



The Sunshine State

GET TO KNOW
FLORIDA'S
MEETING
DESTINATIONS.

By Morgan
Halaska

North

AMELIA ISLAND

Off the coast of northeast Florida is Amelia Island, a barrier island known for its beauty and history. Also known as the Isle of 8 Flags, Amelia Island is the only place in the U.S. where eight different flags have flown (French, Spanish, British, Patriots, Green Cross, Mexican Revolutionary, Confederate and the U.S. flag).

The island is home to Fernandina Beach, a former Victorian seaport village that's escaped 20th-century commercialization. The 50-block Victorian National Historic District features original Victorian-style mansions and cottages dating back to the late 19th century and boutique shopping on its historic Centre Street. The Amelia Island CVB offers a self-guided walking tour of the town with 43 stops.

Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort was named a Silver Medal Golf Resort by Golf Magazine; it boasts 36 championship holes and each course is recognized as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. The resort is the largest conference center on the island, featuring 80,000 square feet of flexible meeting space. Meeting space includes a new 16,825-square-foot ballroom, an additional 13,200-square-foot prefunction space, and a new 11,000-square-foot event lawn.

The CVB: The Amelia Island Convention & Visitors Bureau offers a Flights for Sites program that allows meeting planners the opportunity to be reimbursed for airfare booked to visit meeting properties. ameliaisland.com

Submit an RFP: ameliaisland.com/meetings/request-information

Getting There: Amelia Island is a 30-minute drive from Jacksonville International Airport (JAX).

BY THE NUMBERS

140,000-plus total square feet of meeting space

10,000 feet: the bird's-eye view of the island offered by Skydive Amelia Island

90-plus restaurants

13 miles of beaches

2 bridges connect the island to the mainland



Florida's Emerald Coast

The Emerald Coast, characterized by its sugar-white sand and emerald-green water, is a fisherman's dream. In fact, many restaurants in the Destin, Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa Island area will even take cleaned catches and prepare it for patrons, making for true Gulf-to-table fare.

Accommodations range from elite hotels to multi-room vacation rentals right on the beach, with more than 13,000 rooms total. The 35,000-square-foot Emerald Coast Convention Center is Northwest Florida's only convention center (see right sidebar for more information).

The CVB: The Emerald Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau helps planners explore venue choices and activities. Groups large and small are treated like "big fish" on the Emerald Coast. emeraldcoastfl.com/groups-meetings

Contact: Tisha Maraj; Convention Sales Manager; sales@myokaloosa.com; 877.574.5123

Getting There: Destin - Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS)

BY THE NUMBERS: EMERALD COAST CONVENTION CENTER

30,000-square-foot outdoor venue overlooks the Choctawhatchee Bay

21,200-square-foot Emerald Grande Ballroom (1,330 banquet seating and 2,350 theater-style)

6,180 square feet of prefunction space
2,400 capacity

600 total parking spaces in the under-building parking garage and outdoor lot

100 pounds per square foot: the floor-load capacity

24-foot ceilings in the flexible, column-free meeting and exhibition space

12 meeting rooms ranging from 425 to 21,200 square feet



FLORIDA'S HISTORIC COAST

Here's some trivia for you: St. Augustine, founded in 1565 by Spanish explorers, is the oldest city in the U.S. Castillo de San Marcos, the oldest masonry fort, is just one of the 60 historic sites in the area.

Alongside the Spanish colonial architecture are more than a dozen golf courses for beginners and seasoned pros alike. Ponte Vedra Beach is home to the PGA Tour, TPC Sawgrass and The Players Championship, and St. Augustine boasts the World Golf Hall of Fame.

The Beaches span from Ponte Vedra in the north to Marineland in the south. The seaside Anastasia State Park has more than 1,600 acres of natural habitat with 4 miles of pristine beach, a tidal salt marsh, and a maritime and upland hammock. This stretch of Atlantic shoreline has been listed in TripAdvisor's Top 10 U.S. Beaches.

The CVB: St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches Visitors & Convention Bureau checks hotel availability, assists with off-site selections, provides meeting facility specifics and helps plan itineraries. It also connects planners with destination management companies, transportation, entertainment, dining, and audio-visual and décor vendors.
myfloridameetings.com

Contact: William McBroom; Director of Conference Sales; wmbroom@floridashistoriccoast.com; 904.209.4432

Getting There: Jacksonville International Airport (JAX): -50 minutes north of St. Augustine, 30 minutes from Ponte Vedra Beach; Daytona Beach International Airport (DAB): -50 minutes to the south of St. Augustine; Northeast Florida Regional Airport (UST): 10-minute drive to St. Augustine or Ponte Vedra Beach (for those traveling on private planes)

BY THE NUMBERS

\$25 million renovation at the Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa

184,000 square feet of meeting space, including the 40,000-square-foot St. Johns County Convention Center

