



Birmingham

Southern Exposure

Diverse offerings in the South make for memorable meetings of all sizes and budgets. **By Cara Clinton**

Successful MEETINGS

Produced by the Nielsen Travel and Performance Group Custom Media Department
770 Broadway, New York, NY 10003
Editorial: alison.golub@nielsen.com
Advertising Inquiries:
Nella Veldran, *Publisher*
(646) 654-7325
nella.veldran@nielsen.com
Alison Golub, *Executive Editor*
Tessa Sestina, *Associate Art Director*
Grace Casey, *Production Manager*



Nielsen Business Media

Ask meeting planners about Southern U.S. destinations and they'll likely mention the region's mild winters, unique cultural heritage, and superb overall value.

Indeed, the South is renowned for all these things, including a number of revitalized, cosmopolitan downtowns offering new and improved meeting, lodging, and recreational options to fit a wide range of interests and budgets.

Memphis helped to pave the way in 2003, with its multibillion-dollar downtown renaissance and \$92 million expansion of the Memphis Cook Convention Center. That resulted in 350,000 square feet of convention space connected to the 2,100-square-foot Cannon Center for Performing Arts. No other convention center in the country, says the Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau, offers an in-house performing arts center that connects to the exhibit space—not to mention there are 20,000 hotel rooms nearby.

Balmy Myrtle Beach, South Carolina is set to unveil a downtown transformation of its own when it completes the \$16 million Boardwalk project this June. A new mile-long boardwalk will connect the Second Avenue and 14th Avenue North piers and will feature three distinct sections: a wooden nature path through the beach and dunes; an area resembling a "Coney Island Carnival"; and an oceanfront park.

"Like many downtowns, ours is undergoing a redevelopment process," says Danna Lilly, director of sales at the Myrtle Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. "The Boardwalk will bring [elements of] the original Myrtle Beach back to life and give a fresh look to this historical area."

Specializing in groups from 500 to 10,000, the Myrtle Beach Convention Center features an exhibition hall sized at 100,800 square feet and is divisible into three separate halls for any kind of exposition, sporting event, trade show,



convention, and entertainment event.

There are 5,000 accommodations within walking distance of the convention center, but for the utmost in accessibility, the Sheraton Myrtle Beach Convention Center Hotel is under the same roof. The Sheraton has 402 luxury accommodations. Guests can easily access the beachfront shops and eateries, as well as Broadway at the Beach, the number-one attraction in South Carolina featuring famous dining venues, specialty shopping, and entertainment.

Further south, the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau is highlighting the Luckie Marietta District as the city's hottest new section of downtown, featuring a handful of meetings hotels for

groups of 500-plus, trendy rooftop restaurants, and attractions like Centennial Olympic Park, CNN Center, and the Georgia Aquarium (set to open a \$110 million dolphin exhibit by the end of 2010).

Of course, new and enhanced venues perform best when paired with the hospitality southerners are known for—and in the meetings industry that extends well beyond just smiling faces.

"We think in terms of relationships and the way we work with different partners within each city," says Norris Orms, executive vice president and COO of the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS). His group has been convening regularly in New Orleans for the past decade, and will



bring more than 24,000 attendees to the area for a citywide in 2013. "In Southern cities like New Orleans and Atlanta, we find our partners to be very flexible and accommodating."

Conventional Wisdom

There are many ways in which the city of New Orleans is accommodating, explains Orms. "All of the local venues we've used are affordable and will work with you to provide additional value," he says. "We can also manage our budgets in terms of F&B—we can either go a bit upscale or scale back if necessary."

Then there are little touches, like the free in-room wireless that all New Orleans hotels offer to HIMSS attendees, a group of highly technical professionals. "This may seem like a like a minor thing but it really catches people's attention," notes Orms.

Such consistent service—plus the city's newly renovated 1.1 million-square-foot convention center, the sixth largest in the nation—has led New Orleans to book a host of other major groups like the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2012), Club Managers Association of America (2012), and the American Academy of Ophthalmology (2013 and 2017).

