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10 CLASSIC AMERICAN CITIES that offer
meeting planners extra value at off-peak times



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When you need a meeting destination that offers opportunities and amenities as vast as the landscape itself, look no further. Scottsdale offers your group distinctive accommodations, top-tier meeting facilities, and hassle-free transportation both in the air and on the ground, as well as something delightfully unexpected – the stirring beauty of the Sonoran Desert.

the Off-Season Advantage

Holding a conference during a destination's quieter time can reap benefits for planners and attendees.

— BY ALLEN J. SHEINMAN

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hen it comes to planning an event, taking the road less traveled due to the season can be a fruitful option.

“When you’ve chosen a destination, you should work with your convention and visitors bureau to find out what the off- or shoulder season is, times when you are able to negotiate more concessions than you could during peak season,” says Ingrid Shumate, education and marketing director for the Washington, D.C.-based American Coal Council. “It can mean reduced rates on hotel rooms and other financial incentives, and easier access to local attractions... perhaps even lower air rates.”

Local destination marketing organizations, always prized partners in the planning process, are especially helpful in creating added value for meeting professionals and their attendees during slower periods, but many hoteliers and business owners of all stripes similarly are eager to help ease costs off-season and promote a welcome environment for meetings and events.

There are trade-offs, of course. Off- or low seasons often coincide with more extreme weather conditions, and the leisure activities a region is known for, such as skiing, beach-going or golfing, might not be available. Even so, with less peak-season distractions to contend with, more attention can be paid to the agenda at hand.

Here’s a look at some popular meeting destinations and what they can offer to planners willing to think outside the season.



Mountain Shadows
Resort, Scottsdale

Cool and Collected in Warmer Climes

Scottsdale, Arizona

While the Grand Canyon State can get hot in the summer, there are myriad ways to beat the heat and enjoy free time before and after a meeting or event, while budget-friendly room rates put the “low” in low season.

Experience Scottsdale’s Sizzling Summer Rebate program — found at TheDesertIsHot.com — involves more than 25 participating resorts and hotels and can be key to boosting ROI, with a rebate of up to \$5,000 based on number of actualized rooms during the summer months.

“The off season is a great time to consider meeting here,” says Kelli Blubaum, CMP, vice president of sales and services for Experience Scottsdale. “During the summer months resort rates take a dip, giving planners the opportunity to take advantage of a 5-diamond experience at a 3-diamond price. With unique activities that allow you to take advantage of the cooler parts of the day, resort accommodations under one roof and creative ‘chill’ food-and-beverage options, groups can create a memorable summertime Scottsdale experience.”

One of the participating hotels in the rebate program is the 750-room Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, which delivers a substantial 316,000 square feet of event space spread among 47 meeting rooms that can hold a total of up to 3,000 people. The facility includes two stand-alone conference centers, each with its own 23,000-square-foot grand ballroom that can be divided into multiple meeting areas. On 65 lushly landscaped acres, the property also features six pools, five dining outlets and the Well & Being Spa.

Summer rebates are to be had as well at the 496-room Talking Stick Resort, with 36,793 square feet of event space for up to 4,424 people, a colorful casino and live entertainment; the 198-room Mountain Shadows Resort, featuring 12,834 square feet of event space, special summer F&B programs and a par-3, 18-hole golf course; and the 204-room Scott Resort & Spa, with a design evocative of Old Havana, more than 14,000 square feet of indoor meeting space and proximity to attractions such as

Western Spirit: Scottsdale’s Museum of the West.

When it comes to going off-site, “There are off-season benefits everywhere in town,” notes John Glynn, director of public relations for the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess. “Rates are generally lower, and it’s much easier to get into restaurants and a host of attractions we have nearby. And because of the extreme heat at midday, there are lots of climate-controlled indoor activities, like Topgolf, go-kart racing at Octane Raceway and ice skating at the Ice Den.”

Other activities include hiking on an easy trail in Scottsdale’s McDowell Sonoran Preserve, which is at its summer best at sunrise and a fun way to experience the grandeur and beauty of the Sonoran Desert without overheating. Two to try are the Bajada Nature Trail Loop at Gateway Trailhead and the Jane Rau Interpretive Trail at Brown’s Ranch Trailhead. Cruise through the vast landscape after sunset with one of Scottsdale’s off-road outfitters. Groups don high-tech night-vision gear to spot owls, coyotes, javelina and other nocturnal creatures. Professional astronomers can accompany the tour to provide orientation to the desert’s starry skies.