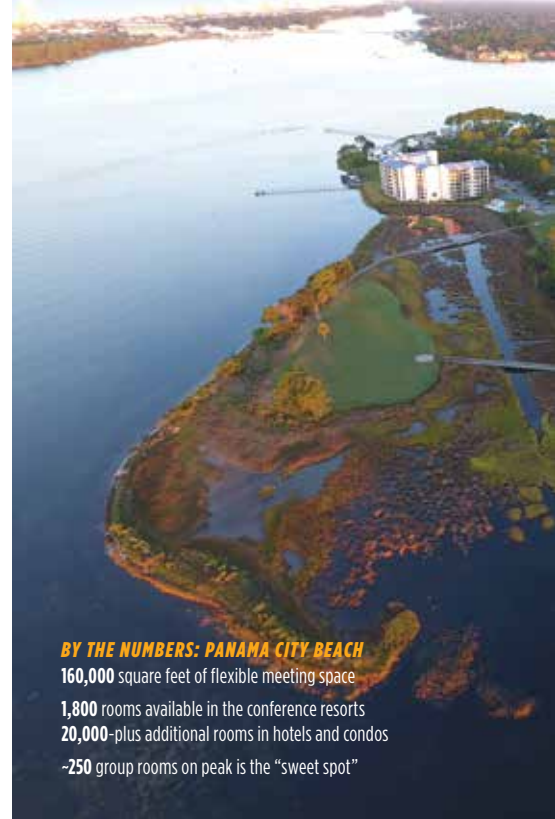
6,312 total hotel rooms

80,000-gallon Snorkel Adventure at the St. Augustine Aquarium

450 years of history

95-plus restaurants

42 miles of unspoiled Atlantic beaches



BY THE NUMBERS: PANAMA CITY BEACH

160,000 square feet of flexible meeting space

1,800 rooms available in the conference resorts
20,000-plus additional rooms in hotels and condos

-**250** group rooms on peak is the "sweet spot"

Panama City Beach

Hurricane Michael, a category four hurricane that hit ground in the area this past October, had minimal damage on Panama City Beach, allowing it to provide shelter and resources for the surrounding communities. "Many restaurants, businesses and properties have reopened with a focus on serving first responders and displaced residents," says Catie Feeney, public relations manager, Visit Panama City Beach. "At this time, Visit Panama City Beach encourages visitors to be patient throughout this process, and check with individual accommodations for lodging availability. Please know that our situation is improving each day, and we look forward to welcoming visitors full time on our beautiful, sugar-white sand beaches as early as this holiday season."

The CVB: Visit Panama City Beach is a full-service bureau. It offers registration and concierge assistance upon arrival and extra-curricular activities and outings, and connects meeting planners with accommodations, activities and restaurants within the area.
visitpanamacitybeach.com/groups

Contact: Renee Lalanne-Wuerdeman; Director of Conference and Group Sales; rwuerdeman@visitpanamacitybeach.com; 850.248.5070

Getting There: Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP) is about 15 minutes from the West End of Panama City Beach.



ST. AUGUSTINE

PHOTOS: GLENN HASTINGS; VISIT PANAMA CITY BEACH; VISIT PENSACOLA



**BY THE NUMBERS:
PENSACOLA**

123,430-plus square feet of meeting space at unique venues

91,000-plus square feet of hotel meeting space

22,000 square feet of meeting space at Pensacola Bay Center

50-plus traditional and unique venues accommodating from **10-200** guests

18 miles of beaches bordered by the Gulf of Mexico

PENSACOLA

The westernmost city in the Florida Panhandle, Pensacola was one of the earliest European settlements in the U.S. The Historic Pensacola Village is a collection of 28 historic buildings and museums in downtown. Museum of Commerce, a reconstructed 1890s-era Pensacola streetscape, has 1,500 square feet of meeting and event space and a collection of horse-drawn buggies and an antique trolley car.

"The area's pristine white-sand beaches, ease of getting here, and more than 450 years of history, culture and Southern charm grabs the attention of both planners and attendees, often joined by family members to experience 'bleisure' travel at its best," says Nicole Stacey, director of marketing and communications, Visit Pensacola.

The CVB: Visit Pensacola is the destination management organization for Escambia County, which includes Pensacola,

"The area's pristine white-sand beaches, ease of getting here, and more than 450 years of history, culture, and southern charm, grabs the attention of both planners and attendees, often joined by family members to experience 'bleisure' travel at its best."

Nicole Stacey

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS, VISIT PENSACOLA

Pensacola Beach and Perdido Key. It is a one-stop shop for planners by offering a multitude of complimentary services including assisting with hotel and venue proposals, arranging site visits, and providing VIP baskets and welcome bags. visitpensacola.com/group-travel/meetings

Contact: Lori Coppels; Destination Sales Manager; lcoppels@visitpensacola.com; 850.432.4209; Jennifer Jackson-Keating; Director of Sales & Services; jjackson@visitpensacola.com; 850.435.8704

Getting There: The Pensacola International

Airport (PNS) is the largest airport along the Gulf Coast between New Orleans and Jacksonville and is just minutes from downtown and beach properties. American, Delta, Silver, Southwest, and United, provide air service to Pensacola and offer direct flights from Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Dallas, Charlotte, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Nashville, Tampa, Orlando, Denver and Miami.

Jacksonville

Jacksonville, the River City by the Sea, is Florida's youngest—and one of its hippest—cities. A vibrant city centered on the banks of the St. Johns River, "Jax" is experiencing something of a renaissance with its new restaurants, breweries, craft distilleries, museums and meetings venues. In the next 18-24 months, more than 1,100 hotel rooms are planned to be added downtown.

The Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center, once the city's train terminal, now boasts 265,000 square feet of flexible meeting space. It is less than a mile from more than 2,000 hotel rooms and offers a Skyway monorail connection to the Omni Jacksonville (354 rooms, 14,000 square feet of meeting space). TIAA Bank Field, home of the NFL Jacksonville Jaguars, is located in the heart of downtown and has seven meeting rooms, with its largest space at 60,000 square feet.

