





Meet in the Golden State

Visit California is making its first-ever foray into the professional meeting and event sector.

By Elaine Pofeldt

With its dramatic Pacific coastline stretching 840 miles, soaring redwoods in Sequoia National Park, mountains stretching to more than 14,000 feet and world-class cities, California has become a mecca for meetings of all types and sizes as travel picks up. Many event organizers and planners have found that the state is full of inspiration and is an ideal backdrop to create memorable events and conferences.

The inspiration does not end when the business day is over. California has something for everyone, offering year-round outdoor splendor and nonstop entertainment options. Tourists can enjoy attractions and cultural icons including Alcatraz, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Hollywood sign, Disneyland and the Getty Center. They can boutique shop in fashion meccas like Los Angeles and San Francisco, and dine throughout the Golden State at Michelin-starred, chef-owned restaurants that showcase the state's agriculture bounty or sample home-grown wines at the state's 3,600+ wineries.

California's coalition of tourism industry partners, led by the nonprofit organization Visit California, is working continually to amplify the state's reputation as a leader in the global tourism industry. In coming months, Visit California plans to leverage its expertise as a catalyst for travel through a sweeping marketing program designed to inspire travel and jumpstart California's economy in measurable ways.

As part of this initiative, Visit California is making its first-ever foray into the professional meeting and event sector. The dramatic locations and experiences that have made California the top tourist destination in the U.S. have also set an ideal stage for professional meetings and events. Whether organizers are planning a large convention, small

meeting or special team-building getaway, California offers options for every type of gathering.

In Los Angeles County, meeting organizers can choose from a variety of venues, including the Fairmount Century Plaza, a \$2.5 billion renovation of the city's legendary Century Plaza Hotel located on the former site of the 20th Century Studios backlot, and Terranea Resort, a 102-acre luxury resort with more than 135,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event space.

In Northern California, San Francisco offers a full menu of options as well, including the Clancy SF, an Autograph Hotel in the SoMa neighborhood with 10,000 square feet of event space, and El Prado Hotel, with 6,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space.

And the plentiful meeting space in Orange County includes the Ranch at Laguna Beach, an iconic beach community spread over 87 acres with 97 guest rooms, and the Anaheim Convention Center, which offers 200,000 square feet of outdoor meeting space.

But not every organizer wants to hold a meeting in a big city. For those who want an alternative, the enticing options of the High Sierra include the Pines Resort, a relaxed meeting destination 25 minutes from Yosemite National Park, and Alibi Ale-Works Truckee, complete with a new outdoor beer garden.

Meanwhile, those who want to stay in Gold Country can choose from a variety of enticing venues such as Safe Credit Union Convention Center in Sacramento, which offers 160,000 square feet of exhibit space, and Railtown 1897 State Historic Park in Old Sacramento, one of the last remaining working roundhouses in the U.S.

Promoting B2B events

In November, Visit California unveiled its first dedicated

B2B platform to spread the word about California meetings and events to both executives and professional planners. Backed by a \$4.5 million investment and shaped by a task force of 11 industry leaders, the brand-new campaign positions the Golden State as a magnet for innovators.

The “Meet What’s Possible” B2B platform debuted at IMEX America 2021, with 249 industry partners participating. The campaign reached 3,420 meeting planners.

In early December, the “Taste of California”

that many meeting organizers find inspires attendees.

The city of San Jose offers a window into the fast-paced technology scene, as well as plenty of cultural attractions. Highlights include Tech Interactive, a hands-on museum located downtown; the San Jose Museum of Art, another downtown venue, focused on West Coast artists of the 20th and 21st centuries; Peralta Adobe, a relic from California’s Spanish and Mexican periods; and History Park San Jose, an indoor/outdoor museum.



roadshow arrived in two major midwestern business markets, Chicago and Minneapolis. Twenty industry partners participated in networking receptions. Visit California also sponsored a Society for Incentive Travel Executives (SITE) holiday event for planners and select media. The roadshow continued in the spring, with stops in D.C., New York and Philadelphia.

