

California Delivers

When it comes to meetings that reflect today's top priorities, there's no destination quite like the Golden State.



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BY MARIA LENHART

Planners looking for inclusivity, sustainable practices, event-friendly technology and inspiring outdoor settings for healthful activities will find that all of these attributes abound in California.

While California, like everywhere else, was not unscathed by the pandemic, its downtown districts and resort meccas are back on track and more welcoming than ever. Whether it's a citywide convention for 10,000 or a board retreat for 10, California provides an array of options for making any meeting shine.

"California is the perfect location for any business event and budget," says Caroline Beteta, president and CEO of Visit California, the state's tourism marketing arm.

Inclusive California

What makes California an inclusive destination and why does this matter to visitors, including meeting attendees? Beteta emphasizes that California, which has the most diverse population of any state in the U.S., embraces and celebrates the multi-faceted range of its heritage and regions. The state is well known as a welcoming haven for people of various faiths, ethnicities and sexual orientation.

"This blending of cultures and lifestyles cultivates the 'you-do-you' attitude that California has long

been known for and unifies all Californians—and visitors—with the message that this is a place where you can be yourself," Beteta says.

Beteta also maintains that California's inclusive nature is an important driver of meeting attendance, one that ties in with the important "bleisure" trend of combining business and vacation travel.

"Attendees are taking more factors into consideration when deciding on business travel as many look to extend their stay to enjoy the destination," she says. "A welcoming host city creates a sense of inclusion, driving a deeper and more positive connection with the destination and overall experience."

When planners are looking for immersive experiences that encourage attendee engagement and make for memorable events, California's diverse cultural heritage and adventurous nature provides an endless array of opportunities.

"California's destinations are eager to showcase their distinct identity, encouraging attendees to understand and experience what makes them special, and support meeting planners in incorporating these elements into their event," Beteta says. "A few ideas could include partnering with local chefs and vendors to create unforgettable culinary experiences, touring historic or significant landmarks as team-building activities or tapping

into the local arts and culture scene to build attendee excitement.”

Visit California has also taken steps to better connect visitors with the state’s Native heritage through a new initiative called Visit Native California. As home to more than 100 federally recognized tribes, Beteta notes that California has a myriad of ways for planners to incorporate Native cultures into a meetings program. These can include everything from viewing the “Before the Other People Came” exhibit at the Oakland Museum of California to exploring the new Agua Caliente Cultural Plaza in Palm Springs, which opened The Spa at Séc-he on April 4 and has restored access to underground

ancient healing mineral waters.

Sustainable California

When it comes to meetings incorporating sustainability, planners will find that destinations all over California have taken a leadership role in developing and adopting eco-friendly practices. Some 13 of the top 20 most sustainable large cities in the U.S. are located in California.

“With the increasing demand for green meetings and attendees’ rising awareness of their environmental impact, cities across California are supporting the green call to action with new standards in meetings that include lower carbon emissions, reduction

top solar-powered city in the nation, but abounds with LEED-certified venues, including the Los Angeles Convention Center, The Broad art museum, J. Paul Getty Museum and The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, as well as many of its leading meetings hotels.

- Greater Palm Springs is a leader in wind power production and wastewater recycling and is home to Two Bunch Palms, the first carbon-neutral spa resort in North America.
- Irvine has over 300 miles of on-road bike lanes, over 50 miles of off-road trails and 16,500 acres of parks and dedicated open spaces. It’s also among the California cities to pledge carbon neutrality by 2035.
- Sacramento, known as “America’s Farm to Fork Capital,” offers more than 25 farmers’ markets and serves locally sourced meat and produce at the SAFE Credit Union Convention Center and local restaurants. It also has the country’s greenest city-vehicle fleet, with more than 2,300 vehicles running on low-carbon energy.
- San Francisco operates the largest fleet of zero-emission electric trolley busses of any U.S. city and is ranked as the second-best large city in the country for biking. The city was also the first in the nation to ban single-use plastic grocery bags and has a composting program that collects more than 500 tons of food scraps per day for fertilizer.
- In Monterey, the Monterey Bay Aquarium is not only a popular venue, but its Seafood Watch program has been educating restaurants and diners about sustainable seafood choices since 1999.



