Texas' destinations, from activities to attractions and events.

"We've tried to make the site a one-stop shop for planners," says Julie Chase, press officer at the Tourism Department, Office of the Governor.

With three of the 10 largest cities in the country, Texas can stage meetings of any size. And, because of its unique heritage and culture, off-site meeting opportunities are unsurpassed as well, Chase notes.

"Where else do you have cowboys along with 620 miles of beaches?" Chase says. "Where else do you have a NASA Space Center along with dude ranches? And where else do you have—could you have—the world's biggest honky-tonk along with 58 Fortune 500 companies?"

Sara Wheiles, a meeting planner at the Texas-based Red Velvet Events, has brought pharmaceutical and insurance companies there. "San Antonio's a big city with a small-town feel," Wheiles says, "and attendees love that. It makes sense economically and it makes sense for a company's public image because we're not a flashy, over-the-top destination." The city's Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center has been expanded to 1.3 million square feet, and it sits on the Riverwalk. The Pearl Brewery, built in the late-1800s, is now a meeting and entertainment center, and its old stable can accommodate 500 guests. The Pearl is also building a 1,200-seat amphitheater on the Riverwalk.

Galveston is just the place for meetings with a view. The Galveston Island Convention Center offers 100,000 square feet of space overlooking the Gulf. The Seaport Museum can host meetings, and the Tall Ship *Elissa* can be perfect for receptions and dinners. The Lone Star Flight Museum can host 1,000 for dinner, as well as meetings in hangars filled with old aircraft. "We were planning an event for some of our high-profile, meetings-industry clients," says Joe Pizzitola, director of specialty sales for Continental Airlines, "and we were looking for a balance of good meeting facilities and an inviting destination. We found it on Galveston Island."

The city of Grapevine has an appropriate tagline—"Aged to Perfection." "We have a wine trail that takes you to our 10 vineyards, which all have meeting rooms," says Barry Lewis, director of marketing at the Grapevine Convention & Visitors Bureau. "There are other interesting meeting

venues such as Grapevine Vintage Railroad. A train can be chartered for a meeting that moves, or one that simply stays in the station. Then there's the Art Deco-style Palace Arts Center, built in 1940 and since restored to its former glory. And the Nash Farm, dating from the 1860s, is also available for events. Christa Santos, a meeting planner for Dallas-based Atmos Energy, a natural gas company, says Grapevine is a great meetings destination. "Grapevine is historic and quaint," she says. "The CVB and meeting facilities are great, and it's a good atmosphere for productive meetings." The CVB's Lewis adds: "We can customize programs and prices for each client."

Fort Worth is Western—and proud of it. The Fort Worth Convention Center recently completed a \$75 million expansion and renovation, and now has 253,000 square feet of exhibit space and 41 breakout rooms, adjacent to a 14,000-seat arena. Now, with the recently opened Omni Fort Worth Hotel, there's a true convention center headquarters, with 614 guest rooms (and 68,000 square feet for meetings). "Given the current sensitivity about over-the-top spending on meetings, we're perfectly positioned," says David DuBois, CMP, CAE, CTA, president and CEO of the Fort Worth Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Kate Allen, CMP, senior meeting planner at the Texas Association of School Boards, holds her annual Summer Leadership Institute there. "We had about 1,100 people at our meeting in June," Allen says. "Our attendance in Fort Worth grows every year. We're booked through 2015."

"We're going after the meetings business very aggressively," says Diana Pfaff, director of communications at the Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau. "Our new convention center will be state-of-the-art. And our hotels are offering very good incentive programs." Planners should look into renting out the sound stages at the Movie Studios at Las Colinas. Diane Steele, national account manager for Experient, a meeting-planning firm in Twinsburg, Ohio, has held several meetings in Irving recently. Her groups of up to 300 have stayed at hotels such as the Four Seasons and the Omni. "The airport is close to town, and there are great attractions," Steele says.

Arlington sits amidst an array of big attractions that can host meetings.

Cowboys Stadium has 300,000 feet of meeting space, and attendees can take the field for teambuilding. At Rangers Ballpark, they can play ball, and at Six Flags Over Texas, planners can rent the entire park during off-hours. "We're a fairly new player in the meetings game," says Jay Burress, president and CEO of the Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau. "But word is getting out about our city."

DIP INTO DIVERSIONS

When in Texas, there are many ways to spend your time. Dallas' booming Arts District has an Opera House, and the AT&T Performing Arts Center opened last fall. Also there are the Dallas Museum of Art and the outdoor, "roofless" Nasher Sculpture Center. The Victory Entertainment District has a Hard Rock Café and a House of Blues. Behind the convention center is Gilley's, one of America's great Western honky-tonks. A more poignant spot is the Sixth Floor Museum (the spot from where an assassin killed President Kennedy in 1963). And the \$60 million Perot Museum of Nature and Science will open late next year.

Hungry meeting-goers in Houston should try McCormick & Schmick's for seafood, Guadalajara for Mexican, Ill Forks for steak, or Yao's (owned by Yao Ming of the Houston Rockets) for Asian. There are 18 museums; the Galleria Mall; the NASA Space Center; and 165 golf courses.

