

Under the Sun

Phoenix, Scottsdale and Sedona are all-around Arizona hot spots

IN ORDER TO FIND THE GREATER Phoenix area—including Scottsdale and other meetings-equipped places like Mesa and Tempe—as well as charming Sedona up the road a bit, all one needs to do is follow the sun.

Each of these group favorites, punctuated by sunshine most days of the year, also boasts facilities that cater to meeting groups ranging from intimate board gatherings to citywide conventions, plus all manner of attractions and activities to round out any meeting itinerary.

Arizona's capital is appealing for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that it basks in the sunshine for more than 300 days every calendar year.

"The near-perfect weather allows groups to take advantage of Phoenix's 200-plus golf courses, outdoor adventures or simply relaxing poolside after a long day of meetings," says Doug MacKenzie, spokesperson for the Greater Phoenix CVB, who's quick to point out the metro area's other group-friendly attributes.

In Phoenix, he says, the timeless character of the Sonoran Desert meets a diversity of accommodations (there are more than 3,000 hotel rooms within walking distance of the LEED-certified Phoenix Convention Center), attractions, activities and meeting facilities, as well as the convenience of the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport (PHX), located only 10 minutes from downtown, and a light-rail transportation system.

The sum of Phoenix's parts equals a destination that attracts

group business time and again.

While the anchor of the city's meetings portfolio is the Phoenix Convention Center, which boasts nearly 900,000 square feet of exhibit and meeting space, including three ballrooms, it also features many meetings-equipped hotels.

The list includes the largest hotel in Arizona, the 1,000-room Sheraton Phoenix Downtown Hotel, with 80,000 square feet of meeting space; the newly opened Westin Phoenix Downtown; Hyatt Regency Phoenix; and Wyndham Phoenix. Other meetings favorites in the Phoenix area are the Arizona Biltmore, part of the Waldorf Astoria Collection; Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa; JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa; and Arizona Grand Resort.

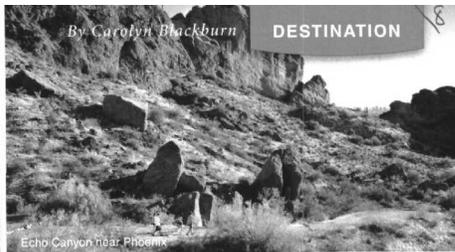
Phoenix is also home to an array of attractions attendees can check out after the meeting, including professional sporting events (Arizona Diamondbacks baseball and Arizona Cardinals football); the Heard Museum, which showcases Native American culture and art; the recently



Phoenix



Arizona Center, Phoenix



Echo Canyon near Phoenix



US Airways Center, Phoenix

Everything



opened Musical Instrument Museum, featuring over 12,000 instruments representing every country of the world; and the Desert Botanical Garden, a lovely place to just visit or hold a corporate gathering.

Scottsdale's location in the heart of the Sonoran Desert lends itself to a variety of outdoor functions and activities that groups can enjoy while admiring the beautiful surrounding landscape.

Much like neighboring Phoenix, getting to Scottsdale is a snap, with more than 1,400 arrivals and departures daily connecting PHX to more than 100 domestic and international locations.

According to Kelli Blubaum, senior national sales manager at the Scottsdale CVB, once attendees are on the ground, Scottsdale's best resorts, shopping, spas and golf are only a 20-minute drive away.

"And with a wide range of accommodations, the city attracts groups of all sizes and budgets," she says, adding that Scottsdale does not have a convention center, "but with ballroom spaces up to 25,000 square feet, meetings of all sizes will find their niche here."

Scottsdale is indeed a resort destination that boasts more than 70 properties of all shapes and sizes, Blubaum says, from boutique properties like the Hermosa Inn to full-service standbys like the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess.

While Scottsdale enjoys repeat corporate customers—groups that book here once oftentimes book again—Blubaum says the Scottsdale CVB recently launched the "Come to Work, Come Back to Play (on us!)" promotional program to encourage meeting attendees to return as leisure guests (for details visit www.comebackonus.com). There are 15 popular meetings properties participating, including Chaparral Suites Scottsdale, Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort and Spa at Gainey Ranch, Hotel Valley Ho, JW Marriott Camelback Inn Resort & Spa, Montelucia

Resort & Spa, The Phoenician, Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain, Talking Stick Resort and Westin Kierland Resort & Spa.

Off-session options for attendees convening in Scottsdale are numerous, including the downtown arts district's Thursday night ArtsWalk, which Blubaum says is ideal for groups who'd like an evening out, starting with a cocktail reception at a local gallery followed by a dine-around at local eateries.

Home to Arizona State University (ASU), Tempe is a college town with an upscale flair, including a great variety of hotels for group meetings, nightlife, dining options, arts and entertainment, and outdoor activities that allow attendees to easily explore the beautiful Sonoran Desert, according to Linda Ruby, director of sales at the Tempe Tourism Office.

"There is always something to do here," she says, adding that Tempe is accessible, located only four miles from PHX, and home to meetings-equipped hotels for midsize groups of up to 500 people. "While Tempe is located within a large metropolitan area, it has the friendliness of a small town."

