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COLORADO

A MEETING AND INCENTIVE PLANNER'S GUIDE



GRAND PLANS

WITH COLORADO'S BOUNTY OF BEAUTIFUL SETTINGS, EXHILARATING ACTIVITIES, AND HOSPITALITY KNOW-HOW, MICE PROGRAMS NEED KNOW NO BOUNDS. —BY EMILY CARRUS

To put Colorado at the center of MICE program design is a smart planning move.

It's what planners in Telluride do when they book breakout sessions aboard the window-enclosed tram cars that ascend and descend one of the area's majestic San Juan Mountains. As the views of peaks soaring 14,000 feet into the sky take shape, attendees will revel in the splendor of their surroundings—and the conversation surrounding their assigned discussion topics will grow ever more animated. Should luck have it, and it often does, enchanting scenes of elk, bears, and other wildlife interacting in their natural habit will come into view on the slopes down below.

It's also what Marc Kessler has done in Breckenridge with his scheduling design for the annual Winter Institute of Medical Physics, which this year took place in February. He blocks out eight hours in between the morning and early-evening meeting sessions at the 515-room Beaver Run Resort and Conference Center, a slope-side property with 40,000 square feet of meeting space, so that attendees can take time to ski, snowboard, snowmobile, dogsled, and spend time in the shops and restaurants downtown.

Somewhat naturally, they assemble in small groups. "I distribute armbands with the meeting logo so people can recognize each other...

even with head-to-toe clothing and helmets," says the Institute's director. "There is a lot of networking during this break as participants take advantage of the winter activities right out the door."

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REWARDS

Planners who know Colorado know that the powerful personal experiences it affords attendees have the potential to help fuel powerful—and productive—professional experiences. A reflection of just how much there is to see and do, how accessible it all is, and just how well visitors are catered to, is the fact that tourism in Colorado is a nearly \$20 billion industry.

Kathy Reak puts it simply. "The leisure appeal is huge," enthuses the president of Destination Colorado, a 120-plus member organization that is single-stop resource of convention and visitors' bureaus, venues, and suppliers throughout the state. "Sküing in the mountains, zip lines, whitewater rafting, waterfalls, historic train rides, first-class restaurants, hiking, biking and so much more across the state allow attendees to find something to do at every turn—as well as providing endless team-building opportunities."

There's hardly a hum-drum meetings locale to be found within Colorado, with its seven mountain ranges, 15 national forests and grasslands, 8,000 miles of rivers, 2,000 lakes, the world's largest natural hot springs pool, and America's tallest sand dunes. But when snow-shoeing need transition

COLORADO



PHOTO CREDIT: RMNP

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK



ASPEN



BOULDER

into seminars or mountain biking need give way to board meetings, planners find that Colorado has the facilities, support, and expertise to accommodate all kinds of business needs, too.

RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES

From Estes Park at the heart of Rocky Mountain National Park... to Loveland, which has an authentic Western ambiance... to Grand Junction in the heart of Colorado's wine country, the "Centennial State" is rife with desirable and unique MICE program destinations. "Where one location may be in their high season, another is in their value season," says Reak. "There is always a location that can meet the budget needs of the group."

Even within Colorado's collection of mountain resort areas, there are lots of varied choices. Breckenridge, which suits Marc Kessler's program, has a quaint Main Street, family-friendly environs, rich mining history, and robust festival scene—in addition to its year-round outdoor activities.

Aspen is celebrated for its panache, polish, and extraordinary cultural scene, as it has the Aspen Art Museum, Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, and an eight week-long summer showcase of more than 400 classical music events. Fifty overnight properties are in the area, some with sizable on-site meeting facilities.

Keystone Resort, with 100,000 square feet of space, is more laid-back. It is distinctive in that it is one of the closest ski resorts to the capital city of Denver and home to the largest conference center in Colorado's Rocky Mountains

And then there's Vail Valley, with its charming town centers reminiscent of European alpine villages and twelve area golf courses that lure in players from around the world. Vail has 24 hotels, many high caliber, and there is 200,000 total square feet of meeting space in the area.

IN PEAK FORM

But in Colorado, seminars need not always be slope-side. The state's cities are celebrated host destinations for MICE programs, too—and invigorate attendees with their own unique personas.

Boulder, just 45 minutes from Denver International Airport, is

an esteemed incubator of thought, ideas, and spirit, as it is home to the University of Colorado and cradle for entrepreneurial pursuit. Much of the city's hotel inventory, which now tops 2,000 overnight rooms, is within walking distance to the pedestrian-friendly hubs of activity on Pearl Street and in the 29th Street District of shops and restaurants.

Colorado's second largest-city, Colorado Springs, has its own unique metropolis-meets-mountainside milieu. Attendees often feel invigorated by the influences of the U.S. Air Force Academy and U.S. Olympic Committee and Training Center, which give the area an aura of aspiration and accomplishment.

Next spring, the Olympic Museum and Hall of Fame will join the list of Colorado Springs' 60 attractions, which includes Garden of the Gods Park, the Colorado Springs Philharmonic, Manitou Art Center, and Pikes Peak, dubbed "America's Mountain." Old Colorado City is a delightful center of shops, galleries, and cafes.

Even with its mesmerizing 450,000 square feet of meeting space, 14,500-plus overnight rooms, and bustling airport—which is just 12 minutes from downtown—there's a small-town feeling in Colorado Springs. Meetings-friendly hotels run up and down the price-point spectrum and include particularly luxurious options, such as The Broadmoor: an amenity-packed, iconic resort that celebrated its centennial anniversary last year. Next spring a new 110,000-square-foot exhibition hall will join the property's existing 185,000 square feet of indoor and 45,000 of outdoor function space.

COLORADO



COLORADO SPRINGS

(Continued from page 96)

CAPITAL CITY CACHE

With its thriving financial district, government activity, dynamic dining scene, spearheading sustainability efforts, seven professional sports teams, and celebrated cultural institutions, Denver is also powerhouse of productivity—and an unstoppable force of development and reinvestment.

"In 2018, Denver gained 4,650 hotel rooms, reaching more than 11,000 in the downtown core; there are 9,000 more planned and under construction. Denver International Airport—named



THE BROADMOOR

Wall Street Journal's #1 U.S. airport—became one of only five U.S. airports with nonstop service to 200 destinations; and it is currently undergoing a major redesign and expansion," says Rachel Benedick, vice president of sales and services at Visit Denver. "The Colorado Convention Center (CCC) expansion is in progress; National Western Center will transform into a massive education and entertainment campus north of downtown; and AEG Presents will debut Mission Ballroom, a state-of-the-art concert venue in RiNo Art District later this year."



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