Likewise, Birmingham, Alabama has secured major business for 2010 and beyond. It recently signed the National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA), with 6,000-plus attendees, for 2012. The convention booked the Sheraton Birmingham Hotel, which just completed \$22 million in renovations, and will use the

Doubletree Hotel Birmingham as an overflow property, confirms Segi Desta, NBCA's meeting planner.

Desta was impressed by Birmingham when she attended the October 2009 Rejuvenate Conference, which brought a group of nearly 800 planners and suppliers targeting the faith-based meetings market to the city. She cites the destination's key selling points as affordability, central location, airport access (Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport sees as many as 150 flights a day), and "the incredible team effort between the CVB, convention center, and area hotels."

"As a conventioner in our city you feel like

a 'big fish' because we make it a point to let everybody—including our restaurants, taxi drivers, and service providers—know you are there," explains Mike Gunn, vice president of convention sales for the Greater Birmingham CVB.

That effort, and the value it provides, is paying off—both for Birmingham and its meeting and convention groups.



Memphis Cook
Convention Center

Savor Charlotte

Look closely at Charlotte and you'll discover a lot. A lot of five-star restaurants for conventioners to indulge. A lot of vibrant clubs for unwinding. And a lot of inspiration for your next meeting. Find a lot more at 800-722-1994 or charlottesgotalot.com. **Charlotte's got a lot.**



Birmingham



Atlanta

"We recently booked a national convention, and due to the group's size, overflow hotels were needed and meeting space costs were more than what had been budgeted," explains Gunn. "We came together as a community and provided rebates and sponsorship dollars to help defray the cost of the meeting space and handle overflow transportation needs. This is something we do on a regular basis."

The CVB staff in Greensboro, North Carolina also works closely with visiting groups to keep meeting costs down, but from a pricing standpoint, the city is attractive from the start.

"Greensboro has less expensive hotel rates than many larger, first-tier cities and is a five-hour drive from Washington, D.C. and Atlanta," says Henri Fourrier, president and CEO of the Greensboro CVB.

The local Joseph S. Koury Convention Center/Sheraton Greensboro at Four Seasons features 250,000 square feet of meeting and banquet space, including the 40,000-square-foot Guilford Ballroom, and offers complimentary parking.

"When you package it all together, Greensboro becomes very cost-effective," says Fourrier.

And with its busy year ahead, the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau is focused on helping its meeting planners meet their attendance goals. The bureau is creating customized event Web sites and partnering with select conventions to find unique and creative ways attract attendees. The city also enhanced its infrastructure in December with the addition of the ATL SkyTrain, an elevated train connecting the passenger terminal at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport to the rental car center and the Georgia International Convention Center.

Take it Outside

With their warm weather and scenic landscapes, many areas of the South offer ideal outdoor settings and activities that can help planners stay on budget. Destinations like Gatlinburg, Tennessee are making the great outdoors more accessible than ever, catering to groups seeking cost-effective entertainment options and rustic-yet-modern venues.

In May 2009, the LEED-certified Hilton Garden Inn opened a few hundred yards from the entrance of the Great Smoky

WE DON'T ROLL UP THE BEACH ONCE SUMMER'S OVER.
WE ROLL OUT THE RED CARPET.



Spring & Fall availability. Great affordability.

VBCC: 150,000 sq ft exhibition space 29,000 sq ft meeting space 31,000 sq ft ballroom CITYWIDE: 12,000 sleeping rooms

Bring it to the Beach. Call 1-800-700-7702 or visit vbmeetings.com



King & Prince Beach & Golf Resort

Golfing With the Stars

Okay, you might not golf with celebrities, but who knows when Justin Timberlake will make a guest appearance at his very own championship golf course, Mirimichi. Located in Timberlake's hometown of Memphis, the eco-friendly course is the first in the country to receive official Audubon Classic Sanctuary certification. It's closed through July 17, 2010 so it can complete three years of course improvements in time for its first anniversary. Among the enhancements will be improvements to the bunkers and greens and extensive additions to wetlands, wildflowers, and native grasses. Mirimichi will also unveil a multimillion-dollar Callaway Performance Center, which will offer golf lessons and customized club fitting utilizing the same Callaway Performance Analysis System used by professional golfers and will be one of only nine in the country.