Summer tee times at the city’s championship golf courses start at sunrise, so golfers can get in 18 holes before the heat really kicks in. Insider tip: Kierland Golf Club offers mister-cooled golf carts, while other clubs, like Boulders and Troon North, stock carts with refreshing amenities like chilled towels, cool neck wraps and insulated coolers.

At the Boulders Resort & Spa, early-morning paddleboard yoga as experienced in the spa pool is a fun activity, while morning yoga sessions also can be arranged in the shaded Alegria Garden at the Royal Palms Resort and Spa and at the Omni Scottsdale Resort & Spa at Montelucia. For a midday splash, there are eight rivers and lakes within a one-hour drive of Old Town Scottsdale, featuring calm-water river rafting, kayaking, SUPing and tubing. Groups can charter the *Desert Belle* tour boat for a climate-controlled scenic journey around beautiful Saguaro Lake.

Photographs: (clockwise from left): Scott Resort; REI Co-Op Experiences; Joel Hazelton/Experience Scottsdale

The Scott Resort & Spa



Kayaking with REI Co-Op Experiences

Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve





Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Spring and fall are the off-seasons in much of the Sunshine State. It's a time to avoid the crush of winter and summer vacationers, with spring break mostly over by April.

"There are distinct benefits to hosting an event in the spring and fall months, when fewer travelers are in our destination," says Ed Simon, executive vice president of convention sales for the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau. "The CVB has invested in a vibrant art scene with its Underground Create brand that includes creative enclaves such as FATVillage [for Flagler Arts and Technology] and the Downtown Hollywood Mural Project, with more than two dozen outdoor murals at key locations. Gallery spaces, coffee shops, restaurants and free monthly ArtWalks show the innovative side of the destination and are much more accessible off-season."

"In addition, team-building and excursion tours are available through the CVB, including yacht charters, kayaking and activities in the Everglades, which in the high season can have crowded waters," Simon says. "Plus, at this time, our local residents are more likely to be frequenting the diverse beaches rather than an overabundance of visitors."

The GFLCVB currently is giving away \$10 million in meeting space at the city's ever-expanding, 600,000-square-foot Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center for groups coming in at off-peak times from 2021 through 2024. "Depending on the dates, qualified groups can get up to 100 percent of their convention center bill covered by the CVB," notes Simon.

On the hotel front, the 150-room Tryp by Wyndham

Maritime Fort Lauderdale is emblematic of properties in the area offering substantially lower rates in the off-season, this autumn having reduced the price of a room from \$239 to \$159. The property, which has an outdoor pool and sits along Marina Bay across from a dizzying array of luxury yachts, offers 5,200 square feet of meeting space over five rooms for up to 300 attendees. Nearby are group-friendly draws like the Broward Center for the Performing Arts and the historic Bonnet House Museum & Gardens.



Guitar Hotel at the
Seminole Hard Rock,
Hollywood



Rendering of expanded Broward County
Convention Center as of May 2023

Orlando, Florida

Even in this uber-popular theme-park mecca, hotels will try harder during the spring and fall off-seasons to ease the path for meeting planners.

“Booking in this time period, we can be in a position to offer extra value-added options,” says Leslie Menichini, vice president, sales and marketing, for Rosen Hotels & Resorts, referring to the 1,501-room Rosen Shingle Creek. “These can include discounts on branding opportunities, audiovisual, Internet requirements and possibly catering, depending upon the group’s needs. We often work with planners on discounts or added-value items related to amenities such as our 18-hole

Rosen Shingle Creek



Cafe du Monde
New Orleans



Arnold Palmer-designed golf course, our newly enhanced spa and more. Groups might also enjoy a little more wiggle room in the set-up or tear-down time for their general session, exhibits, galas or breakouts. And there is more flexibility with meeting-room to guest-room space ratios and room rates.”

The property, which won the Silver Award for Best Décor/Design, Southeast, in Northstar Meetings Group’s 2019 Stella Awards, features a hefty 524,000 square feet of event space, including a 95,000-square-foot conference room among its 74 dedicated meeting spaces with enough total capacity for up to 20,500 people.

The 1,010-room DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld hotel, a 2019 Stella Award finalist for Best Hotel/Resort, Southeast, room rates also take a dip in the off-season. The 28-acre property, adjacent to the Orange County Convention Center with its 1,103,538 square feet of exhibit space, has its own 100,000 square feet of meeting space and two swimming pools. On-site dining takes place in venues such as the Langua Restaurant & Bar, whose all-day menu includes steak and seafood in a casual

Gatlin Ballroom, Rosen Shingle Creek



atmosphere, Alberto’s Pizzeria and the Barefoot Bar. SeaWorld is less than a mile away.

