



California

The Golden State's Diverse Destinations Offer an Escape From the Ordinary

It's been said that California is a state of mind. Which might be another way of saying, California isn't really a state at all. It is, after all, the sixth largest economy in the world.

But, so dominant is California's influence on American innovation and culture, so great is its agricultural bounty that feeds a nation, and so dynamic are its physical attributes — from the highest peaks in the Lower 48

By David Swanson

to North America's greatest deserts — that California's collection of world-class destinations is positively catnip to meeting planners looking for a dose of fresh air on the meeting circuit.

"California really sets itself apart," suggests Stephanie Rosenstone, executive assistant to the CEO of Paul Davis Restoration Inc. "When you get there, you feel like you've left the United States. It's beautiful and picturesque, it's sunny, but not humid. With each place you go, it's like you've stepped into a different location. That's what attracts me to cities like San Diego, which has a nautical, adventurous feeling. You visit Hollywood and you feel like you're one of the elite. In Palm Springs, you go to downtown and it's laidback, with a lovely shopping district."

Hollywood Hideaway

For its annual franchisee conference, Paul Davis chose La Quinta Resort & Club near Palm Springs, one of the desert community's original Hollywood hideaways. In the 1930s and '40s, Greta Garbo luxuriated in the resort's privacy, Clark Gable played by the many pools and director Frank Capra wrote Gable's "It Happened One Night," "Lost Horizon" and "It's a Wonderful Life" while staying in one of the casitas. The 620-unit resort, now part of the Waldorf Astoria family, received a \$22 million facelift to celebrate its 90th anniversary last year, and features 190,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space, including three ballrooms.

"Our CEO fell in love with the La Quinta property years ago," explains Rosenstone, who planned the May 2016 event. "It just so happened we were celebrating our 50th anniversary, and I felt this complete sense of connection. Our founder, Paul Davis — this would have been his era, when he was at his best. You stroll the property and you're thrown back in time. I just felt like it was meant to be — these were his people, this was his time.

"One of things I noticed is the tenure of the people that



Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center recently debuted The Cove, a new indoor/outdoor event space.



Credit: 2014 Beach CVI

than 509,000 sf, and a new 50,000-sf column-free ballroom will be added. Once completed, the facility's meeting space will total 1.5 million sf.

In downtown San Jose, the SoFA (South of First Area) district is host to an eclectic strip of cultural museums, galleries and nightlife venues. Attendees can enjoy live music, hand-crafted cocktails, and some of San Jose's best food. It is also home to the newly opened Uproar Brewing Company and Forager taproom — part of the burgeoning craft brew scene in San Jose. Both establishments offer unique venue spaces with their rustic, modernized warehouse settings that complement additional event venues in the SoFA district.

San Jose's City National Civic Courtyard and Montgomery Courtyard recently have been renovated. The picturesque lo-

cation includes newly built custom benches, gas inline heaters, outdoor lighting and a fire pit. The entire courtyard has been wired with sound and can be split into two courtyards or used as one with movable rustic gates. In the future, the courtyard will feature a live video feed of the theater's interiors. It has a total of 5,407 sf and can fit up to 1,081 people.

And the Monterey Conference Center is currently putting the finishing touches on a \$60-plus million renovation, scheduled to be completed this fall. Next door, the Portola Hotel & Spa recently completed a \$10 million renovation of its 379 guest rooms and bathrooms. In all, the interconnected Monterey Conference Connection space — the Monterey Marriott, Portola and conference center combined — encompasses 85,000 sf.



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Grace Pineda, Senior Travel & Events Representative, Cadence Design Systems, San Jose, CA

Value in Monterey

For an offsite meeting in April, Cadence Design Systems gathered a 12-member team at Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa, a location convenient to the company's San Jose offices, 90 minutes away. Cost and value were other factors in choosing the city as a meeting site, according to Grace Pineda, senior travel and events representative for the electronic design automation company.

"Monterey is far away without being too far away," explains Pineda, adding that ocean views and plentiful activity and dining options were other draws for the Cadence team. "The city has a small-community feel. Everybody seems to care about the group having the best experience possible, and willingly recommend other businesses if it sounds more like what that group is looking for."

Pineda suggests contacting the Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau during the initial planning stage. "Sammy Ramos helped make the planning so easy and seamless — it was like a one-stop shop. It saved me a lot of time, and it gave me confidence that I was contacting the right vendors.

"The Monterey Plaza Hotel has a great location along the waterfront, easy access to restaurants and activities, and the meeting space was perfect for our group's small size. They offered reasonably priced rates and concessions that were a great value, and they were able to accommodate all of our requests for food, Wi-Fi and room block. I really enjoyed

Rendering of the Monterey Conference Center's renovation, scheduled to debut this fall.



Credit: Monterey Conference Center

working with Angela Vickers and Magdalena Parker on their sales and catering team. They provided a lot of suggestions to help us make this event successful." Instead of using the hotel's usual meeting room they used the Grand Bay Suite, which offered a more intimate atmosphere, ocean views and felt more comfortable.

Cadence did have one enjoyable offsite dinner at the Fish Hopper, within walking distance to the hotel. On another evening, the group wanted to do a bonfire on the beach, but found out Monterey County doesn't allow them any longer. The hotel arranged for the group to use its fire pit and have the event there.

Test-Driving the L.A. Area

In contrast to the gentle hum of Monterey, the Los Angeles area has a reputation for traffic issues, which Flavio Martinez was careful to take into account for a recent meeting by a global leader in sports footwear, apparel and accessories. "For



Credit: Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa

The Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa enjoys a beachfront location overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