The CVB: Visit Jacksonville and the Beaches' Sales & Services Team prides itself on its great relationships with the destination's first-class companies and community resources, allowing them to seamlessly connect planners to all the resources needed to pull off a meeting or convention. visitjacksonville.com/meetings

Contact: Bob Doering; Senior National Accounts Manager; bdoering@visitjacksonville.com; 904.798.9123

Getting There: The Jacksonville International Airport (JAX) is 15 minutes from downtown. JAX provides nonstop flights to more than 30 major U.S. cities plus 100 daily arrivals and departures on all major domestic air carriers and a network of regional carriers.

BY THE NUMBERS

110,000 square feet of total meeting space and 966 rooms at the newly renovated Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront

840 square miles, making it the largest city in the continental U.S.

450 city parks, **7** state parks and **2** national parks (the largest urban park system in the nation)

160 hotels and resorts

22 miles of beaches

Groups of **10-10,000** guests can be accommodated



South Walton

In this corner of the Florida Panhandle, you'll find something that's only otherwise found in Madagascar, Australia, New Zealand and Oregon: coastal dune lakes, in which South Walton has 15 along its 26 miles of coastline. These rare natural formations are believed to be as old as 10,000 years and serve as a habitat for a unique mix of flora and fauna. Preservation is paramount here, and more than 40 percent of Walton County's total acreage (56,000 acres) is dedicated to preservation through state parks and forests.

Also unique to the area is the Underwater Museum of Art off Grayton Beach, the first of its kind in the U.S. The museum opened in June 2018 and is 55 feet below the surface and contains seven sculptures.

The CVB: Visit South Walton ensures that

RFPs are distributed to the South Walton meeting properties that are best equipped to accommodate each group. The staff assists in arranging site inspections of the hotels and resorts, as well as provides suggestions for off-site event venues, group activities and dine-arounds. Its ToolKit for planners is complete with digital and print assets that serve as an easy and cost-effective way to share the beauty of South Walton with potential attendees. visitsouthwalton.com/groups

Contact: Dawn Truemper; Director of Sales and Events; dawn@visitsouthwalton.com; 850.267.1216

Getting There: The Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP) is located in Panama City Beach, approximately 35 minutes east of South Walton. The Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) is situated in Fort Walton Beach, approximately 35 minutes west of South Walton.

BY THE NUMBERS

- 135,000-plus square feet of event space at hotels and resorts
- 10,000-plus accommodations
- 140-plus restaurants
- 200-plus guests can participate in a sandcastle team-building activity
- 200-plus holes of championship golf
- 26 miles of sugar-white beaches
- 16 beach neighborhoods
- Groups of 10-1,500 guests can be accommodated



BY THE NUMBERS:
TALLAHASSEE
 550,000-plus square feet of meeting space
 45,000-plus artifacts and permanent exhibits at the Museum of Florida History
 6,000 hotel rooms

TALLAHASSEE

Situated in the Florida Panhandle, Tallahassee is 25 miles north of the Gulf of Mexico and 14 miles south of Georgia. Groups of 10-1,200 find an abundance of options in the state capital. With a median age of 26.5 and 43.5 percent holding a bachelor's degree, Tallahassee is one of the youngest cities in Florida as well as one of the most educated.

Tallahassee currently has 62 hotels with more projects in the works. "The expansive growth of the tourism industry is easily visible through the amount of hotel construction the city is seeing," says Kerri Post, executive director of Visit Tallahassee. "Two new hotels have already opened this year, and six more are underway."

The CVB: The Visit Tallahassee staff has long-term, in-market relationships with the local industry. It will prepare and distribute customized requests for proposals on planners' behalf; coordinate site visits and tours; provide expertise and assistance with lodging and venue selection; assist with city-wide event planning, including off-site venues and selection of activities; offer recommendations and/or personalized itineraries; and provide complimentary welcome bags and visitor information for all groups. visittallahassee.com

Contact: Janet Roach; Meetings & Conventions Director; janet.roach@visittallahassee.com; 850.606.2320

Getting There: Tallahassee International Airport (TLH) is less than 8 miles from downtown and served by three major airlines (American, Delta and Silver). There is a full-service facility for private charter planes nearby.

PHOTOS: DAVID BARFIELD/THE LONELY FOX; (OPPOSITE) TONY GIESE/DAYTONA BEACH AREA CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU



DAYTONA BEACH

Known as the Festival Capital of Florida with over 60 annual festivals, Daytona Beach is no stranger to events. The East Central Florida city may perhaps be best known for its racing. The Daytona International Speedway, the world's first motorsports stadium where the Daytona 500 takes place, recently completed a \$400 million investment to improve the experience and add new and unique meeting and event space.

ONE DAYTONA, the dining, retail and entertainment complex across from the speedway, opened in late 2017 and includes two hotels (the 105-room Fairfield Inn & Suites Daytona Beach Speedway/Airport opened in January and the 145-room Marriott Autograph Collection hotel called The DAYTONA will open in 2019).

The Ocean Center, the fifth largest convention center in the state, boasts 205,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor meeting space and is 400 feet from the Atlantic Ocean.

The CVB: The Daytona Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau team helps planners develop services customized to their group. daytonabeachmeetings.com

Contact: Linda McMahon; Director of Group Sales; lmcmahon@daytonabeach.com; 386.255.0415

Getting There: Daytona Beach International Airport (DAB) is served by Delta, JetBlue and American Airlines and is only 5 miles from the beach.

