

Great Lakes

Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Columbus, Ohio, makes a lush setting for meetings during spring and summer months. The John F. Wolfe Palm House, shown here, has a double grand staircase descending into a tropical garden. The venue can accommodate 170 people for dinner or 250 for a standing reception. Learn about more stand-out spaces in the Great Lakes region in the following pages.

By Libby Hoppe and Dawn Reiss



RANDALL L. SCHIEBER

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green rooftops
encompassing
5.5 million square
feet, more than any
other U.S. city



QUICK FACTS

Guest rooms: 110,000

Nearest airports:

O'Hare International and
Midway International

Convention center:

McCormick Place

Meeting space:
2.6 million square feet

Meeting rooms: 173

COMING IN 2015

- 10 new hotels opening in central business district, including a 400-room Loews Hotel with 25,000 square feet of meeting space in March and a 375-room Residence Inn in August
- McCormick Place upgrades its free-to-attendees Internet and Wi-Fi so up to 45,000 users can connect at once
- The CTA's Cermak-McCormick Place Green Line train station will open in spring, meaning visitors can quickly take the 'L' from downtown to the convention center

Windy City Blues

When the meeting is over, attendees can take advantage of abundant live music venues in Chicago.

Music has always been a staple at religious events. With 47 neighborhood music festivals and more than 220 music venues, Chicago is a smart choice for planners who want to capitalize on the city's vibrant music scene before, during or after a conference.

During summer, large groups can coordinate event dates to overlap with the Gospel Musical Festival, Chicago Blues Festival or Jazz Festival. Small groups wanting a more intimate setting can gather for an evening of jazz at the historic Green Mill, a swanky, 1940s-era club on Chicago's North Side, or Andy's Jazz Club & Restaurant, which accepts reservations for dine-in groups.

Kingston Mines, a blues venue in Lincoln Park, hosts private events alongside soulful tunes and Cajun cuisine. Seven nights a week, two blues bands alternate playing in a pair of rooms. Groups can sit at long tables and nosh on po' boys, catfish, jambalaya and ribs, or dance near the bands. Another option is Buddy Guy's Legends in the South Loop, which is owned by the Grammy Award-winning singer. Rent the main floor, which can accommodate up to 400 standing guests and a 10-piece band onstage, or opt for a private room upstairs for up to 150 people.

Chicago's 55,000-sq.-ft. House of Blues can be rented out in various portions for events. The entire space holds 1,800 people, and individual sections can host groups of 50 to 1,000. For a meal with real spirit, book the Gospel Brunch, which serves up songs and an all-you-can-eat buffet at 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. every Sunday.



From left:
Chicago Blues
Festival; Buddy
Guy performs
at his namesake
jazz club.



[CASE STUDY]

Planning a convention in Chicago, especially for a nonprofit religious organization, can be expensive. That's why Sister Debbie Borneman, director of member relations and services for the National Religious Vocation Conference, hosted the group's 2014 Biennial NRVC Convocation in Rosemont, a suburb 30 minutes from downtown near O'Hare Airport and serviced by Chicago's L train.

"The affordability and location were key, because it was close to the airport," says Borneman. "The Marriott offered a complimentary shuttle to and from the airport,

which helped get participants and speakers in, and the Chicago Transit Authority Blue Line is across the street from the hotel, so anyone who wanted to go downtown could do so."

Borneman planned two years in advance for the five-day November conference held at Rosemont's Chicago Marriott Suites O'Hare for 800 Catholic sisters, brothers and priests. A big draw of the hotel, she says, was the concessions Marriott offered, including hosting 15 staff and board members for a pre-site visit and the chef's willingness to work with dietary restrictions.



High Octane

Local coffee roasters are making Columbus a destination for a divine cup of joe.

About 83 percent of Americans drink coffee, reported a 2013 survey by the National Coffee Association. It's no surprise that a large majority of your meeting attendees will need a java jolt to jump-start early morning sessions. Thanks to a growing number of independent roasters, Columbus, Ohio, is a palatable place to caffeinate.

Aficionados should stop by the original stalwart, Stauf's Coffee Roasters. Opened in 1988, the micro-roaster serves a luscious French press and has more than 60 hand-roasted coffees. It was ranked the No. 1 coffee shop in the city for the third year in a row by news site Columbus Underground, and it's also the parent company of Cup o'Joe, which has coffee shops all over Columbus. Planners can pick up bags of local beans to drop in welcome bags or send home with guests.

