

Small Market Meetings

The Publication for Planners Who Love Smaller Cities and Sites

Wild in WEST VIRGINIA

Religious Meeting
Fact and Fiction

Cities with Foreign Flair

Raleigh, North Carolina

Illinois Meeting Guide

A P R I L 2 0 1 4

HIGH TECH AND HIGH-MINDED

By Ann Witmer

A thriving
intellectual
environment
makes Raleigh
an energetic city

Natural light is a hallmark of the environmentally friendly Raleigh Convention Center.

© 2009 The Raleigh

"It's so good that the World Wide Web Conference was held here in 2010."

Raleigh's convention center opened its doors just 11 days before financial institutions around the world began collapsing and the crash of 2008 began.

But what could have been a financial disaster for North Carolina's capital city, which had invested heavily in the huge downtown facility, sparked a rebirth instead.

In February, *Forbes* magazine declared Raleigh the second-fastest-growing city in the country. Last year, jobs grew at a rate of 2.44 percent, and the population, by 2.15 percent. Only Austin, Texas, forged ahead faster.

Home to eight colleges and universities, Raleigh has a casual, friendly flair. Even taxi drivers get training in how to make visitors feel welcome.

"They are often the first person someone meets when coming to Raleigh," said J. R. Oliver, the Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau's director of sales.

An upbeat and walkable Southern city of 425,000, Raleigh is used to living on the edge. The Research Triangle it shares with Durham and Chapel Hill and their universities – North Carolina State, Duke and the University of North Carolina – has drawn forward-leaning businesses to the region for more than 50 years; 170 are now located there.

The city has embellished its high-tech reputation with museums, galleries, festivals and free outdoor Wi-Fi. More than 125 eateries and pubs offer foods of all flavors, although barbecue rules now and forever in North Carolina.

Free hybrid electric buses circulate throughout the city, making it easy to park your car in one of Raleigh's reasonably priced garages and get where you want to go without driving.

"Raleigh is a place to meet in, sleep in and be entertained," said Laurie Okun, the convention center's director of sales.

Convention Center Campus

Much of the action takes place along historic Fayetteville Street, anchored at one end by the state Capitol and the other end by the Duke Energy Center for the Performing Arts.

A statue of Sir Walter Raleigh, the city's namesake, is often dressed up for special occasions on what's known as the Convention Center Campus.

The \$221 million, four-tier Raleigh Convention Center is Silver LEED-certified with abundant natural light and vaulted space. Light flows into meeting rooms through vitrines, glass cases

that display art and books.

The convention center has 500,000 square feet of event space. It includes a 52,000-square-foot ballroom with a 12,000-square-foot foyer, 20 meeting rooms seating 48 to 504 people and a massive 150,000-square-foot exhibition hall that can be divided in thirds.

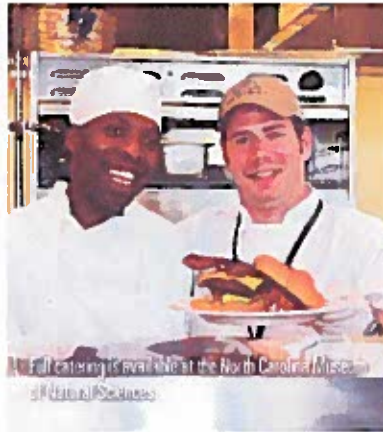
It also has in-house catering, 12 truck bays and 4,000 parking spaces nearby. Wi-Fi, although not free, is robust.

"It's so good that the World Wide Web Conference was held here in 2010," Okun said.

The convention center's outside back wall is adorned with a slimmer mural. Lighted at night, it features an oak tree, Raleigh's symbol.

Beside it, on land that could be used for convention center expansion if warranted someday, is a 6,000-seat outdoor amphitheater where the city holds 25 to 30 concerts each summer.

Duke Energy Center for the Performing Arts, home to ballet, symphony, opera and theater, rounds out the campus. Its 89,000 square feet of versatile space includes a 2,500-seat auditorium, a 1,700-seat concert hall and two smaller theaters.