BY THE NUMBERS

120,000-plus square feet of flexible meeting space at Daytona International Speedway

60,000 square feet of meeting space in hotels

12,000-plus guest rooms

200-plus hotels and resorts

MARTIN COUNTY

Port Salerno, Stuart, Palm City, Jensen Beach, Indiantown, Jupiter Island, Hobe Sound and Hutchinson Island make up Martin County, part of Florida's Treasure Coast. Natural beauty abounds in its 22 miles of beaches on the Atlantic and 100,000-plus acres of parks and conservation land.

Hutchinson Island, a barrier island that stretches for 23 miles, is virtually untouched and a wildlife sanctuary.

The CVB: The Martin County Office of Tourism and Marketing can provide brochures, make reservations, and help plan interactive itineraries for your event. discovermartin.com/plan/meetings-conventions

Contact: Nerissa Okiye; Tourism & Marketing Manager; 877.585.0085

Getting There: 45 minutes from Palm Beach International Airport (PBI), an hour from Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL), 90 minutes from Miami International Airport (MIA), two hours from Orlando International Airport (MCO)

BY THE NUMBERS

Hutchinson Island Marriott Beach Resort & Marina

30,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor event space

200-acre resort

274 villa-style guest rooms with private balconies

77-slip private marina

18-hole executive golf course

Hutchinson Shores Resort & Spa

8,000 square feet of meeting and event space

500 attendees can be accommodated

178 guest rooms

Kissimmee

"[Kissimmee is] close enough to Central Florida's popular attractions, but far enough away to create a stress-free, secluded professional meeting experience," says Michelle Moore, CMP, HMCC, director of sales, Experience Kissimmee.

Kissimmee features four primary meeting properties: Embassy Suites by Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista South (300 rooms, 40,000 square feet of meeting space); Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center (1,416 rooms, 400,000 square feet of flexible space); Reunion Resort (270 villas, 25,000 square feet of meet-

ing space); and Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate (862 rooms, 248,111 square feet of meeting space).

The CVB: Experience Kissimmee is the official tourism authority for Osceola County (CVB). It offers complimentary meeting services through the entire meeting planning process. It Pays to Meet in Kissimmee is a meeting incentive program for large group bookings that offers to \$10,000 cash back. experiencekissimmee.com/meetings

Contact: Experience Kissimmee Meeting Sales; meetingsales@experiencekissimmee.com; 407.569.4800

Getting There: Kissimmee Gateway Airport (ISM) or Orlando International Airport (MCO) is 25 minutes away.

BY THE NUMBERS

1,000,000-plus square feet of meeting space

45,000-plus accommodations

22,000-plus vacation homes (dubbed the Vacation Home Capital of the World)

~300 venues



OCALA/MARION COUNTY

Known as the Horse Capital of the World, Ocala/Marion County's landscape features rolling green pastures dotted with horses in paddocks; as such, the area abounds in a variety of horse farm tours as well as horse and carriage rides.

The Ocala National Forest, the southernmost forest in the continental U.S., is known for its intricate trail systems and multiple fresh water springs where visitors can swim, snorkel and dive in crystalline water that stays 72 degrees year-round.

The CVB: The Ocala/Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau provides a booking incentive program, Meet and Save in Ocala/Marion County, which offers up to a maximum of \$1,500 to businesses and/or organizations that book a new meeting with an Ocala/Marion County meeting property, facility or venue through the Ocala/Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau. planners.ocalamarion.com

Contact: sales@marioncountyfl.org; 888.356.2252

Getting There: Orlando International Airport (MCO) and Tampa International Airport (TPA) are approximately 1.5 hours away from Ocala/Marion County. Jacksonville International Airport (JAX) is about 2 hours away and Gainesville Regional Airport (GNV) is about 40 minutes north.

BY THE NUMBERS

354,353 in population (the county is about the same size as Rhode Island)

195,000 acres of horse breeding and training grounds and 600-plus thoroughbred farms

-4,000 rooms

Groups of 400- 4,000 guests can be accommodated

DOUBLETREE BY HILTON HOTEL ORLANDO AT SEAWORLD



Orlando

Orlando is the land of theme parks—11 to be exact, including Walt Disney World and Universal. Here, anything is possible: a welcome reception in the shadow of Universal's Volcano Bay; a networking event in the courtyard of the 400-foot ICON Orlando 360 Observation Wheel; or a behind-the-scenes look at SeaWorld Orlando's manatee rehabilitation area. Planners can create a unique experience at every budget with branded character moments and inspirational themes. Rates are some of the most affordable across the U.S., with airfares among the lowest of the 50 largest airports.

Universal Orlando Resort opened its sixth hotel on property, bringing the total number of on-site hotel rooms at Universal Orlando to 6,200.

The Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort recently completed a \$140 million multiyear redesign project to transform all 2,267 guest rooms, as well as a new lobby, additional food and beverage options, and renovated meeting space.

The 28-acre DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld recently underwent a multimillion-dollar transformation, building an additional 40,000 square feet of conference center and event space, bringing the property's total meeting space to more than 100,000 square feet. The hotel, with 1,020 refreshed guest rooms, can now handle about 2,000 meeting attendees.

The CVB: Visit Orlando's team of destination experts can assist with everything from comprehensive site inspections to attendance building. The team can help planners with professional convention services such as providing highly qualified staffing, assisting with turnkey CSR programs, finding vendors and assisting with accommodating services for attendees with special needs. orlandomeeting.com

Contact: Sales: convention.sales@visitorlando.com; Destination Meeting Services: meeting.services@visitorlando.com

Getting There: Orlando International Airport (MCO) provides nonstop service from more than 150 cities around the world.