At Cafe Brioso downtown, latte lovers rave about the honey vanilla latte. Nearby, the Zagat-rated bakery Pistacia Vera has its own Brioso blend that complements a delectable array of macarons, quiches and croissants, as well as gluten-free menu items. Catering is available, with macaron towers being a popular choice for special events.

Small groups looking for a breakout session spot can congregate at new social justice-minded The Roosevelt Coffeehouse, which donates part of its proceeds to fight human trafficking and poverty. Opened in early 2015, it has floor-to-ceiling windows, a patio and a conference table constructed from recycled bowling alley wood.

If your group is meeting in March, attendees can tack on a visit to the North Market Coffee Roast festival during their stay. Held at the bustling indoor North Market, the festival is a collection of independent shops and restaurants offering samples and educational opportunities.

[CASE STUDY]

Chris Douglas, director of the conference office for Church of the Brethren, selected Columbus to host her group's annual conference in July 2014. "We really liked how close the hotels are to the convention center, so we could easily get 1,000 rooms on peak nights," she says. "We also found the downtown very walkable with a lot of restaurants within a couple blocks."

The group of 2,600 attendees, which included families and older participants in their 70s and 80s, used 100,000 square feet of exhibit space in Greater Columbus Convention Center for business sessions, worship and fellowship, along with a 30,000-sq.-ft. ballroom. The Hyatt Regency Columbus served as its main hotel, and some participants stayed at Crowne Plaza Columbus-Downtown and Drury Inn & Suites Convention Center.

Having the indoor North Market nearby for shopping and dining was a big draw, says Douglas, along with the Short North Arts District restaurants, including the vegetarian-friendly Northstar Cafe. To keep accompanying children and teenagers entertained, Douglas scheduled trips to the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, and Center of Science and Industry, while adults visited the historic German Village.

► QUICK FACTS

Guest rooms: 26,000

Nearest airport:
Port Columbus International

Convention center:
Greater Columbus Convention Center

Meeting space:
1.7 million square feet

Meeting rooms: 65

COMING IN 2015

► \$125 million upgrade and expansion to Greater Columbus Convention Center over the next two years

► \$37.6 million expansion at Columbus Museum of Art, including addition of a new 17,700-sq.-ft. Sculpture Garden



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"The Detroit Industry" mural by Diego Rivera

Design Hub

From murals to sculptures, explore the surprising art scene in Detroit.

With world-class art, private gallery tours and a 1,000-seat theater, the Detroit Institute of Arts (commonly known as DIA) is a prime location for events. The 658,000-sq.-ft. museum houses more than 100 galleries chock-full of works by Degas, Cezanne, van Gogh, many African-American artists and Mexican muralist Diego Rivera who painted "The Detroit Industry," a series of frescoes. The museum's culture-rich spaces, like the Ancient Middle Eastern Gallery and Romanesque Hall, can be used for events. On Sundays, attendees can take in a series of live music performances, free with museum admission.

Leaded glass windows and art deco lights adorn the Scarab Club, which hosts regular art exhibitions, musical performances and poetry readings. It can be rented day or night for events. The 22,000-sq.-ft. Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit in the Midtown neighborhood—which transformed a former auto dealership into an urban mecca for modern art, film, music and literature—also has event space, as well as valet parking.

Russell Industrial Center is made up of seven buildings and is home to more than 120 artists and galleries. Groups can rent the 36,000-sq.-ft. exhibition center, known as the Baker Building, which has polished white floors in sharp contrast to its industrial setting. On weekends, direct attendees to the center's indoor marketplace, showcasing furniture shops, bakeries, poetry readings and business expositions.



Detroit Institute of Arts

The downtown Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center, which has 1,298 guest rooms and 100,000 square feet of meeting space, is one of the tallest hotels in North America.

[CASE STUDY]

On a site visit to Detroit in search of a host city for the 2014 International Convention of the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, Dan Martin, contract manager and convention overseer, wasn't sure what to expect amid the city's financial troubles. "We were a little worried about Detroit," says Martin. But the CVB's transparent tour of the good (and bad) helped remedy his fears. "Even the locals were able to get reacquainted with Detroit because the downtown is very well cared for," he says.

Although Martin's group usually schedules large events two years in advance, Martin says they signed a contract with Detroit only one year out to host a pair of three-day conventions—a June convention for 40,000 attendees and another in July for 38,000—at Ford Field, home of the NFL's Detroit Lions. "We would have loved to have had one convention all together, but the parking would have been a nightmare," says Martin.