With school in session, September through early December (not counting Thanksgiving week) is considered an optimum time to avoid the most voluminous crowds at Walt Disney World and Universal Studios. When it comes to meeting at a Disney resort, rates can fluctuate from \$130 to \$245 throughout the year. Travel blogger Leah Crocker Althiser runs a website called the Budget Mouse filled with good advice on best times to book.

New Orleans, Louisiana

The fabled Big Easy swings all year round, but the pace might be a tad more leisurely during the hot summer months. “In relation to hotel deals, it really depends on what’s going on in the city,” says Kristen Loflin, communications and marketing manager for New Orleans & Company, the city’s DMO. “While the summer is a generally slower time for us, the rates will go back up when an event like the Essence Music Fest is in town in July, for example. We usually direct people to view our calendar of events to see what’s happening.

“Of course, our bureau works to help conventions and meetings get special deals throughout the year,” Loflin adds, “and we do offer special summer promotions like the COOLinary program, which takes place during August and allows visitors and resident alike the opportunity to enjoy discounted prix fixe menus at many of New Orleans’ finest restaurants.”

Warm Comforts *in* Cooler-Weather Destinations

Jackson Hole, Wyoming

While attendees won't find much use for their skis or snowshoes here in the spring and fall, this grandly rustic city offers easy access to Grand Teton National Park (from mid-May), Yellowstone National Park (April-May, September-October), lots of nature and nights made for stargazing. The town itself has an inviting mix of shops and dining options clustered around the central Town Square.

"In our case, the best times to plan a meeting are early May to late June and late September through October," says Cory Carlson, director of sales and marketing for Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, about the 124-room Four Seasons Resort and Residences Jackson Hole. The property has 1,966 square feet of event space spread among four rooms, in addition to the 4,000-square-foot Cottonwood Ballroom. "This is when we can more readily commit the entire resort for buy-outs, when we can customize the place for groups with displays and be more flexible in terms.

For example, we can leave the spa out of the buyout package during off-season, something we wouldn't do at peak time."

At the plush 121-room Spring Hill Suites Jackson Hole, rates can run \$400-\$500 per night during peak season, but \$100 per night off-season, according to Justin Walters, lead visitor services agent for the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce. Ideal for small meetings, the all-suite property has one meeting room plus a variety of functional lobby spaces.