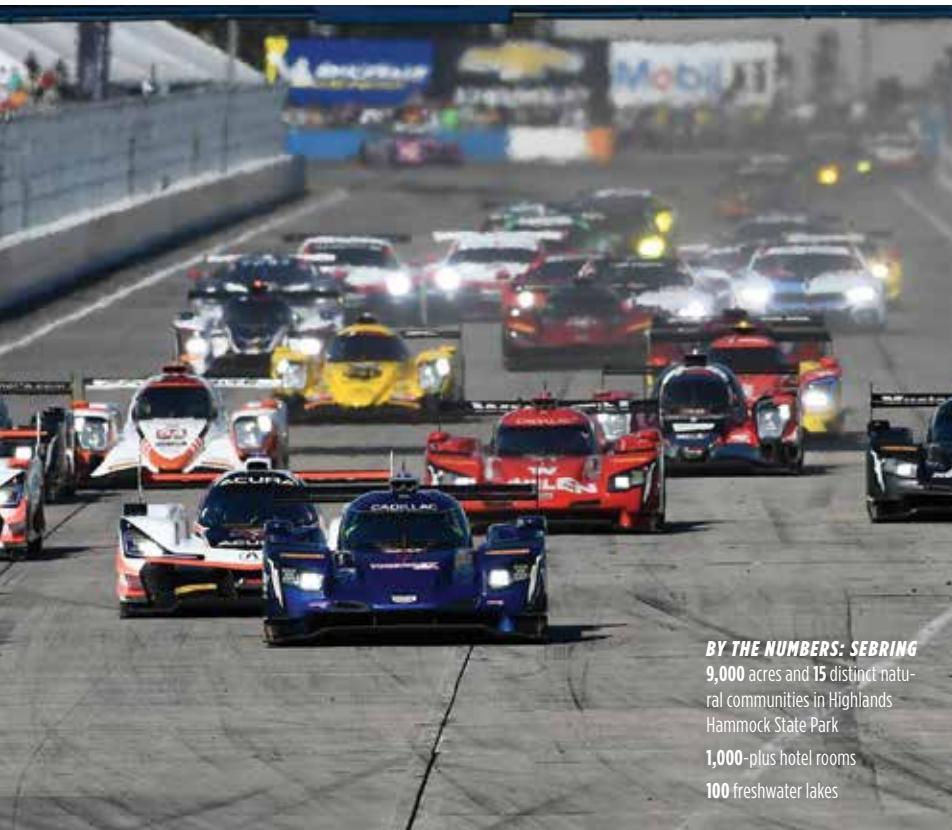
BY THE NUMBERS

7 million square feet of space at the Orange County Convention Center, the second largest convention center in the U.S.

450 hotels and resorts with more than 121,000 rooms

150 meeting hotels that offer 5 million-plus square feet of flexible meeting space

11 world-class theme parks and water adventure parks



BY THE NUMBERS: SEBRING
 9,000 acres and 15 distinct natural communities in Highlands Hammock State Park
 1,000-plus hotel rooms
 100 freshwater lakes

Sebring

Located about 60 miles south of the frenzy of Disney World is Sebring, where life moves at a moderate speed. That's not considering, of course, the Sebring International Raceway—one of the oldest continuously operating racetracks in the United States with its first race in 1950. The Château Élan Hotel & Conference Center, which sits amongst the racetracks of the Sebring International Raceway, has 123 guest rooms and more than 7,000 square feet of meeting space.

Citrus Golf Trail is a collection of affordable golf clubs, with options for every budget and player. Ron Garl, renowned golf course architect, describes the area as “an undiscovered gem.”

A Tru by Hilton property is set to open in 2019 next to the Marriott Residence Inn, which is located on Little Lake Jackson. There are plans to build a lakefront event space between the two hotels.

The CVB: Visit Sebring helps planers on a case-by-case basis. visitsebring.com/meeting-planners

Contact: Dana Knight; Tourism Administrative Assistant; info@visitsebring.com; 800.545.6021

Getting There: Several airports are within a 90-120-minute drive, including Orlando International Airport (MCO), Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW), Tampa International Airport (TPA) and Palm Beach International Airport (PBI).



WEKIVA SPRINGS STATE PARK

ORLANDO NORTH/SEMINOLE COUNTY

Orlando North is 45 minutes from Disney, 25 minutes from downtown Orlando, 45 minutes from Daytona Beach and approximately one hour from the Kennedy Space Center; a nature-lover, though, won't want to leave “Orlando's Natural Oasis.”

Natural attractions include the Wekiva River (one of only two National Wild and Scenic Rivers in the state), Wekiva Springs State Park, Lake Jesup and the St. Johns River (where the endangered Florida manatee feeds on aquatic vegetation in winter months). There are more than 30 parks and preserves, making it a destination for hiking, biking, bird watching, wildlife study, nature photography and more.

The Tourism Bureau: The Orlando North, Seminole County Tourism team extends personalized service to group and event planners and coordinates arrangements for familiarization tours. The team can also assist with locating the right hotel and meeting facility, arrange transportation to off-site venues, coordinate publicity with email and banner ad templates, provide welcome packets, and help secure discounted attraction packages for accompanying family members. meetorlandonorth.com

Contact: Danny Trosset; Director of Sports Tourism, Marketing and Meetings; dtrosset@seminolecountyfl.gov; 407.665.2902

Getting There: The closest airport is Orlando Sanford International Airport (SFB); nearby airports include Orlando International Airport (MCO) and Daytona Beach International Airport (DAB); Amtrak Auto Train is an option, and by car the area has convenient access to major highways including I-95 and I-4.