And in January, Visit California President and CEO Caroline Beteta addressed the 2,800 attendees of the PCMA Convening Leaders Conference in person and virtually. So far, the campaign has reached more than 6,000 planners, according to Visit California.

Going forward, Visit California will be more closely affiliated with Meetings + Events magazine and the MPI Foundation through new strategic partnerships.

Tech and innovation

As the birthplace of famous garage startups like Apple, Disney, Google and HP, California is known for its pioneering spirit, anything-is-possible mindset and culture of inclusivity. A world-famous hub of innovation, it is home to leaders in tech, biotech, healthcare and education.

California’s “climate of possibility” brings a wholly distinct meetings and events experience

San Jose’s downtown is also home to a lively culinary scene, including San Pedro Square Market, which offers takeout fare and is open late, and Treatbot, a futuristic ice cream truck.

Outdoor climate

The unique outdoor locations and experiences that helped California to become the top state in the country for tourism also make it the ideal state for professional meetings and events. Many event organizers are now holding professional events everywhere from the deserts to the Wine Country to the Central Coast.

Wine Country is home to many exciting venues, including the MacArthur Place Hotel and Spa, known for its “mindful meetings” programming; Safari West, where guests can mingle alongside “flamingo lagoons,” and Flamingo Resort, which has 170 rooms, along with 20,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space.

There are even professional meeting venues in desert cities, including the BMW Performance Center in Palm Springs, where it’s possible to take team building to a new level doing high speed laps, and Sonoran Palm Springs, which has 38,000 square feet of outdoor event space.

On the Central Coast—the region between

Point Mugu and Monterey—there are more options, such as the Scarlett Belle Paddlewheel Riverboat, which offers special holiday cruises; Santa Barbara Events Space, which includes the Santa Barbara Polo and Racquet Club; Catalina Event Space, a flexible, indoor/outdoor event space with spectacular ocean views; and the Monterey Zoo, which includes a 10,000-square-foot special events venue with space for up to 400 guests.

Central Valley offers its own opportunities to spend time in the countryside at the Seven Sycamores Ranch, a nearly-100-year-old citrus farm where couples can celebrate their weddings in a tranquil setting, and Bradley Ranch Winery, a renovated getaway in Elk Grove where guests can enjoy the wine-tasting room with views of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

And on the North Coast, the secluded Skunk Train, a one-of-a-kind venue for meetings and events, has been reimagined. Tucked within the redwoods outside of Ft. Bragg, the Skunk Train can only be reached by historic train or rail-bike. The location now includes a fully electric, 3,375-square-foot indoor/outdoor pavilion.

Sustainable California

California’s embrace of sustainable tourism practices includes reducing the impact tourism has on the environment through sustainable eating and drinking, sleeping and play.

However, statewide efforts toward sustainability go beyond that to successful destination stewardship. That means ensuring tourism is serving communities in beneficial ways while maintaining the visitor experience at the highest level. Visit California launched a Responsible Travel Code for visitors last year and is now a leader in showing partner destinations how to tackle these key issues.

Keeping travel inclusive

The Golden State is open and ready to welcome your next meeting or event with a steadfast commitment to success. California is the most diverse state in the nation—no one group makes up a majority—and California’s meeting venues are known for their commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity. With accessible facilities around the state, there are group-friendly attractions for every preference.

As the world opens back up for travel, the state’s tourism hubs are ready to throw out the welcome mat to every visitor who comes to California—whether they come for work, play or a mix of both.

Learn more at visitcalifornia.com/meetings.

IN THE BIRTHPLACE OF WHAT'S NEXT

CREATIVE MEETINGS ARE WHAT
EVERYONE CAN LOOK FORWARD TO.



SANTA BARBARA, CA

Meetings in California are like no others. Around here, an anything-is-possible meets an everyone-is-welcome mindset. So, it's no coincidence that California is a hotbed for groundbreaking ideas. Visit the land of innovation, free thinkers, and can-doers to discover the perfect environment for getting the most out of your next event.

Meet What's Possible for your next meeting at VisitCalifornia.com/meetings.

