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SEPT 2025

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# WIN, PLACE & SHOW!

Kentucky is racing ahead as a  
thoroughbred meetings option

ATTRACTIONS: GOLD STANDARD  
RESORTS & INCENTIVES: RESTAURANT REINVENTIONS  
IMEX AMERICA: COMMUNITY GATHERING  
WELLNESS: ROAD WARRIORS

Churchill Downs, Louisville

JACOB ZIMMER, COURTESY OF LOUISVILLE TOURISM



## Taking Off

By Danielle LeBreck



From Danielle's desk, the destinations you haven't thought of for meetings and events, from under-the-radar locales to new neighborhoods you should know about.

**C**incinnati is betting on meetings in a big way.

Downtown is in the midst of a whopping \$800 million revitalization, with much of the energy focused on its convention core. The Duke Energy Convention Center is being reimagined to the tune of \$264 million with the goal to be one of the premier convention centers in the Midwest. On track to open in January 2026, sweeping improvements



Marriott headquarters hotel rendering

PORTMAN HOLDINGS

include modernized meeting rooms, upgraded ballrooms, renovated exhibit hall and prefunction space, a new expansive rooftop terrace on the second level with views of Cincinnati's downtown skyline, and upgrades to building systems and technology making the building more energy efficient.

The game-changing development will pour over Elm Street Plaza—a new two-acre park and outdoor convention area that will be available for event activations and breakouts. A pavilion, walking paths and retractable bollards/posts for easy flow and street closures over Elm Street enhance the area for events and conventions.

That's not all, though. Last month, a new Marriott headquarters hotel was announced, scheduled to open in 2028 across the street from the convention center, connected by skywalk. Developed by Portman Holdings, the \$536 million project will bring more than 62,000 square feet of meeting space, 17,445 square feet of outdoor terrace event space, 700 guest rooms, a full-service restaurant, outdoor bar with panoramic skyline views and 15,000 square feet of retail space. The hotel adds to

the 3,000-plus walkable hotel rooms in the downtown footprint.

New restaurants, shops, retail and parking options have opened in downtown Cincinnati recently, too. When complete, the highly walkable convention center district will be unrecognizable from its present design and a major lure for meetings and conventions that value easy access, modernized venues and plenty of space.

It's safe to say, even if you've been to Cincinnati for a meeting or convention, it will look and feel entirely new the next time you visit. The city is also within 500 miles of 60% of the U.S. population, making it an easy fly-in or drive-in location for

attendees spread across the country.

And the friendly, welcoming Midwestern vibe? That's just a bonus. ■

*Danielle LeBreck*



Fountain Square

VISIT CINC

# Cincinnati, OH



Findlay Market

VISIT CINC

## STAY

Portman Holdings, the developer of the new Marriott headquarters hotel, just announced it has purchased **The Westin Cincinnati**, in the heart of downtown steps from the Duke Energy Convention Center. The property has 456 guest rooms, 29,000 square feet of meeting space and easy access to downtown's best entertainment.

[marriott.com](http://marriott.com)

## EAT

While there are many spots to dine in Cincinnati, consider a trip to **Findlay Market** to sample a bit of everything. It's Ohio's oldest continuously operated public market (1852), and more than 1 million visitors each year venture to its location in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood to explore offerings from 50 full-time merchants.

[findlaymarket.org](http://findlaymarket.org)

## PLAY

Opened in 2004, the **National Underground Railroad Freedom Center** on the banks of the Ohio River is rooted in the stories of the Underground Railroad and works to "illuminate the true meaning of inclusive freedom" through its exhibits and education. Groups can book tours of the museum and planners can also use its spaces for private events (including buyouts).

[freedomcenter.org](http://freedomcenter.org)