

Austin Hits a High Note with Music, New Hotels and State-of-the-Art Facilities

Over the past two decades, the small town where Willie Nelson sought respite in the 1970s to brand his own unique musical style grew into a big city with more than one million people in the metropolitan area. Known as the Live Music Capital of the World®, Austin also bears the distinction of being one of the best places in the nation to do business; the best city for singles; the country's top place for filmmaking; and the home of the third best performing airport in North America.

Centrally located, Austin stands as the gateway to the Texas Hill Country, revered for its rolling landscapes and pockets of Old World culture. This hilly region west of town enjoys the nickname "Silicon Hills," due to the many technology companies headquartered in the area, including Dell Computer Corporation.

As the seat of government for Texas, a nature lover's paradise and home to the University of Texas, Austin remains a favorite destination. A cosmopolitan flair, thriving cultural scene, cluster of excellent downtown hotels and array of fine dining restaurants combine with a vibrant nightlife to make it an ideal place for conventions.

The Texas State Capitol, Texas State History Museum and LBJ Presidential Library rank among the city's top attractions. Other popular sites include the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, nearly 200 live music venues and the Congress Avenue Bridge. Some 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats hang beneath the bridge from April until November and provide an incredible show with their nightly departures.

Since the opening of the Austin Convention Center in 1992, the city has emerged as a prime meeting and convention site. In May 2002, the Convention Center completed an expansion that doubled its size to nearly 900,000 square feet. It includes a 43,300-square-foot

grand ballroom and two new column-free exhibition halls. The expansion gives the Convention Center, considered one of the most technically advanced convention facilities in the U.S., 47 meeting rooms with 54,730 square feet. The new 131,000-square-foot Palmer Events Center also opened in summer 2002 and provides additional space for smaller meetings and special events.

The Austin Convention Center is currently working toward LEED certification and features energy-saving devices such as temperature control, selective lighting and panels that use sunlight to power the facility. The eco-friendly practices found at the Convention Center provide only one example of how Austin is a premier green destination in the U.S. In addition, meeting planners can turn to transportation companies like R&R Limousine and Bus that provide hybrid or bio-diesel options to reduce their carbon footprint. Or groups can take advantage of Austin's walkable downtown area, which features some 5,500 hotel rooms within a short distance of the Convention Center and major attractions, including the Sixth Street entertainment district, a six-block stretch of restaurants, bars and music clubs.

"Along with having an outstanding convention center and other fine meeting facilities, Austin gives our delegates a chance to ease into that unique Austin state of mind, which they won't find anywhere else," says Bob Lander, president and CEO of the Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau. "We've been called 'hip,' 'trendy' and 'cool.' We're all those things, and that's what people enjoy about Austin."

In an effort to help meeting planners map out their next business conference, the Austin CVB now provides a digital Convention Services toolkit. The interactive CD provides planners with promotional tools, such as logos for print ads or e-marketing pieces, and offers attendees information on how to navigate the city during their stay.

As seen in the changing landscape and skyline, the Convention Center expansion prompted redevelopment in the downtown area. In early 2004, the 31-story, 800-room Hilton

Austin opened as the Convention Center headquarters hotel. The property also includes a parking garage, three restaurants, residential condominiums, fitness center and rooftop pool.

Several Austin hotels have undergone renovations and expansions in recent years. The city's second largest hotel, the newly renovated Renaissance Hotel, sits as the cornerstone of the Arboretum development that features 95 acres of more than 50 specialty shops, restaurants, movie theaters and nature trails. Conveniently located in northwest Austin near several of the country's largest technology companies, the 478-room hotel is 20 minutes from downtown.

The InterContinental Stephen F. Austin Hotel, built in 1924, underwent a \$30 million renovation after being closed for 13 years. Located on the city's main downtown thoroughfare, Congress Avenue, the hotel provides 6,000 square feet of meeting space only four blocks from the State Capitol and houses the acclaimed Roaring Fork restaurant.

Another historic downtown property is the elegant Driskill Hotel, restored to its original grandeur after a four-year, top-to-bottom renovation. Built in 1886, the Driskill has 12 suites, 176 rooms—no two of which are alike—and 15,000 square feet of meeting space. President Lyndon Johnson watched the returns of his presidential election from the Driskill and dined with Lady Bird there on their first date.

In October 2004, the Marriott Horseshoe Bay Resort opened its doors in the heart of the Hill Country overlooking Lake LBJ. The 349-room hotel offers a state-of-the-art conference center, which boasts 22,000 square feet of unique indoor and outdoor meeting spaces. Guests may choose from an extensive list of on-site activities, including golf on three Robert Trent Jones, Sr. championship golf courses, spa services and lake excursions.

In summer 2006, the Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa opened near Bastrop, just a few miles south of Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. The new resort features 500 hotel rooms, an 18-hole golf course, spa, canoeing and fishing on the Colorado River as well as hiking and equestrian trails. The property offers more than 50,000 square feet of indoor function space and numerous outdoor event venues.

The AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center opened in August 2008 and is the newest meeting facility on the University of Texas campus grounds. Complying with LEED Silver certification standards, the AT&T Conference Center features 40,000 square feet of meeting space, 297 guestrooms and offers a number of conference packages.

Scheduled to open in March 2010 is The Westin Austin at The Domain. The eight-story, 340-room hotel will be an addition to the upscale retail mall found in north Austin, and will include 14,000 square feet of meeting space, an urban American bistro and WestinWorkout® fitness center.

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