Courtesy: Visit Raleigh

Raleigh, North Carolina

LOCATION

Wake County in northeast central North Carolina

ACCESS

Raleigh-Durham International Airport
Accessible from I-40, I-540, I-70

MAJOR MEETING SPACES

Raleigh Convention Center, Duke Energy Center for the Performing Arts, McKimmon Center

HOTEL ROOMS

1,000 within a mile of the convention center
15,300 in Greater Raleigh area (Wake County)

OFFSITE VENUES

North Carolina Museum of Art, North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, Angus Barn, Pavilion and Wine Cellar, Merrimon-Wynne House, North Carolina State Fairgrounds.

CONTACT INFO

Greater Raleigh CVB
800 849 8499
www.visitraleigh.com

Adjacent Hotels

Two hotels alongside the convention center have 753 guest rooms and additional meeting space.

The 400-room Raleigh Marriott City Center, built at the same time as the convention center, is connected to it by escalator. This summer, the hotel will undergo an \$8 million renovation of its lobby, restaurant and meeting space. Guest rooms will be redone in 2016 using a new palette of neutral colors.

The Marriott's 15,000 square feet of meeting space includes a 9,000-square-foot ballroom that can be divided into six rooms, a smaller ballroom that can be divided into three rooms, four meeting rooms for 18 to 24 and a boardroom. A second boardroom will be added during this summer's renovation.

Adjacent to the convention center, the Sheraton Raleigh Hotel has 555 guest rooms and 20,000 square feet of meeting space. The hotel renovated its lobby, restaurant and meeting space last year, opting for an arched grotto motif.

Two ballrooms, one 5,000 square feet and the other 4,500 square feet, have ample prefunction space and can be divided into smaller rooms. In addition, there are eight meeting rooms and a boardroom.

A Marriott Residence Inn will add 120 rooms



Whale skeletons and seahorses enliven events held at Raleigh's Museum of Natural Sciences. *By Ann Whitner*

"We can do anything here from mechanical bulls to casinos."

to downtown Raleigh's roster when it opens in 2015.

Beyond Downtown

"Two hotels beyond the downtown are also important for meeting planners," said Oliver. "Embassy Suites near the airport has 275 suites and 20,000 square feet of meeting space. It consistently ranks tops within its brand."

And the Hilton North Raleigh/Midtown, she said, has 50,000 square feet of meeting space that can be divided into 20 rooms.

Raleigh is also home to one of two North Carolina hotels that hold both Forbes Five-Star and AAA Five Diamond ratings. The Umstead Hotel and Spa on 12 beautifully landscaped acres might be perfect for a high-end meeting or event. It has 10,200 square feet of meeting space, art exhibits that change every six months and suites that open onto a lawn.

Venue with Regional Flair

A compact city where you can get anywhere, including the airport, in about 20 minutes, Raleigh also has meeting, reception and event venues that reflect the region.

The Angus Barn, Pavilion and Wine Cellar, a 54-year Raleigh tradition, mimics a barn with hay feeders, farm implements and gingham tablecloths.

But just downstairs from its 650-seat restaurant is a wine cellar that for the last 20 years has won Wine Spectator's Grand Award for having

one of the world's top-100 wine lists; it's 85 pages long with 1,000 items. There are 25,000 bottles in that wine cellar, including an 1880 Madeira that costs \$5,000. Two private rooms are available for tastings and dinners for groups of 12 to 36 people.

Upstairs, there's a private dining room for 100 and a cigar lounge with its own steward.

Eight years ago, the Angus Barn added a pavilion that can seat 550. Three of its walls retract to the open air overlooking a lake with a fountain. The fireplace is built of cobblestones that once paved Fayetteville Street, and trusses overhead came from a pre-Civil War munitions factory.

"An outdoor patio can hold 500 for a reception," said event coordinator Kelly Justin. "We can do anything here from mechanical bulls to casinos."

On the campus of North Carolina State University, the McKimmon Conference and Training Center is geared for educational meetings. It has 57,000 square feet of meeting space, including 25 flexible breakout rooms, and 700 free parking spaces. The center can host meetings for 12 to 1,200.