Grand Teton Park

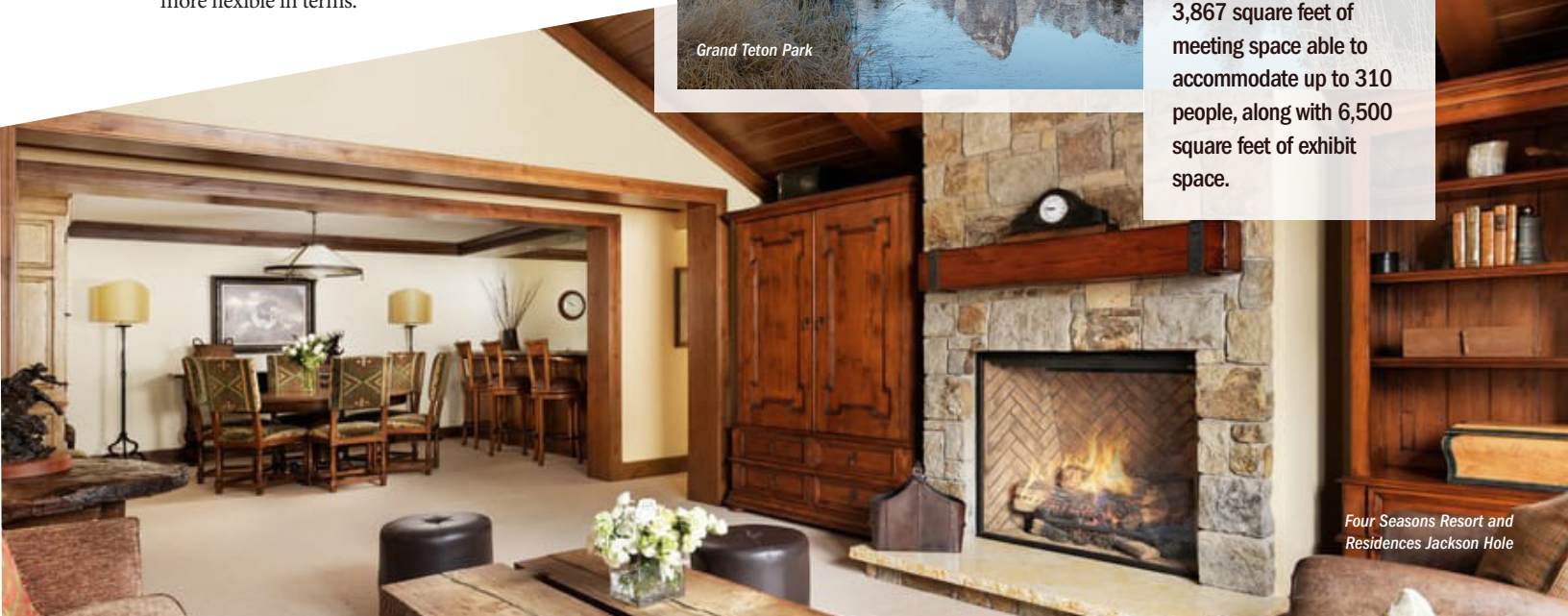
Topnotch Resort, Stowe



Stowe, Vermont

This lovely village, well known as one of the East Coast's premier skiing destinations, offers much to visitors during its off-season, primarily in the late-fall (post-Columbus Day), after peak leaf-peeping season but before snow carpets the terrain. Cool mornings and sunny days are ideal for guided hiking and biking tours, and the area offers many repositories of culture such as the West Branch Gallery and Sculpture Park and the Vermont Ski & Snowboarding Museum. For more, visit the area DMO, Go Stowe.

Planners can find late-fall inducements at properties such as the 68-room Topnotch Resort and Spa, where room discounts of up to 50 percent are available in November, along with two-for-one deals on treatments at the property's sumptuous spa. The resort has 3,867 square feet of meeting space able to accommodate up to 310 people, along with 6,500 square feet of exhibit space.



Four Seasons Resort and Residences Jackson Hole



Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Known as a hub for fine arts, theater and technological research, Winston-Salem is less than six hours from major cities such as Atlanta and Washington, D.C. The weather here is warm and muggy in summer and cold and wet in winter, the latter being the off-season.

“Planners booking in the city during this time will find added flexibility and competitive rates in meeting-space offerings at a number of locations,” says Marcheta Cole Keefer, director of marketing and communications at Visit Winston-Salem. Such sites include the Twin City Quarter, a complex that includes the recently renovated Benton Convention Center, with 105,000 square feet of flexible meeting space. The center is connected to the 315-room Marriott Winston-Salem, with its own 11,468 square feet of event space, as well as the 146-room Embassy Suites Hotel Winston-Salem, with 11,505 square feet of total event space. The three venues collectively are known as the Twin City Quarter.

At the 189-room Kimpton Cardinal Hotel in downtown Winston-Salem’s historic R.J. Reynolds building, said to be the architectural muse for New York City’s Empire State Building, off-season rates can be reduced by as much as 20 percent. The property has two ballrooms, which combined total 1,943 square feet and can host up to 217 people for a

reception. There also are several smaller meeting rooms, a trendy French restaurant and recreational outlets like a full basketball court and a bowling alley.

“The nice thing about being a second-tier city is that our pricing already is competitive compared to places like Raleigh, Charlotte and such,” says Richard Brooks, complex director of sales and marketing for Twin City Quarter. “The second half of November through December is when you see more attractive hotel pricing and packages, and a good amount of our inventory is devoted to convention groups. And our downtown is compact and filled with lots to do, including affordable restaurants, bars and craft brewers. Even parking is a deal here — overnight parking can run to \$50 in Boston and \$25-\$30 in Charlotte, but our overnight rate is just \$15.”



Buffalo, New York

This historic city is on the northwestern edge of the Empire State and a major gateway to Canada. Summer is high season here, with gorgeous weather and outdoor festivals galore. As for winter, it’s cold. “But the city is most welcoming, hotel prices will be at their

lowest, and fellow tourists will be few and far between,” says *U.S. News & World Report*.

“Our off-season hotel rates do fall dramatically,” affirms Patrick Kaler, president and CEO, Visit Buffalo Niagara, “and our sales team is prepared to work with planners to put together an extremely competitive and affordable off-season package.”