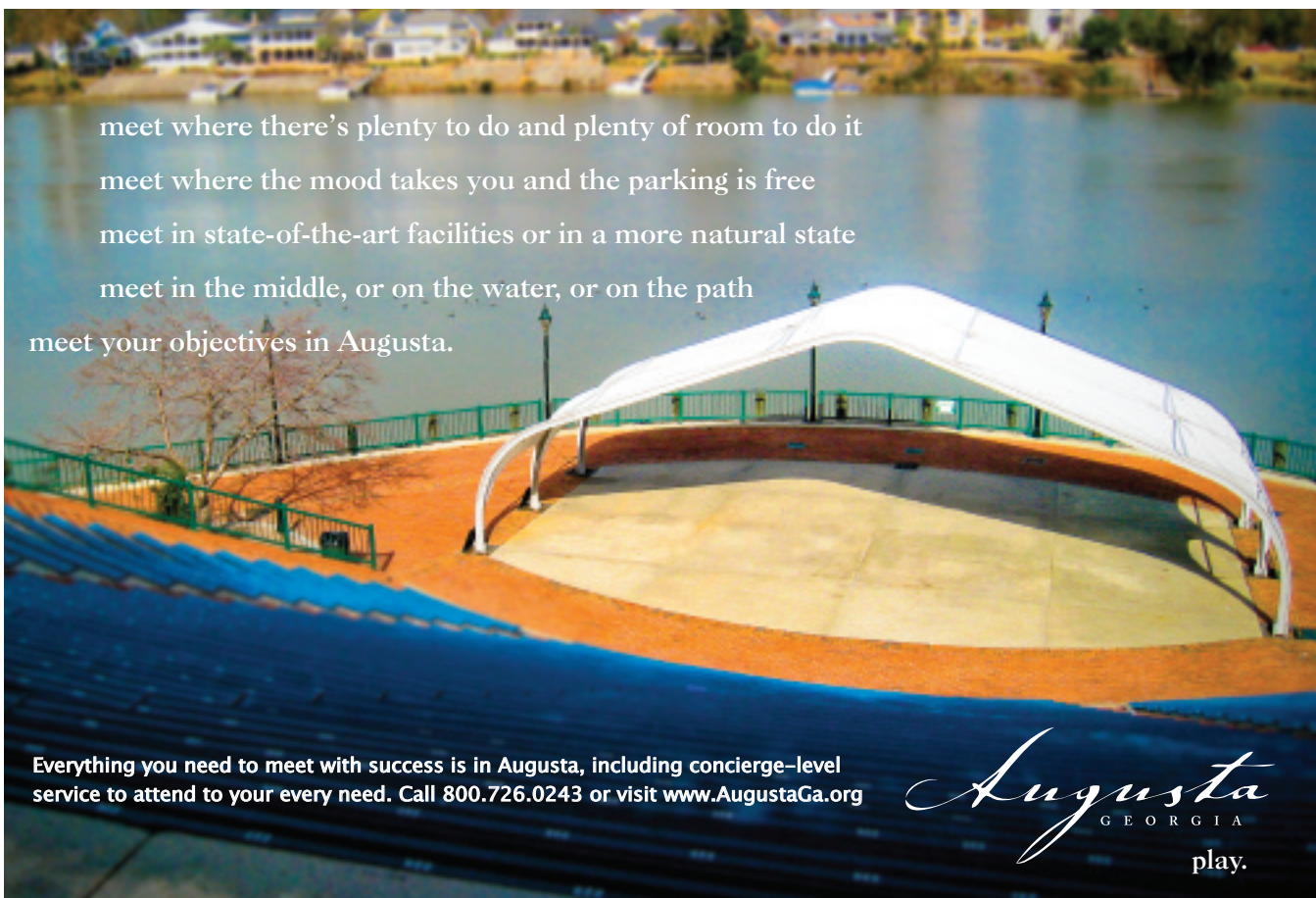
Mountains National Park in downtown Gatlinburg. The 120-key hotel brings the area total to more than 12,000 rooms available in properties overlooking the Little Pigeon River and on the mountaintop overlooking the Smoky Mountains. The Hilton also contains more than 1,500 square feet of flexible onsite meeting space.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is also home to an abundance of trails and hiking paths that are perfect for teambuilding experiences, notes Jim Davis, public relations coordinator at the Gatlinburg Department of Tourism. "The best part is that the Smokies are free," he says. "Whether you go for a scenic drive and short walk or hike all day, the price is the same, and that fits every budget."

