

# california

## meetings + events

MEETINGSMAGS.COM // WINTER 2019

# *Best of 2019*

***24 categories including:*** BEST COASTAL RESORT, CRAFT BREWERY  
WITH MEETING SPACE, NEW VENUE, ATTRACTION/THEME PARK,  
MOUNTAIN RESORT, CONFERENCE/CONVENTION CENTER *and more!*



california  
meetings + events  
**BEST OF 2019**

**The votes have been tallied and it's time for the reveal in  
our third annual celebration of the Golden State's finest.  
Congratulations to all!**

Your picks for the best venues, activities and attractions in California include some innovative newcomers along with stellar, repeat champions. Here's who you, our readers, say are the best of the best.

*By Janet Fullwood and Shelley Levitt*

**BEST DESTINATION MARKETING  
ORGANIZATION/CVB (POPULATION  
UNDER 500,000)**

**Visit Napa Valley**

visitnapavalley.com | 707.226.5813

It was a year of immense challenge in Napa Valley as the October 2017 wildfires that burned hundreds of thousands of acres in three counties precipitated a slump in leisure and business tourism. The fires did not deter new growth, however, and Visit Napa Valley has been proactive nationwide in spreading the word that vineyards and businesses on the valley floor experienced little or no impact. Five new hotels, seven new museum exhibits, a new film festival, a new winery, 12 new tasting rooms and four new restaurants have opened since the blazes. Visit Napa Valley stands poised to curate a full-sensory, tailored attendee experience in the legendary wine region.

**Runners-up:** Greater Palm Springs Oasis; Monterey County CVB

**BEST DESTINATION MARKETING  
ORGANIZATION/CVB (POPULATION  
OVER 500,000)**

**San Francisco  
Travel Association**

sfrtravel.com | 415.974.6900

San Francisco has been shattering tourism records year after year, with visitor volume hitting 25.5 million in 2017. Nevertheless, the San Francisco Travel convention sales team offers complimentary hotel and site selection for groups booking as few as 10 room nights, along with attendance-building tools, promotional materials and other services for groups of any size. A revamped Moscone Convention Center is boosting business even more, while four new hotels, all with rooftop venues, opened in the central city in 2018, adding to overall room count. Diversity is the name of the game in this city of distinct neighborhoods, and with beautiful scenery, out-of-the-box venues, and an unbeatable food

scene, San Francisco Travel is never short of suggestions to help attendees make the most of their visit.

**Runners-up:** San Diego Tourism Authority; Los Angeles Tourism & Visitors Bureau

**BEST CONFERENCE/CONVENTION  
CENTER UNDER 100,000 SQUARE FEET**  
**Monterey Conference Center**

montereyconferencecenter.com  
800.742.8091

After a \$60 million renovation project, the sparkling Monterey Conference Center reopened in January 2018. With state-of-the-art technology and a location in downtown Monterey, the Center sits adjacent to the Monterey Marriott and the Portola Hotel & Spa to offer 41,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, 19,150 square feet of exhibition space, and 1,200 hotel rooms. As befits its location and commitment to sustainability, the Center works with Aqua Terra Culinary as its



## Winners

caterer; the local company specializes in using responsibly sourced farm-to-table products.

**Runners-up:** Redding Civic Auditorium;  
Riverside Convention Center

### BEST CONFERENCE/CONVENTION CENTER OVER 100,000 SQUARE FEET

#### Moscone Center

San Francisco | [moscone.com](http://moscone.com)  
415.974.6900

Meeting planners danced around construction and restructured their gatherings for years while a \$551 million expansion of San Francisco's convention center, with attendant neighborhood improvements, was underway. The ribbon was cut on Jan. 3, bringing the city's vibrant convention scene back to full force. And no wonder planners love it: the expansion brings the center's total exhibit space to more than 504,000 square feet of continuous space, including 157,000 square feet of flexible meeting space in the Moscone North and South wings. A new ballroom, multiple terraces with skyline views, the ability to create up to 82 meeting rooms, and two pedestrian bridges are among the many other improvements. Plus, the entire center is LEED Platinum Certified. And the location couldn't be better, with 19,545 hotel rooms within eight blocks and more on the way.