Among Tempe's group-ready properties are the Tempe Mission Palms; The Buttes, A Marriott Resort; Sheraton Phoenix Airport Hotel; Fiesta Resort Conference Center; Embassy Suites Phoenix-Tempe; and Four Points by Sheraton Tempe.

"The lakeside Tempe Center for the Arts is a perfect spot to see a performance or have an off-site event in a stunning location," Ruby says, adding that the Arizona Historical Society Museum and the ASU Art Museum are also well-suited for group outings.

Meeting attendees will also enjoy a round of golf at the Pete Dye-designed ASU Karsten Golf Course, water sports such as kayaking and paddle boarding at Tempe Town Lake, and dine-arounds in the Mill Avenue District and Tempe Marketplace, where a variety of restaurants reside within a pedestrian-friendly area.

Mesa, which enjoys close proximity to neighboring Phoenix and Scottsdale and is often dubbed the largest suburb in America, is a distinct metropolitan area that boasts nearly a half-million residents.

"Because of our size, planners are surprised to see the depth of product offerings we tout being so close to the Phoenix marketplace," says Pam Williams, meetings development manager for the Mesa CVB, adding that Mesa is surrounded by the Sonoran Desert and therefore close to outdoor recreation and attractions. "Less time spent commuting to your activity allows for more time to enjoy it."

Mesa also juts up against the farming communities of Queen Creek and Gilbert, offering nearby attractions centered on agritourism, adds Michelle Streeter, spokesperson for the Mesa CVB.

"These popular activities, including olive mills, wineries and farm tours, offer new product offerings to planners, and most of these attractions specialize in hosting large groups and offering tailored programming," she says.

Mesa is also home to the Mesa Arts Center, a performing and visual arts facility located in the heart of downtown.

"Planners can arrange guided walks of the seven-acre Mesa Arts Center campus," Streeter says, adding the Claycation series is a popular option. "Planners can book the lecture hall or the center's state-of-the-art boardrooms and schedule breakout sessions in the many artist studios. With top instructors teaching new art forms and mediums, groups can use the arts venue as a muse for inspiration and team building."

More traditional meeting facilities in town include the Mesa Convention Center and adjacent Phoenix Marriott Mesa Hotel, Marriott Phoenix-Mesa, Hilton Phoenix-East Mesa and smaller boutique-style properties such as Hyatt Place Phoenix Mesa.

Carefree, Litchfield Park and Fountain Hills, smaller towns in the "Valley of the Sun," are also home to notable meetings properties, including Wigwam Resort in Litchfield Park as well as two properties in Carefree: Boulders, A Waldorf Astoria Resort and Carefree Resort and Conference Center.

Fountain Hills is home to group-ready options such as CopperWynd Resort and Club, Radisson Fort McDowell Resort and Casino, and Inn at Eagle Mountain.

Sedona, known worldwide for its spectacular red rock formations and stunning sunsets, is a great location for groups that would like to get better acquainted with colleagues, get inspired and be productive, according to Jennifer Wesselhoff, president and CEO of the Sedona COC.

"Sedona is a perfect combination of rugged natural beauty and world-class resorts and amenities that suit the needs of any small to midsize meeting," she says. "Meeting attendees will feel invigorated by the creative nature of Sedona, revived by the energetic vortexes and eager to learn and collaborate in such a unique setting."

Popular properties that host groups

here are Best Western Arroyo Roble Hotel & Creekside Villas, Sedona Rouge Hotel & Spa, LAuberge de Sedona, Amara Creekside Resort, Poco Diablo Resort, Enchantment Resort and Hilton Sedona Resort & Spa.

"Sedona's burgeoning wine industry has been called 'the new Sonoma' by wine enthusiasts nationwide," Wesselhoff adds, explaining that Page Springs and the surrounding Verde Valley are developing a growing reputation for wines, with tasting rooms, tours and wine-tasting dinners popping up all over the region. "Kayaking the Verde River with a stop at an area winery for a 'water to wine' tour would be a great opportunity for attendees to experience the natural beauty and enjoy a tasting of our regional wines."

Groups, especially those coming from big cities where nighttime stars aren't as visible, might also enjoy Sedona's dark skies via a stargazing tour, Wesselhoff says, or finding their inner yogi by meditating or taking a morning yoga class before a meeting. **MF**

Carolyn Blackburn is a frequent contributor to MEETINGS FOCUS WEST.

Search for detailed information about CVBs, hotels and meeting facilities in Phoenix, Scottsdale and Sedona by visiting our website at MeetingsFocus.com/Arizona.