To assist international visitors unfamiliar with the area, the group set up tables at Detroit Metro Airport to gather attendees and bus them to area hotels. Martin says some of the highlights of Detroit for guests included tours of the Henry Ford and Motown museums.

► QUICK FACTS

Guest rooms: 40,000

Nearest airport:
Detroit Metropolitan

Convention center:
Cobo Center

Exhibit space:
722,500 square feet

Meeting space:
180,000 square feet

Meeting rooms: 80

COMING IN 2015

► Completion of \$379 million, three-year renovation of Cobo Center in June

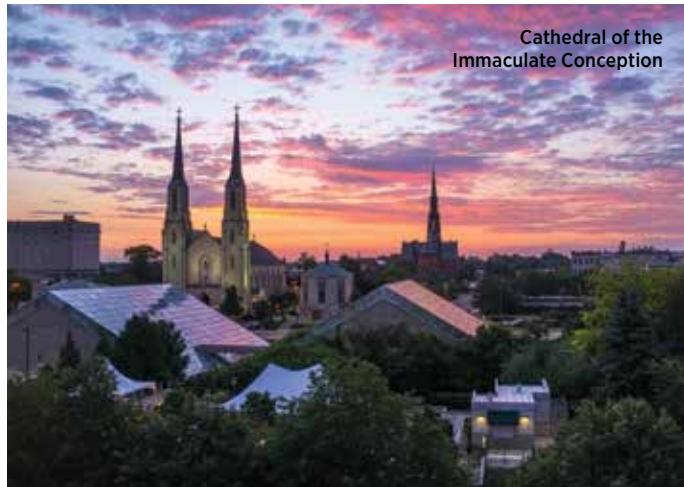
► Historic 76-room Roosevelt Hotel in Corktown will open in summer

Building Off Heritage

Fort Wayne is rich in religious tradition.

Fort Wayne, Indiana, has a strong religious history. Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopal and other faiths have long established regional hubs in Fort Wayne, the second-largest city in the state after Indianapolis. Four national Christian denominations are headquartered in the city, including Missionary Church and Fellowship of Evangelical Churches. Its strong faith-based core makes it a popular destination for religious events, but a city needs much more than churches to host a meeting.

Fortunately, that's not a problem in Fort Wayne. In the past few decades, developers have been focused on city improvements. The year 2007 saw the addition of the \$130 million Harrison Square development, which is home of Parkview Field where Minor League Baseball's TinCaps play. Stadium Journey magazine named Parkview the best overall Minor League ballpark experience for 2014 for the third time in four years. Soon the city will see a major expansion of Allen County War Memorial Coliseum, located on the north side of town. It will add more than 50,000 square feet of space to the arena and expo center, bringing the facility to more than 1 million square feet of space. "The new facility will enable the coliseum to attract past events that have outgrown the space, and accommodate our large exhibition events that have been asking for more space," says Randy Brown, the facility's executive vice president and general manager. Construction should be completed by early 2016.



Cathedral of the
Immaculate Conception

QUICK FACTS

Guest rooms: 5,000

Nearest airport: Fort Wayne International

Convention center: Grand Wayne Convention Center

Meeting space: 225,000 square feet

Meeting rooms: 18

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A Town of Tradition

In Green Bay, the past is present at every turn.

Wisconsin's Green Bay Packers date back to 1919, founded that year by Earl Lambeau, the namesake of the stadium where the team still plays today. It's the NFL's third-oldest franchise, and by far the smallest market, playing where the city's total population only slightly outnumbers the seats in the stadium. The people of Green Bay value and celebrate the team's history, and this respect for tradition can be found in many places beyond Lambeau Field.

Planners can incorporate classic Green Bay and Wisconsin traditions into their events. The most obvious place to start is at the Packers' stadium. Private tours for groups take visitors inside the locker rooms, through players' tunnels and out on the field. The on-site Lambeau Field Atrium is open most days of the year, houses a

pro shop, restaurant and hall of fame, and can be rented out for special events with private catering.