When not being used for the state fair in October, the 544-acre North Carolina State Fairgrounds offers 598,000 square feet of space, indoors and outdoors, for events and trade shows. The 7,610-seat Dorton Arena, designed by Polish architect Maciej Nowicki, features an extraterrestrial, saddle-shaped roof supported by steel cables.



A fire pit patio at the Angus Barn Pavilion sits alongside a lake and fountain. *By Ann Whitner*

Smithsonian of the South

Over the years, Raleigh has earned the moniker "Smithsonian of the South" for its renowned museums. Most are free; they also host meetings and events.

Rodin's "Naked Muse, Without Arms" greets guests at the North Carolina Museum of Art; it has the second-largest collection of Rodin sculptures in the country.

The nation's first state-funded art museum moved to its 164-acre art park in the 1980s and added a second building of galleries in 2010.

"Art starts the conversation here," said Morgan Greer, director of special events, who coordinates everything from meetings in the museum's 272-seat auditorium to receptions and dinners for several hundred people in areas adjacent to the galleries.

The North Carolina Museum of Natural Science's new wing, the Nature Research Center, is hard to miss with its three-story globe, the Daily Planet.

A fourth-floor conference center accommodates meetings for 15 to 200 in four rooms. Receptions in the conference center's lower overlook a green roof terrace and a swooping 90-foot "flash ribbon" that electronically portrays the patterns from raindrops to flocking birds.

The museum also has an auditorium for 260 and a 3D theater.

After hours, the museum will host receptions for 250 or dinners for 120 amidst natural wonders like a gigantic shark jaw, whale skeletons and a live seahorse exhibit.

Beautiful Bones and a Light Touch


The newest of Raleigh's event venues is the historic Merrimon-Wynne House, which opened in January.

The restored 1876 home, built for a judge, has beautiful architectural bones. It can seat 170 for dinner or host receptions for 250. A one-acre lawn outside can be tented for 200.

Raleigh can be counted on for quirky fun year-round. There's a bowling alley with meeting rooms that feature their own private lanes. A fall Bluegrass Festival packs Fayetteville Street for a week with more than 50 bands.

And the NC State student-inspired Krispy Kreme Challenge tests the fitness and gastronomic fortitude of 8,000 people each February as they run five miles and gobble a dozen doughnuts within an hour, all for a good cause: raising money for the North Carolina Children's Hospital.

There's a youthful, high-tech feel here in Raleigh - a rebirth.



Small Market Meetings CONFERENCE

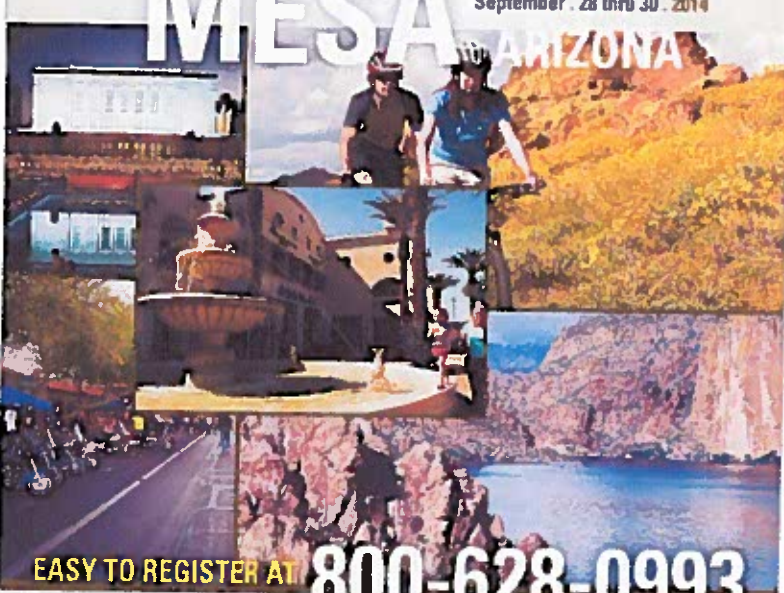
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