Bookings, adds Davis, are ahead of any pace ever set for the Gatlinburg Convention Center and W.L. Mills Conference Center, which offers a total of 148,000 square feet of meeting and exhibit space (67,000 square feet in the Gatlinburg Convention Center and an additional 50,000 square feet in W.L. Mills, opened in 2006).

Off the Atlantic Coast of South Carolina, Hilton Head Island, the first eco-planned destination in the United States, is all about nature. "Our destination is very low-key," says Jack Reed, director of sales at the Hilton Head Island Visitor and Convention Bureau. Everything is understated—although we have a downtown and some unique shopping villages, you don't see a lot of commercial or retail development. It's just a relaxing, rejuvenating place."

meet where there's plenty to do and plenty of room to do it
 meet where the mood takes you and the parking is free
 meet in state-of-the-art facilities or in a more natural state
 meet in the middle, or on the water, or on the path
 meet your objectives in Augusta.



Everything you need to meet with success is in Augusta, including concierge-level service to attend to your every need. Call 800.726.0243 or visit www.AugustaGa.org

Augusta
GEORGIA
play.



The island boasts salt marshes, lagoons, centuries-old live oak trees, and 12 miles of beaches. Its largest meetings property, the Hilton Head Marriott Resort & Spa, boasts 513 rooms and 45,000 square feet of meeting space, including an 18,000-square-foot meeting room.

Luxurious Stays

In addition to highly affordable group venues, the South offers a variety of upscale hotels, resorts, and amenities for planners with a little extra in their budget.

The Roosevelt New Orleans, for example—which re-opened last July as part of the Waldorf=Astoria collection after a \$145 million restoration—features 505 rooms, including 125 luxury suites; nearly 60,000 square feet of meeting and event space comprised of three ballrooms and 23 meeting rooms; and a 12,000-square-foot, world-class spa and fitness center.

In Atlanta, groups can choose from elegant options like the St. Regis Atlanta, one of the city's most luxurious properties, complete with a 40,000-square-foot Pool Piazza, more than 16,000 square feet of meeting space, a grand terrace for up to 530 people, and a St. Regis Butler to cater to your every need.

Butler service is also offered at the nearby, 127-key Mansion on Peachtree, a Rosewood Hotel & Residence. The boutique hotel stands 42 stories tall in Atlanta's affluent Buckhead neigh-

Myrtle Beach Convention Center



Meetings that Strike a Chord

Here's a new way to end meetings on a high note: Music-based team-building company Song Division recently launched in the South, specializing in "conference energizers," experiential marketing, and private parties. Founded in Australia six years ago, Song Division has worked with groups of up to 10,000-plus attendees, including Microsoft, Coca-Cola, and PriceWaterhouse Cooper.

Song Division's regional debut was a sales kick-off at Atlanta's Dolce Peachtree Resort for Fortune 500 company Pitney Bowes. The 150 attendees wrote, performed, and recorded original songs with the help of musicians who have worked with the likes of David Bowie, James Brown, John Lennon, and Michael Jackson.