**Runners-up:** Palm Springs Convention Center; San Diego Convention Center

### BEST DOWNTOWN MEETING VENUE OUTSIDE CONFERENCE OR CONVENTION CENTER

#### Hilton San Diego Bayfront

[hiltonsandiegobayfront.com](http://hiltonsandiegobayfront.com) | 619.564.3333

Landing the top spot in this category for the third year in a row, this 1,190-room AAA Four Diamond property has enduring appeal. For starters, a location that's ideal for meetings: adjacent to the San Diego Convention Center, on the waterfront, across the street from Petco



Moscone Center

Park, and within easy walking distance of the restaurants and shops of the Gaslamp Quarter. A standout among the 165,000 square feet of flexible meeting space is the 7,000-square-foot terrace—the largest in the city—that overlooks the San Diego Bay.

**Runners-up:** The Masonic;  
The California Science Center

### BEST WINERY WITH MEETING SPACE

#### Castello di Amorosa

Calistoga | [castellodiamorosa.com](http://castellodiamorosa.com)  
707.967.7084

Castello di Amorosa is renowned for hosting some of Napa Valley's most impressive events in a distinct style that can only be offered in a 13th-century-style castle. Featuring 18,000

square feet of indoor event space and over 8,000 square feet of outdoor event space, venues at the Castello include outdoor terraces, wine caves, hidden rooms, an opulent dinner hall and an expansive courtyard. Small or big, they have a space that fits your need for wine-focused educational events. The hospitality staff are artful masters in setting the stage, providing creative ideas, and arranging every last detail. Wine education events include a tour of the property, a wine presentation, and a wine tasting. Guests will be led by a castle expert through the picturesque property while tasting the portfolio of wines before dining in one of the distinct spaces.

**Runners-up:** Callaway Vineyard & Winery;  
Folktales Winery & Vineyards





**Castello di  
Amorosa**



**Stone Brewing**

#### **BEST CRAFT BREWERY WITH MEETING SPACE**

### **Stone Brewing**

San Diego | [stonebrewing.com](http://stonebrewing.com)  
760.294.7866

A three-peat winner, Stone Brewing continues to be a “suds”-ational option for laid-back gatherings. The Escondido location, which is adjacent to the main production brewery, has a 1-acre garden and a seating capacity of 1,000 reception-style. Stone Brewing World Bistro and Garden – Liberty Station has 55,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor space, including a 30,000-square-foot garden, for a total seating capacity of more than 800.

**Runners-up:** Peter B’s Brewpub;  
Anchor Brewing

#### **BEST WINE COUNTRY RESORT WITH MEETING SPACE**

### **Harvest Inn**

St. Helena | [harvestinn.com](http://harvestinn.com) | 707.963.9463

The “vineyard way of life” is expressed with aplomb at this idyllic, 78-room resort spread over 8 acres that are shaded by more than 300 redwood trees and defined by four separate “neighborhoods” combining heritage and modern style. Every conceivable amenity is offered, from multiple swimming pools and hot tubs to indoor and outdoor spa-treatment rooms, in-room wine tasting and a signature restaurant, Harvest Table, highlighting locally sourced ingredients. Indoor and outdoor meeting and event venues include the Vineyard View Room and adjacent terrace;

two additional meeting rooms accommodating 60 and 110, respectively, and the Fountain View Terrace, which can handle 110 guests over its 2,000 square feet. Vineyard views are part of the ambience that brings many groups here year after year.

**Runners-up:** Indian Springs Resort and Spa;  
Meritage Resort & Spa

#### **BEST COASTAL RESORT**

### **Surf & Sand**

Laguna Beach | [surfandsandresort.com](http://surfandsandresort.com)  
877.741.5908

No hotel in California gets closer to the beach than the Surf & Sand, which sits directly on 500 feet of shoreline in Laguna Beach. With 20,000 square feet of event space, equally



## Winners

divided between indoor and the wave-lapping outdoors, the luxury property can accommodate groups of up to 200. A stand-alone conference center features an elevated garden terrace, the Pelican Ballroom and numerous boardrooms, all with vaulted ceilings and natural light.