In Galveston is a 40-block area of restored Victorian homes, the second-largest repository in America. The Seaport Museum documents the island's role as the second-largest port of entry into the U.S. in the 19th century. The pier has classic "Tall Ships" and World War II ships at permanent anchor, and there's a 13-mile seawall (where local folks skate, bike, jog, and take in the sea air) and 32 miles of beaches. Some of the major attractions are found at the renowned Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa & Convention Center, including the second-largest aquarium in Texas, a living rainforest, an IMAX 3-D Theater, a 4-D Special FX Theater, an old-time paddlewheel boat, and the Ridefilm Theater. A butterfly attraction is coming soon. You won't go hungry in Galveston, either. The Steakhouse at San Luis Resort was rated No. 2 in the state. Rudy & Paco's features South American fusion cuisine, Luigi's proffers Italian

SPECIAL SECTION

TEXAS

SPECIAL SECTION

specialties in a restored 1800s bank, and Shearn's, atop the Moody Gardens Hotel, offers stunning views to go with Continental and American specialties.

Fort Worth's Stockyards National Historic District boasts the biggest honky-tonk in America, Billy Bob's; along with rodeos, Western restaurants, saloons, the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame, and the Fort Worth Herd daily cattle drive. Legendary structures such as the Livestock Exchange Building still stand proudly here, and the Stockyards Station shops and restaurants are located in old hog barns. But there's culture here, too. "Sundance Square is one of the country's model urban redevelopment projects," says DuBois of the CVB. "It's 35 square blocks of shops, restaurants, galleries, and performing arts venues." The cultural district has five excellent museums, among them the renowned Kimbell Art Museum. And restaurants include Del Frisco's,

for steak; Grace, for upscale American; and Reata, for Western.

Among the attractions in San Antonio are SeaWorld, Six Flags, the Alamo, and America's largest Mexican market. HemisFair Park, site of the 1969 World's Fair, is now filled with shops and a museum. At the Tower of America, you can dine overlooking the city. Arlington, east of Fort Worth, is the site of (Texas) Rangers Ballpark, as well as the \$1.5 billion Cowboys Stadium, new home of the Dallas Cowboys and the Super Bowl in 2011. At the Las Colinas Equestrian Center in Irving, your attendees can play golf-cart polo. The Ranch at Las Colinas offers Texas comfort food, and the Cool River Café offers great steaks and seafood. In Grapevine, the Glass Cactus Nightclub, in the Gaylord Texan, overlooks Grapevine Lake, and the two-story deck offers incredible views of the sunset.

STAY AWHILE

Accommodations in Texas are nothing less than impressive. The Omni Hotel in Dallas will open in January 2012,

adding 1,000 guest rooms to the city's total of 31,000, along with 80,000 square feet of meeting space. The Ritz-Carlton opened in 2008. And the Sheraton Dallas—the largest hotel in town with 1,840 rooms—recently underwent a \$90 million renovation. Houston has 65,000 hotel rooms, and recent openings include the Hotel Sorella CITYCENTRE (244 rooms; 18,000 square feet); the Embassy Suites Downtown, across from the Convention Center (262; 7,000); and the Embassy Suites-Energy Corridor (216; 7,000). And the Hyatt Regency has just completed major renovations.

There are 42,000 hotel rooms in San Antonio, 1,000 of which are in the just-opened JW Marriott, along with 140,000 square feet of meeting space. This October will see the opening of the Embassy Suites Riverwalk, with 285 rooms and 12,000 square feet. The 37-story Grand Hyatt San Antonio, open only two years, is adjacent to the convention center, and close to the Alamo, restaurants, and shopping. With over 1,000 rooms and 115,000 square



Grapevine



Schlitterbahn Waterpark, Galveston Island

Business By the Beach



GALVESTON

• ISLAND •

Where the Texas Coast Begins.

Galveston Island is a meeting planner's paradise. This tropical destination boasts 5,000 hotel rooms and 291,000 sq. ft. of meeting space just steps from the beach. Warm breezes and temperate seas complement the rich historic districts, award-winning restaurants, charter fishing fleets, and bustling shops—perfect for an off-site escape. Galveston's relaxed island atmosphere is only 40 minutes from Houston, yet a world away in spirit. Book your next convention on Galveston Island and find out how productive a little relaxation can be.

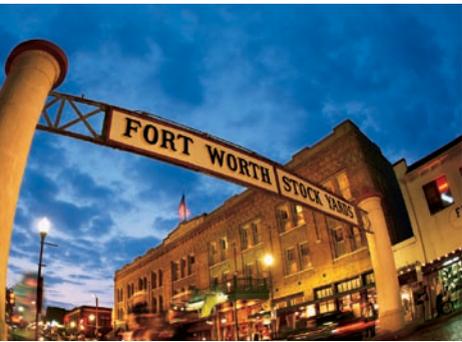


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TEXAS



SPECIAL SECTION



feet of space, the Grand Hyatt can accommodate various-sized meetings. The meeting space is stacked vertically, on three floors. Each level opens up to a balcony overlooking the Riverwalk. Theater Plaza, just next door, can hold another 400 delegates.