Another classic Wisconsin tradition is the Friday night fish fry, the perfect way to close out or jump-start an event in Green Bay. Its history dates back to early Wisconsin settlers, many of whom were Catholic and avoided meat on Fridays during Lent. It's nearly impossible to walk by a restaurant in Green Bay on a Friday and not see a menu board highlighting a fish fry. In nearby Door County, the Friday night tradition takes on a new form: a fish boil. Restaurants start an outdoor bonfire to cook potatoes, onions and fish in a pot of boiling salted water. The experience culminates with a kerosene-aided flash that causes the water to boil over, discarding the oil.



From top: A fish boil plate; fish boil in action at Old Post Office Restaurant in Door County.



[CASE STUDY]

Rob Weise, pastor and youth conference director for the Forest Lakes District of the Evangelical Free Church of America, plans an annual event for 3,500 young people in Green Bay. "We moved from Madison [Wisconsin] and used to move it around the state, but since we have come to Green Bay, we don't plan to move," he says. The annual conference includes rallies in the convention center, a trade show and seminars, and attendees can venture off-site to shop at local malls and go bowling or roller-skating. Weise works with the local YMCA in Green Bay to organize activities. He can't speak highly enough about the level of service in the city. "The convention center is excellent, and hotels nearby are great to work with," he notes. "Plus, the Green Bay convention bureau is amazing at helping us."

QUICK FACTS

Guest rooms: 4,300

Nearest airport:
Austin Straubel International

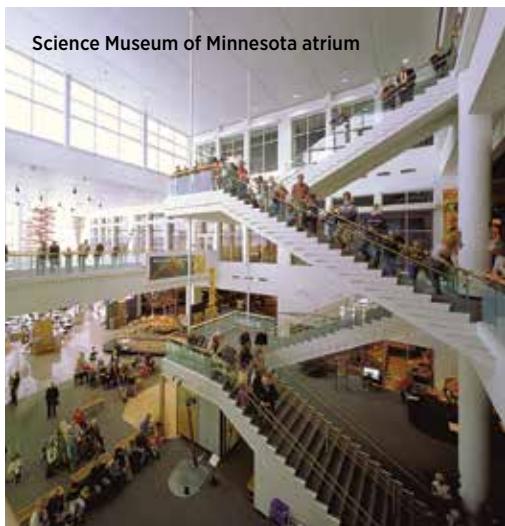
Convention center:
KI Convention Center

Meeting space:
45,000 square feet

Meeting rooms: 19

COMING IN 2015

- \$23 million expansion of KI Convention Center, nearly doubling its size
- 160-room Hotel Northland
- \$5.3 million Hampton Inn conversion connected to KI Convention Center



Families Welcome

St. Paul is a prime destination for family-friendly events.

Walking through downtown St. Paul, Minnesota, you get a feel for the city's long history. Lush green spaces pop up between architecturally significant buildings that house new restaurants. In the past few years, city and tourism leaders in St. Paul have embarked on a \$1.6 billion improvement campaign that encompasses everything from sports venues and light-rail transit to hotel renovations and new retail space.

Much of the new development is happening in and around St. Paul's convention district, anchored by the Saint Paul RiverCentre, which is accompanied by the Xcel Energy Center and Roy Wilkins Auditorium. Several Twin Cities family attractions are nearby. The Science Museum of Minnesota, across the street from RiverCentre on the banks of the Mississippi River, has been a St. Paul staple since it opened in 1907 (it moved to its current location in 1999). The Minnesota Children's Museum is also a few blocks away.

QUICK FACTS

City guest rooms: 1,700

Area guest rooms: 5,000

Nearest airport: Minneapolis-St. Paul International

Convention center: Saint Paul RiverCentre

Meeting space: 239,000 square feet

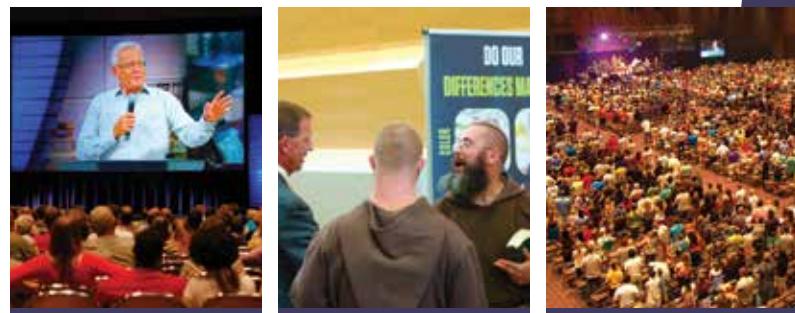
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