**Runners-up:** Hotel del Coronado;  
Terranea Resort

### BEST MOUNTAIN RESORT

#### Lake Arrowhead Resort & Spa

lakearrowheadresort.com | 909.336.1511

The scenery is incomparable and the service luxe at this AAA Four Diamond mountain hideaway that sits at an elevation of 5,200 feet along the shores of Lake Arrowhead in the San Bernardino National Forest. Both secluded and convenient, Lake Arrowhead Resort & Spa is just 90 minutes from Los Angeles and Orange County, but worlds away. The Autograph Collection Hotel has 162 guests room and 11 suites—all with stunning lake or mountain views so no attendee feels short-changed—and 23,000 square feet of indoor meeting space. As for outdoor space and activities, that's pretty much unlimited with a private beach, an event lawn, an expansive deck, and year-round fun that includes s'mores at sunset, drive-in movies, walking, hiking and mountain-biking trails, and guided kayak and fishing tours.

**Runners-up:** Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe;  
Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe

### BEST DESERT CITIES RESORT

#### La Quinta Resort & Club

laquintaresort.com | 760.564.4111

The sky is endless in the Coachella Valley, and so are the possibilities for gatherings at this Waldorf Astoria Resort. With 190,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space, a guest capacity of 1,300 and three ballrooms (the largest can accommodate 1,800 attendees), La

Quinta welcomes groups of all sizes. From world-class golf and tennis to 41 pools on 45 landscaped acres and the award-winning 23,000-square-foot Spa La Quinta, attendees will relish their restorative R&R time between sessions.

**Runners-up:** Two Bunch Palms;  
Ritz-Carlton Rancho Mirage

### BEST GOLF RESORT (SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA)

#### Park Hyatt Aviara Resort, Golf Club & Spa

Carlsbad | hyatt.com | 760.448.1234

Both Golf Digest and Golf Magazine have named the Aviara Golf Club one of the best resort golf courses in the country. Your attendees will agree: The 18 holes and 7,000 yards weave around rolling hillsides, wildflowers and streams, offering lots of challenges. The 32,000-square-foot Golf Clubhouse, with a wraparound terrace, Argyle Steakhouse, bar and library, is just one of many venues for a memorable gathering at the 327-room Forbes Five Star and AAA Five Diamond luxury destination.

**Runners-up:** Ojai Valley Inn & Spa;  
La Quinta Resort & Club

### BEST GOLF RESORT (NORTHERN CALIFORNIA)

#### Pebble Beach Resorts

pebblebeach.com | 888.242.8131

For the second year in a row, Pebble Beach Resorts, a collection of six golf courses and three hotels on the storied Monterey Peninsula, takes the award in the golf category. This year marks the resorts' centennial with special attention to accomplishments ranging from the addition of Fairway One at The Lodge at Pebble Beach to complete renovation of all guest rooms across the three properties, which also include The Inn at Spanish Bay and Casa Palmero, a 24-room "resort within a resort." A new Pebble Beach Visitor Center features



Ojai Valley  
Inn & Spa



Pebble Beach  
Resorts

PHOTOS: PEBBLE BEACH RESORTS PHOTO BY RANDY TUNNELL; OJAI VALLEY INN & SPA



exhibitions that celebrate Pebble Beach history, including its championship golf pedigree and commitment to the environment and community. In another centennial milestone, Pebble Beach Golf Links will host its sixth U.S. Open Championship June 13-16.