The Grand Hyatt is a modern hotel, yet with a very Spanish/Mexican feel. It boasts the Achote River Café, serving Pan-Latino comfort food—the *paella* is legendary. “People come to meet here for the same reason they come to visit,” says Scott Lane, director of sales & marketing at the Grand Hyatt San Antonio. “We have so much history, attractions, and natural beauty. And we know how to put on a meeting.”

In Galveston, the AAA Four-Diamond Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa & Convention Center is fresh off a major renovation, with 242 acres of tropical gardens and one of the island’s two golf courses. Its modern convention center has 100,000 square feet, and

attendees are housed in 428 luxurious rooms and suites. There’s also an outdoor amphitheater with nationally known acts, a spa, outdoor and indoor pools, a jogging track, a 24-hour fitness center, and a business center. There are also three other AAA Four-Diamond properties on the island, and 5,000 rooms in all. “Galveston has so much to offer a meeting planner,” says Jamie Weir, director of sales and marketing at Moody Gardens. “Upscale hotels, great restaurants, shopping, golf, the beach, and excellent meeting facilities. Then of course you’ve got all the attractions here at Moody Gardens. We’ve got the first IMAX 3-D theater in the U.S.; three ‘Ridefilm’ theaters; a 4-D theater, in which you can actually smell and feel the movement; and the ‘Colonel,’ an 1800s paddlewheeler. You can do everything without ever having to leave the property.”

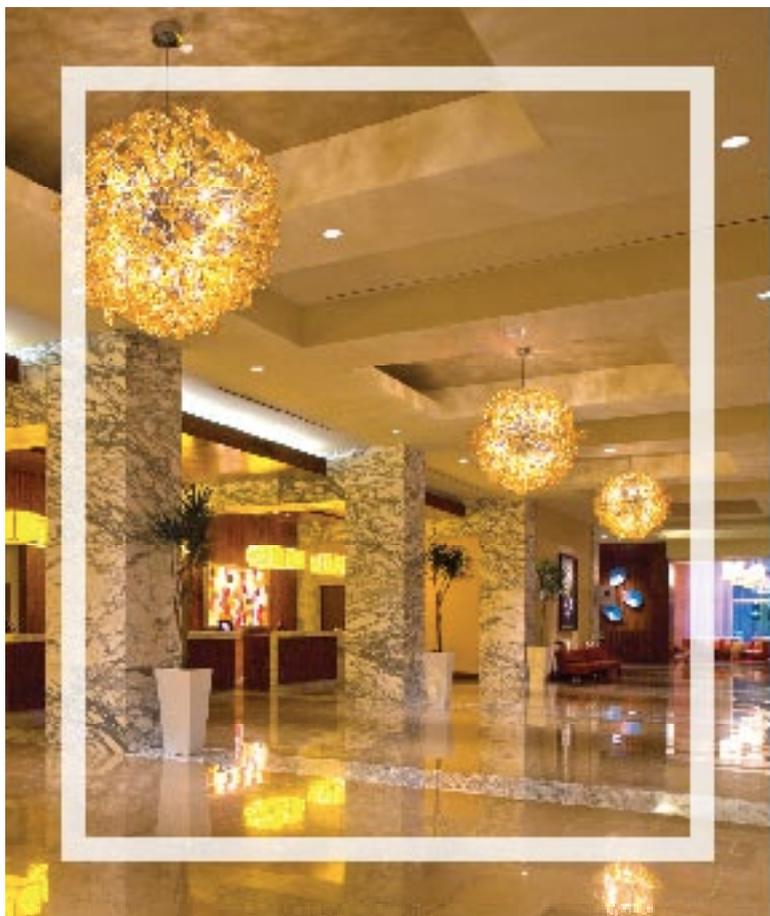
Just west of Dallas, Irving has 12,000 hotel rooms and 300,000 square feet for meetings—a figure that will grow by a third with the late-year opening of the Irving Convention Center

at Las Colinas. Three boutique hotels have also opened recently, each with meeting space—aloft Las Colinas, Element, and NYLO. Meanwhile, the recently renovated Four Seasons just added 70 new villas. In Fort Worth, the Renaissance Worthington (504 rooms) and the Hilton Fort Worth (284) have both been recently renovated, and there are 13,000 hotel rooms in town. And the Arlington Convention Center offers nearly 100,000 square feet of space for meetings, and the adjacent Sheraton just completed a major renovation. In all, there are 5,500 hotel rooms in the city.

Grapevine has proven to be a sweet surprise to planners. The city has 5,000 hotel rooms—all within 10 minutes of the DFW International Airport, located there, and more than 800,000 square feet available for meetings. The Gaylord Texan Resort has half of that meeting space, and 1,511 rooms. The Grey Wolf Lodge has a conference center with 30,000 square feet. And most of the city’s full-service hotels have been recently renovated. ■



Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas



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