BY THE NUMBERS

100,000-plus square feet of meeting space (25 event venues)
 -5,000 hotel rooms (43 hotels ranging from luxury hotels to historic B&Bs)

500-plus restaurants
 345 square miles, 36 of which are water
 72 degrees the constant temperature

of the Wekiva River
 17 properties and districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places
 9 golf courses



ST. PETERSBURG/ CLEARWATER

Located on the central west coast of Florida is St. Petersburg and Clearwater—where the Gulf of Mexico is on one side and Tampa Bay on the other. On the western border of Pinellas County is a 35-mile barrier island, with powder-sugar sand and turquoise Gulf waters, where you'll find the U.S.'s top award-winning beaches. If that's not enough of a draw, St. Pete holds the Guinness World Record for logging the most consecutive days of sunshine ever recorded (768 days in row), earning it "The Sunshine City" moniker.

The Dali Museum in St. Pete is the second-largest collection of Salvador Dali's works in the world and the Clearwater Marine Aquarium (CMA) is a working aquarium, dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and release of sick and injured marine animals (CMA's resident star, Winter, is the first dolphin in the world to receive a prosthetic tail after losing hers in crab trap).

The CVB: Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater (VSPC) provides all the expected, standard services a CVB would offer, and services are complimentary. The booking incentive program is offered on a case-by-case basis and offers financial assistance that, when approved, is applied as a credit to the groups master account. The CVB offers these monetary incentives to enhance hotels' proposals to generate more competitive bids for group business opportunities. meetings. visitstpeteclearwater.com

Contact: Jeanine Messerschmidt; Senior Sales Manager; jeanine@visitspc.com; 727.464.7382

Getting There: Two international airports: Tampa International Airport (TPA) and the St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport (PIE)

BY THE NUMBERS

608 square miles (the second smallest county in Florida)

17 hotels/resorts with a significant amount of meeting space and rooms (ranging from 7,500 square feet to 70,000-plus square feet of meeting space and 77-620 rooms)



Tampa

The state's third largest city is currently undergoing a complete overhaul of its downtown waterfront area. Water Street Tampa, a \$3 billion visionary redevelopment, will be adding hundreds of new hotel rooms along with new residential, retail and gathering spaces.

JW Marriott Tampa is one of the hotels under construction and is expected to open in late 2020. It will have 519 rooms, more than 100,000 square feet of meeting space and a 26th floor rooftop bar. Marriott Edition, a five-star luxury hotel with 173 rooms, is slated to open in early 2021.

A 345-room combined Hyatt Place/Hyatt House is under construction on as an urban in-fill project downtown with 3,400 square feet of meeting space (opening date TBA). Aparium Hotel Group, known for its location-inspired hotels, has begun work on a 176-room full-service hotel in historic Ybor City (opening date TBA).

The CVB: Visit Tampa Bay's staff are the local experts when it comes to the needs of meeting planners. The Convention Sales and Services teams are well-versed in supporting gatherings of all sizes with anything they might need, whether audio-visual specialists, off-site venues or transportation options. Destination sales professionals assist in the site selection process, distributing events specifications local industry partners equipped to host. They collate responses and provide planners with a one-stop solution to placing a meeting in Tampa Bay. They conduct site visits, arrange the appropriate introductions to hospitality professionals that will create a one of a kind experience. visittampabay.com/meeting-planners

Contact: Adam DePiro; Director of Convention Sales; adepiro@visittampabay.com; 813.342.4061

Getting There: Tampa International Airport (TPA) is 6 miles from downtown and served by hundreds of regular nonstop flights, including multiple flights per day from Atlanta, New York, Chicago, Denver, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle and Los Angeles.

BY THE NUMBERS: THE TREASURE COLLECTION

752,000 square feet of meeting space (including the Tampa Convention Center)

Another 100,000-plus square feet is on the horizon

3,600 rooms (2,000 group committable within five blocks of TCC)

13 hotels within minutes of TCC

West Volusia

Situated between Daytona Beach and Orlando is West Volusia, which comprises 14 communities in the western part of the county along the St. Johns River. “Our motto is ‘Old Florida, New Vibe,’ because we have both ecotourism offerings (three state parks, a wildlife refuge, lots of eco-tours along the river) as well as a vibrant, award-winning MainStreet in DeLand,” says Georgia Turner, executive director, West Volusia Tourism Advertising Authority. “We are a great place for small meetings.”

“The most popular activity in our area is cooking pancakes at DeLeon Springs State Park,” says Turner. The Old Spanish Sugar Mill Restaurant, opened in 1961, is located inside the park and features a griddle in the middle of each table. Manatee viewing is also a popular activity at Blue Spring State Park—a designated manatee refuge and the winter home to a growing population of West Indian Manatees. During manatee season (mid-November to March) several hundred manatees can be viewed from the spring’s overlooks.

The Tourism Bureau: West Volusia Tourism can contact hotels, attractions and caterers, among other services. visitwestvolusia.com

Contact: Georgia Turner; Executive Director; gturner@visitwestvolusia.com; 386.734.0162

Getting There: Daytona Beach International Airport (DAB) and Orlando-Sanford International Airport (SFB) are both within 30 minutes of West Volusia; Orlando International Airport (MCO) is an hour away.