**Runners-up:** Quail Lodge & Golf Club; Silverado Resort and Spa

**BEST SPA RESORT  
(SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA)**

**Ojai Valley Inn & Spa**

[ojaivalleyinn.com](http://ojaivalleyinn.com) | 855.697.8780

Since last year when the Five Diamond property was voted into the top spot in this category, the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa has been planning the early 2019 opening of its extraordinary new venue The Farmhouse. A majestic retreat within the resort, it features an 8,500-square-foot Great Room that can accommodate 600 seated guests (or 800 reception-style) under its 25-foot-high peaked ceilings; a gorgeously manicured event lawn that can host up to 1,750; the 11,000-square-foot courtyard, centered around a stately outdoor fireplace, with a capacity of 600, and several intimate settings including the Library and Kitchen Terrace.

**Runners-up:** L'Auberge Del Mar; Park Hyatt Aviara Resort

**BEST SPA RESORT  
(NORTHERN CALIFORNIA)**

**Indian Springs Resort & Spa**

[calistoga.indianspringscalistoga.com](http://calistoga.indianspringscalistoga.com)  
844.378.3635

We dare you to get out of the pool! It's not just any pool; Indian Springs' centerpiece attraction, in operation since 1913, is an Olympic-size mineral pool heated by on-site geysers and maintained between 92 and 102 degrees, depending on season. The adjacent, beautifully restored spa is even older, dating to 1862 and offering a menu of mud baths (using volcanic ash harvested on-site), massages and





## Winners

facials. The 115 luxuriously furnished yet unpretentious guest rooms are spread over multiple buildings on the 17-acre property. A recently renovated, 1,200-square-foot Event Barn targets corporate gatherings. There's also a wedding garden, a Garden Retreat Center with several meeting rooms and a yoga studio, a 90-seat restaurant with patio seating and fire pits that can be rented for private events. Meanwhile, downtown Calistoga restaurants and tasting rooms are within walking distance, with vineyards and wineries just a short jaunt away.

**Runners-up:** Solage Calistoga; Carneros Resort & Spa

### BEST OUTDOOR VENUE (SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA)

#### The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens

San Marino | [huntington.org](http://huntington.org) | 626.405.2100

From the Huntington Art Gallery South Terrace to the 1919 Patio, the Rose Garden to the Library Lawn, there are more than 30 stunning and unique venues at this world-renowned research, educational and arts center. The on-site special events team can help planners create gatherings that might include an hors d'oeuvres reception with a private gallery viewing or dinner among the blooms.

**Runners-up:** San Diego Japanese Friendship Garden; Hilton San Diego Bayfront

### BEST OUTDOOR VENUE (NORTHERN CALIFORNIA)

#### Cornerstone Sonoma

[cornerstonesonoma.com](http://cornerstonesonoma.com) | 707.933.3010

This seductive food, wine, shopping and event venue in the Carneros wine region offers many creative options for planners. Sunset Magazine's demonstration gardens and outdoor test kitchen are here, along with

three on-site wine-tasting rooms, a distillery, a restaurant and several home design and fashion shops—15 locations in all. Private culinary events and hands-on activities like scavenger hunts, curated cocktail experiences, cooking classes and garden tours can be arranged, or groups can be set free to enjoy the grounds and marketplace on their own. Event venues include an open-sided barn that can be dressed up for sit-down dinners, event lawns, a wedding garden that is tented in winter and a patio overlooking the Tyge William Cellars vineyard.

**Runners-up:** Golden Gate Park Venues; Asilomar Conference Grounds

### BEST SPORTS VENUE

#### AT&T Park

San Francisco | [giantsenterprises.com](http://giantsenterprises.com)  
415.972.1800

San Francisco's nostalgia-inducing AT&T Park, home to the San Francisco Giants, hosts lots more than baseball games. Giants Enterprises, the entrepreneurial arm of the franchise, specializes in curating innovative events—more than 250 a year on nongame days. From dinners and concerts large and small, creativity is the name of the game. Last year, a private luxury yacht, the California Spirit, was added to Giants Enterprises' array of offerings. It's docked at Pier 40, right next to the ballpark, and can host events ranging from dinner cruises to cocktail receptions and weddings, on game days as well as nongame days.