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in waste, energy conservation and utilizing locally sourced products, not to mention our many LEED-certified convention centers,” Beteta says.

California cities are approaching sustainability in a variety of distinctive ways. Here are a few examples:

- San Diego is home to the world’s first LEED platinum-certified commercial airport terminal and to San Diego Zoo Global, one of the world’s largest animal conservation organizations.
- Los Angeles not only ranks as the

Technology leader

As headquarters to the likes of Google, Apple, Oracle, Hewlett-Packard, Facebook and scores of other top tech companies, California has long been the incubator of developments that have profoundly changed the way we live.

According to Beteta, this translates into a variety of enhancements for meetings and events held in the state.

"California is a state of creativity and forward-thinking, home to the world's largest technology companies and birthplace of the Internet," she says. "Innovation is woven into California culture, influencing our meeting

entertainment industry is an important source of state-of-the-art infrastructure for staging truly dazzling events.

Even smaller cities such as Monterey are on the cutting edge of tech innovation. In 2021, the Monterey Conference Center became the first meeting venue in the world to partner with Immersive Design Studios, a

unlimited, whether it's a sophisticated hotel rooftop with skyline views, sunny beach, terraced vineyard, snow-capped mountain or desert oasis.

"California's year-round ideal weather and abundance of outdoor event venues and meeting spaces keep our destinations a head above the competition," Beteta says. "When coming to California, meeting attendees expect to be outside as much as possible, soaking in the breathtaking views of the state's diverse landscapes and bustling cities. And outdoor activities—including everything from mural tours to surfing lessons or rounds of golf—add an unforgettable element to any meeting."

In the post-pandemic era, the ability to meet in open-air settings and enjoy healthy outdoor activities has become a huge selling point, according to Beteta.

"Outdoor events showcase the beauty of California destinations, while giving attendees an opportunity to be in fresh air, soak up the sun or stand in awe under the stars," she says. "As the meeting and event industry embraces the need for mental and physical health and safety protocols, outdoor events have become a norm in California."

The trend for incorporating wellness components into an event is fully in sync with the California lifestyle and its emphasis on health and self-care, Beteta says, adding that planners will find no shortage of creative ways to rejuvenate attendees.

"From offering attendees nourishment with food and beverages from local farms, rebooting attendees' energy with outdoor yoga or 5K walks or partnering with a local wellness coach for breathing exercises during meeting breaks, meeting planners find that California's endless offerings will recharge and inspire their attendees," she says.

Learn more at visitcalifornia.com/meetings.



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and event industry to dream bigger. Meeting planners have access to the newest technology, state-of-the-art facilities and endless educational and research resources."

While Silicon Valley is the world's best-known tech hub, planners should also know that destinations throughout California offer access to top innovators and educational institutions that are rich sources for meetings content. In Greater Los Angeles, for example, there are over 7,000 tech companies, including many specializing in green and health technology, as well as top research centers such as Cal Tech, UCLA and the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute. Added to that, the

service for immersive hybrid events that can reach many thousands of remote participants.

Great outdoors

While the shift to remote and hybrid work has brought more flexibility to the workplace, it also means that face-to-face meetings have become more valuable than ever. As meeting planners look to make the most of this precious time for team bonding and collaboration, outdoor events and activities are an ideal solution, allowing attendees both maximum connection to each other and full immersion in the destination.

With its varied and spectacular landscapes, Mediterranean-like climate and rich cultural heritage, California is the ultimate meeting destination for outdoor experiences that motivate and foster lasting bonds. The variety of stunning settings for this is almost

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