BY THE NUMBERS

2,600 acres at Blue Spring State Park (including the largest spring on the St. Johns River)

4 large hotels (as well as boutique hotels, B&Bs and “fish camps”)

2 conference centers (Sanborn Center in DeLand and The Center at Deltona)

South



BY THE NUMBERS: FLORIDA'S PARADISE COAST

400,290 square feet of meeting space [including **100,000** square feet of event space at the new JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort]

2021 a new sports stadium with meeting space is slated to open

91 18-hole golf courses

30 miles of white sand beaches

6 major beach resorts

FLORIDA'S PARADISE COAST

Made up of three main areas (Naples, Marco Island and the Gulf Coast portion of the Everglades), Florida's Paradise Coast juxtaposes luxury with wilderness; 70 percent of the area within Collier County is dedicated to parks and nature preserves.

Naples is a luxurious resort city on the coast; its iconic pier on Naples Beach stretches 1,000 feet into the Gulf of Mexico. Marco Island is the largest and only developed barrier island of the Ten Thousand Islands—a pristine labyrinth of water and mangroves. The Everglades National Park (the only subtropical preserve in North America) is directly south of the island and a habitat for many rare and endangered species like manatees, American crocodiles and Florida panthers.

The CVB: The Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB provides FAMs, RFP assistance, destination experts, site itineraries, and incentives and marketing. meetinparadise.com

Contact: Debi DeBenedetto; Group Sales & Marketing Manager; debi.de@colliercountyfl.gov; 239.252.2379

Getting There: Southwest Florida International Airport in Fort Myers (RSW) is about a 30-minute drive to Naples and 50 minutes to Marco Island; the airport provides nonstop service to 54 destinations on 16 air carriers.



FORT MYERS AND SANIBEL ISLAND

Unspoiled white sand beaches, exotic wildlife and lush subtropical foliage define the Fort Myers and Sanibel Island area, found in Southwest Florida along the Gulf Coast. "Here, visitors escape the more congested areas of the state for a feel of old Florida that no longer exists," says Jill Vance, director of sales, Lee County CVB. "[The area] is proving to be the perfect sanctuary for families to reconnect with loved ones in a quiet, natural setting. With surroundings conducive to refocusing on what's really important in life, visitors are finding a sense of inner peace as they submerge themselves in alluring natural wilderness."

The VCB: The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel, aka the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau, offers meeting planners imaginative services and solutions for events throughout the entire planning process including site selection assistance, pre-meeting planning, attendance-building support, marketing materials, spouse and youth activities and ambassadors to assist with conference services. fortmyers-sanibel.com/meetings

Contact: Jill Vance; Director of Sales; jvance@leevcb.com; 239.691.3500

Getting There: Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) is in Fort Myers and Punta Gorda Airport (PGD) is just to the north in Charlotte County.

BY THE NUMBERS

250,000-plus square feet of total meeting space

12,000-plus committable guest rooms

-90 area golf courses

FORT LAUDERDALE



FORT LAUDERDALE

Nicknamed the "Venice of America," Greater Fort Lauderdale is dubbed the Yachting Capital of the World for its canal system. With 300 miles of scenic navigable waterways along the Atlantic Coast, the area offers private yacht charters that are ideal for an afternoon breakout session or sunset wind down.

Greater Fort Lauderdale's Convention Center District boasts more than 3,000-plus hotel rooms within a 1.5-mile radius of the Broward County Convention Center; there is also more than 14,000 group and meeting hotel rooms in the area.

The CVB: If groups are using the Broward County Convention Center, the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau will provide a concierge during meeting registration hours to provide information on transportation, attractions, restaurants, shopping and cultural activities. If meetings require registration assistance, ground operators, special event producers, musicians, yacht charters, off-site venues or more, the referral program will speed up the selection process. sunny.org/meetings

Contact: Ed Simon; Senior Vice President, Convention Sales and Services; esimon@broward.org; 954.767.2459

Getting There: The Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL) is located minutes from downtown, the beaches, the convention center and the port. The airport offers ease of direct flight access from more than 165 domestic and international cities.

BY THE NUMBERS

1,047,000 square feet of meeting space at hotels (with 120,000 square feet under construction or in planning)

200,000-square-foot Xtreme Action Park, Florida's largest indoor entertainment venue