Attendees can convene in a number of landmark venues, such as Frank Lloyd Wright's sprawling Martin House Complex, originally built for businessman Darwin D. Martin and his family between 1903-1905 and which recently completed a \$52 million restoration. Event spaces include the glass-walled Eleanor and Wilson Greatbatch Pavilion, which can sit 120 for meetings, host a cocktail party for up to 150 people and a sit-down dinner for 100; for more intimate gatherings, the estate's original Gardener's Cottage accommodates up to 35 for cocktails and 22 for dinner.

The opulent Shea's Performing Arts Center, a converted 1920s movie palace with Tiffany-designed interiors, offers spaces such as the 710 Theatre with over 600 seats for presentations, the 2,280-square-foot Shea's Smith Theatre with table seating for 130 and theater-style seating for 220, and an attached bistro and bar to help host a cocktail party for 250.

Among things to do is a visit to the 23.5-acre Buffalo Zoo, the third oldest such attraction in the U.S., having been founded in 1870. Groups also can enjoy the cream of today's best jazz musicians at the Colored Musicians Club, which dates from 1934 and has been the site of historic jam sessions by the likes of Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis and John Coltrane.

New York's second largest city also has a compact convention center district, anchored by the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center with 64,000 square feet of exhibit space and banquet space for up to 5,000 people. Surrounding the center are a host of restaurants, breweries and meetings-worthy properties.

Among hotels aggressively courting off-season business is the 110-room Aloft Buffalo Downtown, which sits aside the city's Theater District and has 1,607 square feet of meeting space in two rooms that jointly hold up to 117 people. On the Lake Erie shore in the Canalside District, the 205-room Buffalo Marriott Harborcenter has 4,485 square feet of event space that can accommodate up to 437 people.

Photographs (from top):
F11Photo; Jon Burkholz



Salt Lake City, Utah

The capital city of Utah is a bustling locus for gatherings and was recently named to meetings-technology giant Cvent's 2019 list of 50 Top Meetings Destinations in the U.S. "Winter and spring are probably the ideal time for planners on a tighter budget to hold an association or corporate event here," says Shawn Stinson, director of communications at Visit Sale Lake. "In April and May in particular, our hotel rates are lower because ski season is over."

Indeed, rates are more competitive at properties like the 499-room Hilton Salt Lake City Center, with 21,873 square feet of meeting space spread over 22 rooms that can accommodate a total of 2,584 people, and the 381-room Radisson Salt Lake City Downtown, offering 15,000 square feet of event space for up to 800 attendees.

Salt Lake City skyline



Salt Lake's downtown is studded with restaurants, shopping and a lively nightlife. Squatters Pub Brewery, a hip, contemporary urban watering hole known for its craft beers, can host private parties of up to 300 guests. Groups will enjoy exploring Temple Square, a 35-acre plaza devoted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, repository of the Family History Library, said to be the largest genealogy library in the world. Other on-site attractions include the soaring Salt Lake Temple and the Gothic-style Assembly Hall.

For a memorable group excursion, consider a day trip to Park City, just 28 miles southeast of Salt Lake. This winter ski center is also a historic mining town; silver was king here, and there are more than 1,200 miles of vintage mining tunnels snaking through the surrounding mountains. The city's tale is told via walking tours like a tasty and history-laden trek via Park City Food Tours and cultural outposts such as the Park City Museum.

Portland, Maine

Known for its varied landscapes, vintage lighthouses, copious seafood and laid-back vibe, the most populous city in Maine enjoys peak tourism in summer, but with lots of skiing in winter and the spectacular foliage a draw in autumn, spring is the prime off-season here.

Visitors will find fishing, canoeing and all other manner of outdoor fun, along with hotels eager to make an off-season deal.

"Our rates here in town can range from \$1,000 per night during peak ski season to \$115 per night during the off-season," notes Avery Windham, director of sales and marketing for the 130-room Hyatt Place Portland – Old Port. The property has 1,050 square feet of meeting space, an indoor pool, the 24.7 Gallery Market and the Coffee to Cocktails Bar.

"In spring it's much quieter in town, with plenty of parking, no lines for restaurants and great weather," adds Windham.

"Nearby are a host of attractions, including the Portland Science Center, the Portland Museum of Art and the Cross Insurance Arena." The latter venue, renovated in 2012, has 6,200 seats and hosts a variety of sporting events and live entertainment.

The big box in town is the Portland Expo, with 24,000 square feet of exhibition space and 10 meeting rooms, adjacent to the William B. Trough Ice Arena, which offers public skating year-round.

Photographs: (top 2) Visit Portland; Paul Broussard/New Orleans & Company



Downtown Portland