

ARIZONA

praising

[ON LOCATION] LYDIA GREGORY

Together, Phoenix and Scottsdale provide a powerful meetings/incentive combo thanks to the prolific infrastructure upgrades and world-beating golf, spa and cuisine. We checked in with the **Greater Phoenix CVB** and a few **Starwood Hotels & Resorts** to get a feel for the big picture in the Valley of the Sun.

Phoenix, the fifth largest city in the United States, is currently experiencing a radical renaissance with new projects like the chic mixed-use CityScape project and **The Westin Phoenix Downtown** (11,000 sf of meeting space). The art-filled **Phoenix Convention Center** has expanded to 900,000 sf of event and meeting space. And attendees can now jump on the recently debuted light-rail system that connects all that meeting space to a slew of new options for dining and entertainment.

"Downtown Phoenix is a big surprise for those who haven't come to the city in a few years," says Douglas MacKenzie, Director of Communications for the Phoenix CVB. "It's also become a center of good food where you can enjoy a great meal pre-game, after a concert or between meetings." Even the convention center has eschewed the usual shrink wrap/fast food lobby fare for a food court that features some great local restaurants."

GREAT SCOTT!

Come sunset, the haunting sounds of Scottish bagpipes reach out across the greens of the Kierland Golf Course, part of Scottsdale's 4-diamond, 732-room **Westin Kierland Resort & Spa**. The hotel just finished work on an additional 21,000 sf of meeting space, upping their total to 208,000.

The Scottish theme is in full evidence at the Kierland Golf Club's Brittlebrush Bar & Grill. Headed by Chef de Cuisine Graeme Blair, the menu offers a fanciful glance at Scottish and English pub fare with a modern twist: think short rib stuffed Yorkshire pudding, mac & cheese laced with lobster claw, and individual steak & Guinness pies. One of the most popular Scottish imports—scotch whiskey—has pride of place. It's even served on the golf course via the unique Johnnie Walker beverage carts, serving Blue, Gold and Green label brands to golfers in air conditioned golf carts.

"Many people don't know about the contributions made by Scottish immigrants to the development of Arizona's railroads, towns and mines," says Stephanie Dowling, Director of PR. "We wanted to pay them homage by incorporating their traditions in our hotel, like our Scottish golf experience, where you can rent a kilt to play, or our Saturday night scotch whiskey tastings."

Beyond the tartan, planners will find plenty to do for their attendees: the Kierland, in fact, has a dedicated "Funcierge."

"We've recently added a variety of teambuilding exercises led by our Funcierge," says Dowling. "He plans anything from short breaks to day-long competitions."

Other activities include ceviche-making classes and mojito muddling courses at **Deseo**. The restaurant showcases the work of James Beard award-winning Chef Douglas Rodríguez, who's considered one of the founding fathers of Nuevo Latino cuisine.

DESERT SHOWCASE

Since opening in 1988, **The Phoenician** is one of Scottsdale's iconic resorts and a 5-diamond ambassador of this resort city. Luxurious without being pretentious, the property is built on 250 acres of gardens and dramatic desert landscapes set right against the slope of picturesque Camelback Mountain. It's also minutes away from first-class shopping at the Scottsdale Fashion Square mall and the quirky nightlife in Old Town Scottsdale.

The Phoenician is its own world of wow: The golf club offers 27 holes of championship play; there are nine resort pools, some with swanky cabanas; an 11-court Tennis Garden; and a 2-acre Cactus Garden where you can see Sonoran Desert beauties up close. There's also a 22,000-sf Centre for Well Being for fitness, enlightenment and spectacular spa treatments, like the Desert Serenity Scrub, Wrap & Massage.

On top of all that, over \$25 million worth of art is sprinkled throughout the resort. And this year, The Phoenician is fresh from a \$70 million "master plan" remodel.

"The \$40 million Camelback Ballroom is the culmination of this project," says Denise Seomin, Director of PR. "We now have over 120,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meetings and event space, but the resort doesn't feel like a convention hotel."

Victoria Evans, National Sales Manager, explains that, "Basically, we're not compromising anybody's experience. The meeting facilities are all contained on one level, with their own satellite check-in points and their own porte-cochère. It's key for us that each type of guest have their own space, so you won't have to wander past a meeting room in your bikini to get to the pool."

CULTURE CARETAKER

"The Pima and Maricopa tribes have been extending their hospitality to visitors since the days of the Gold Rush," says Ginger Sunbird Martin, Cultural Concierge at the 4-diamond, 500-room **Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa**, located in the Gila River Indian Community. The colorful decor incorporates tribal culture into every detail, giving guests a true reference and appreciation for the Native American way of life.

For example, Aji Spa (one of the top seven spas in Arizona) offers the only authentic Native American spa menu in existence, with treatments and activities designed and practiced by Aji's Pima and Maricopa cultural caretakers. All of their products are made from organics found on the Gila River Indian Community.

At **Kai**, Arizona's only 5-diamond restaurant, the menu is a glorious presentation of "Native American with Global Accents," which means heavenly dishes like a grilled tenderloin of buffalo from the Cheyenne River Tribe. Our group started the evening off

Opposite: Westin Kierland Resort & Spa

Below top: The Phoenician

Below bottom: Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa

toasting the sunset with a blood-orange Komatke martini.

Within the 150,000 sf of indoor/outdoor space, Ginger also incorporates Native culture into group events.

"We've worked with groups on typical teambuilding projects like building bikes—then we have them give those bikes personally to kids waiting in the next room who've never even seen a bike," she says. "We offer groups the opportunity to get involved in community programs.... Over 50 percent of them participate because they see this is a great place to do something for the better good. The experience of being on a reservation only adds to the event and gives it authenticity. The Southwest isn't canned: it's a true experience."

Greater Phoenix CVB: visitphoenix.com

Scottsdale CVB: meetinsscottsdale.com

The Westin Kierland Resort: kierlandresort.com

The Phoenician: thephoenician.com

Sheraton Wild Horse Pass: wildhorsepassresort.com