40,000 square feet of flexible space at the Gallery of Amazing Things

34,000 hotel rooms and 562 hotels

4,000-plus eateries

3,000 hours of annual sunshine

77 average temperature

The Florida Keys

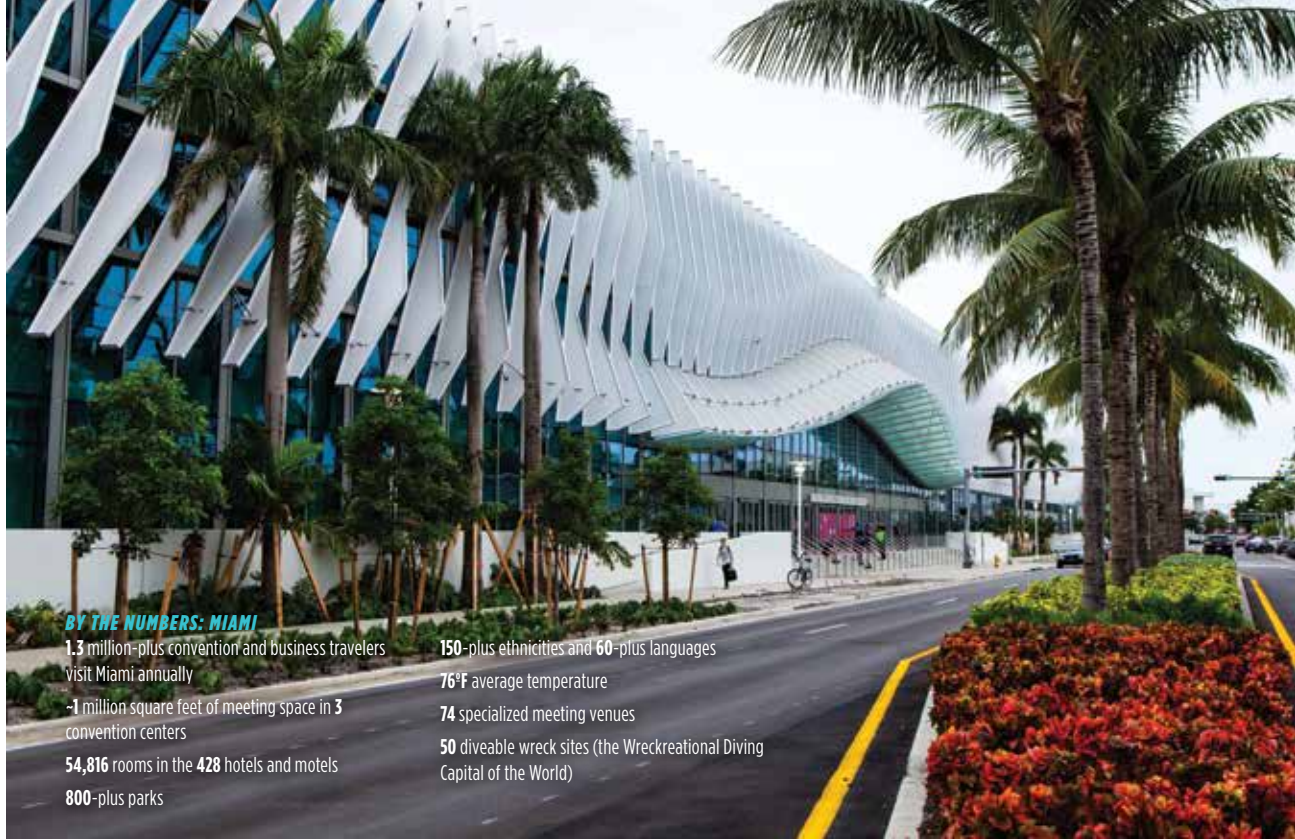
Located off the southern coast of Florida is the coral cay archipelago known as the Florida Keys. While it's the southernmost part of the continental U.S., the Keys more closely resemble the Caribbean in climate.

"In the Florida Keys and Key West, it's all about simply finding the right fit for your group," says Jack Meier, group sales manager for the Monroe County Tourist Development Council. "The Keys offer an experience that's a world away from a typical meeting experience at a mega-metro convention center."

The CVB: Download the Meeting Planner Guide at fla-keys.com/meeting-planners

Contact: Jack Meier; Sales Manager; jack@fla-keys.com

PHOTOS: GREATER FORT LAUDERDALE CVB; (OPPOSITE) GREATER MIAMI CVB; ISTOCK.COM/@MEINZAHN



BY THE NUMBERS: MIAMI

1.3 million-plus convention and business travelers visit Miami annually

~1 million square feet of meeting space in 3 convention centers

54,816 rooms in the 428 hotels and motels

800-plus parks

150-plus ethnicities and 60-plus languages

76°F average temperature

74 specialized meeting venues

50 diveable wreck sites (the Wreckreational Diving Capital of the World)



BY THE NUMBERS: THE FLORIDA KEYS

127 miles the length of the Overseas Highway (connecting the regions)

Key Largo is 58 miles from Miami International Airport & Key West is 160 miles from Miami International Airport

10 Keymandments guide visitors into have meaningful experiences while respecting and preserving the environment

5 regions (Key Largo, Islamorada, Marathon, The Lower Keys and Key West)

Getting There: The Key West International Airport (EYW) has commercial service and is served by major airlines. Florida Keys Marathon International Airport (MTH) welcomes on-demand small charter aircraft. Visitors can also fly into Miami International Airport (MIA) or Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL) and take an airport shuttle bus or rent a car. fla-keys.com/how-to-get-here

Miami

The only destination in the U.S. that's bordered by two national parks (Biscayne National Park and Everglades National Park), Miami was once a mangrove swamp before it began development in the 1920s that led it to the premier international hub it is today. Likewise, the culturally rich Miami Beach used to be a Coconut Grove Plantation; the man-made island now boasts 800-plus art deco buildings in its Art Deco District, the world's largest collection.

The Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC), which underwent a \$620 million renovation, reopened in September 2018 and features a sustainable design and eco-conscious operational procedures. MBCC now boasts nearly 500,000 square feet of exhibit space, a new 60,000-square-foot grand ballroom, 81 breakout rooms, a 20,000-square-foot rooftop specialty space, and an adjacent 6-acre park. It's also committed to the arts, investing about \$7 million in public art.

The CVB: Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau's Convention Services Team provides complimentary site selection assistance, business services referrals and destination materials. miamimeetings.com

Getting There: Miami International Airport (MIA) welcomed a total of 21.7 million arrivals in 2017. More carriers fly into MIA than any other airport in the country. Both the airport and PortMiami are conveniently located 10 minutes from downtown. 🚗