CVB Contacts

Carefree/Cave Creek COC
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www.carefreecavecreek.org

Fountain Hills COC
480.837.1654
www.fountainhillschamber.com

Greater Phoenix CVB
602.254.6500
www.visitphoenix.com

Mesa CVB
480.827.4700
www.visitmesa.com

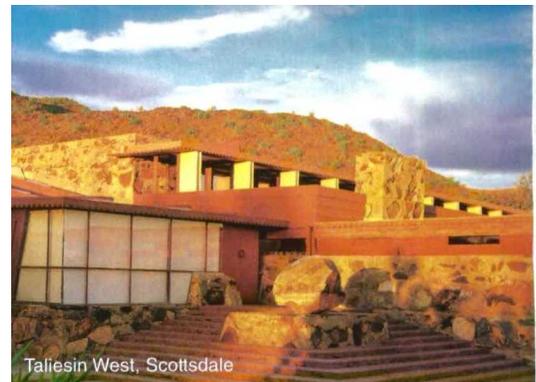
Scottsdale CVB
480.421.1004
www.scottsdalecvb.com

Sedona Chamber of Commerce
928.282.7722
www.visitsedona.com

Southwest Valley COC (Litchfield Park)
623.932.2260
www.southwestvalleychamber.org

Tempe Tourism Office
480.894.8158
www.tempetourism.com

For more information, visit: MeetingsFocus.com





PHOENIX

- The 242-room **Westin Phoenix Downtown** (602.429.3500; www.westin.com/phoenixdowntown), located one block away from the Phoenix Convention Center, opened in March with more than 11,000 square feet of meeting space.
- A 250-room **Hotel Palomar** (www.kimptonhotels.com) is planned for a 2012 opening in the downtown Phoenix area within CityScape, a mixed-use project also featuring shopping and dining options.

SCOTTSDALE

- **Talking Stick Resort** (480.850.7777; www.talkingstickresort.com) recently debuted with 497 guest units and more than 100,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space. The resort features a 13,000-square-foot, open-air spa; several restaurants, including Orange Sky, located on the 15th floor and featuring panoramic views; two golf courses; and Casino Arizona, offering 240,000 square feet of gaming space.
- The 195-room **Drinkwater** (800.738.7477; www.jdvhotels.com), scheduled to open this fall, will be the first Joie de Vivre Hotels property outside the state of California, complete with on-site meeting space, a spa and a restaurant.
- **The Phoenician** (480.941.8200; www.thephoenician.com) opened the 15,000-square-foot Camelback Ballroom last October. Encompassing a total of 45,000 square feet, including back-of-house operations and prefunction space, the \$40 million structure brings the resort's overall interior/exterior meeting and event space to more than 120,000 square feet.
- In June 2010, **Westin Kierland Resort & Spa** (480.624.1000; www.kierlandresort.com) began property enhancements, including the addition of 21,000 square feet of meeting space, namely the 11,000-square-foot Trailblazer Ballroom and the 4,500-square-foot lakeview terrace deck, Northern Sky, as well as a renovation of all guest rooms and corridors.
- **The Clayton on the Park** (480.990.7300; www.theclaytononthepark.com), a new event space, opened in February. The venue can accommodate up to 450 people in three distinct spaces: an outdoor terrace and two indoor levels with floor-to-ceiling windows framing views of the park, fountain and public art.
- **The Venue Scottsdale** (480.945.5150; www.thevenuescottsdale.com) is undergoing an 8,000-square-foot expansion and facelift this summer, including the addition of a retractable roof and a new rooftop patio. Upon completion in early 2012, the Venue Scottsdale will be able to accommodate 2,000 people.
- **Scottsdale Beach Club** (480.421.1004; www.scottsdaleclub.com), which will be open to the public and available for group events, will debut in summer 2012 with entertainment, music and food. Amenities include a resort-style pool with daybeds and lounges, private and VIP cabanas with private plunge pools, and a clubhouse area with video games, billiards, shuffleboard and flat-screen TVs.

TEMPE

- **Tempe Mission Palms** (480.894.1400; www.missionpalms.com), with 303 newly renovated guest rooms and suites, is undergoing a \$2 million renovation of its 30,000 square feet of meeting and conference space, including new carpeting, wall coverings and audiovisual equipment. The renovations are scheduled for completion by September.

OTHER COMMUNITIES

- **Carefree Resort and Conference Center** (480.488.5300; www.carefree-resort.com) recently finished a multimillion-dollar renovation, including the transformation of the Lariat Restaurant & Lounge from a private dining space to a venue that can accommodate meetings, and the addition of The Sonoran Suites at Carefree, a 60-room complex featuring two- and three-bedroom adjoining suites.
- **The Boulders, A Waldorf Astoria Resort** (888.579.2631; www.theboulders.com) in Carefree completed an interior makeover in July that updated its collection of casitas and restaurants.

SEDONA

- **Enchantment Resort** (480.264.3009; www.enchantmentresort.com) is undergoing a guest room renovation that was partially finished at press time and scheduled for completion by fall 2011.
- **L'Auberge de Sedona** (928.282.1661; www.lauberge.com) completed a renovation last year. This property now has 87 guest rooms, up from 56, a new indoor and outdoor wine bar and dining patio, and an expanded spa. The property is also adding a pool.
- **Sedona Golf Resort** (928.284.9355; www.sedonagolfresort.com) recently remodeled the Juniper Bar & Grille, which accommodates up to 150 people.