"The experience allowed us to bring our teams together and communicate our goals for the year in a fun, original fashion. We also found significant value in using the same band for our evening dinner entertainment after the teambuilding exercise," says Jessica M. Berman, marketing manager for Pitney Bowes.

Groups can experience their own personal recording sessions wherever they convene, using professional vocal booths and mixing rooms—on a private island, yacht, or in a meeting room.

Add inspiration to your agenda.

At The King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort, inspiration comes naturally. Here at the ocean's edge is a meetings-minded resort steeped in history and hospitality, staffed by professionals passionate about your group's success. The industry and attendees alike praise our seaside meeting space, oceanfront dining and over 190 guest rooms in an array of settings. And inspiring experiences, from play on our spectacular new King and Prince Golf Course to soothing massages in our new Royal Treatment Cottage, add to all that make meetings so memorable here.

For complete information on our inspiring settings and services, visit kingandprince.com. Or call (866) 831-1454.

SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS PINNACLE AWARD: 2006, 2007, 2009

The King and Prince
BEACH & GOLF RESORTSM
ST. SIMONS ISLAND, GEORGIA

HISTORIC HOTELS
of AMERICA
HISTORIC TRUST FOR
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

borhood. Among highlights are the 29 spa, a staff "mixologist" to assist with cocktails, Craft Atlanta restaurant from Tom Colicchio of "Top Chef" fame, and personal shoppers available by speed-dial from guest rooms. The property can accommodate intimate meetings and receptions of up to 200 attendees.

Successful meetings have been a tradition at the King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort on pristine St. Simons Island, Georgia for well over 70 years. The King and Prince Resort boasts over 10,000 square feet of ocean-side function space. The historic centerpiece is the Delgal Room, which features 11 stained glass murals and panoramic views of the Atlantic Ocean. The resort also offers a variety of accommodations, ranging from the Historic Main Building to beachfront villas and the private guest houses of The King and Prince, all on the resort grounds. Newly renovated rooms of the Oceanfront Building feature patios or balconies to enjoy the ocean breezes and beautiful views.

Luxury also awaits in Biloxi Mississippi, where the Beau Rivage Resort & Casino recently became the state's first property to be accepted into the prestigious Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI).

The 1,740-room resort is also the state's tallest and largest building, at 32 stories and 3.2 million square feet. With 50,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, includ-

ing the 17,000-square-foot Magnolia Ballroom, Beau Rivage can accommodate groups of up to 1,800. In addition to its 24-hour casino, the property also includes a spa, nightclub, theater, two fine-dining restaurants, and the Fallen Oak golf course, recognized by *Golfweek* last year as its "No. 1 Course You Can Play."

On a smaller scale, the secluded Litchfield Plantation in Pawleys Island, South Carolina (30 miles south of Myrtle Beach) caters to small meetings or incentive groups of 20 or less and paints a charming picture of the Old South.

"You feel like you have stepped back in time," says Lilly of the Myrtle Beach CVB. But rest assured, the property is not without modern amenities, like a Southern-style gourmet restaurant, three-story oceanfront beach club, tennis courts, private marina, pool, and gym. Guests can stay in the 200-year old Plantation House or in villas and cottages on the property grounds. Nearby are a host of signature golf courses designed by the likes of Jack Nicklaus, Tom Fazio, Ron Garl, Tom Jackson, and Dan Maples. ■



Roosevelt New Orleans

You've Gotta Know the...

KNOXVILLE CONVENTION CENTER



Did You Know?

The Knoxville Convention Center has **500,000 sq. ft. of flexible meeting space**, a **27,000 sq. ft. ballroom**, a **461-seat lecture hall** and so much more! Most importantly of all, it has everything you need to...

BOOK YOUR NEXT EVENT!



Contact Us Today!

www.Knoxville.org/meetings/kcc
sales@Knoxville.org • 800-727-8045