**Runners-up:** Petco Park; Rose Bowl Stadium

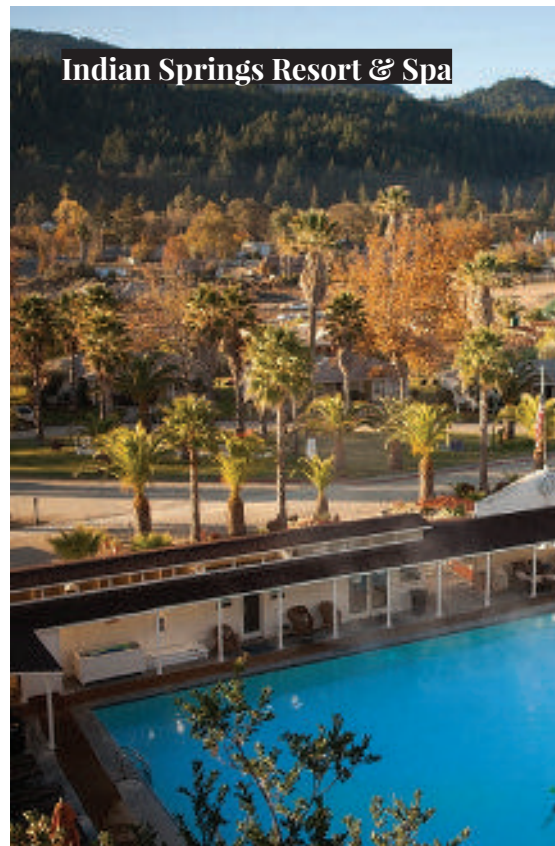
### BEST NEW VENUE

#### Vista Collina Resort

Napa | [visitacollinaresort.com](http://visitacollinaresort.com)  
888.965.7090

It's a new concept for Napa: a Tuscan-themed "lifestyle resort" combining a hotel operation with 145 tranquil guest rooms, eight wine-tasting rooms, a craft brewery, an artisan market, a

#### Indian Springs Resort & Spa



#### Vista Collina Resort



PHOTOS: VISTA COLLINA RESORT; INDIAN SPRINGS RESORT & SPA; AT&T PARK





AT&T Park





## Winners

Food & Wine Center for cooking and wine education classes, a 16,000-square-foot event lawn and a curated calendar that's always changing. Part of the Meritage Collection, Vista Collina opened in August across the road from the Meritage Resort. Between them, the properties offer 80,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space, 44 unique venues, a 9-acre vineyard with walking trails, a spa, an estate cave fitted out for wine dinners, two pools and fitness centers, and, yes, six lanes of bowling.

**Runners-up:** Kimpton La Peer;  
Kimpton Sawyer

### BEST RENOVATED VENUE

#### Bodega Bay Lodge

bodegabaylodge.com | 707.875.3525

Renovations have been ongoing at this dramatic, 83-room Sonoma Coast property for many years, including property-wide upgrades, five new luxury suites, new guest-room furnishings, a new bar concept and additional outdoor fire pits—all with a luxury designer touch. The newly renovated Waveside and adjoining Chart Room, with direct patio access, can comfortably handle 70 guests, while the Captain's Quarters is a second-floor retreat for 20. An event lawn and 1,200-square-foot patio are especially popular for weddings and receptions. Virtually every spot on the property commands sweeping views of ocean and wetlands, adding to an intimate coastal experience.

**Runners-up:** Lafayette Park Hotel & Spa;  
Renaissance Palm Springs Hotel

### BEST ATTRACTION/THEME PARK

#### Disneyland Resort

Anaheim | disneymeetings.com  
714.781.4636

At IMEX 2018, Disney introduced what they called “our reimagined brand”—Disney Meetings & Events. That's an indication of just how important meetings are to the mouse kingdom, and how far they'll go to make sure

your event is magical. Disneyland Resort has over 180,000 square feet of meeting and event space, and team-building exercises that range from behind-the-scene tours to lessons in how groups can adapt Disney business practices to their own organizations. Three Disney Hotels are within easy walking distance of Disneyland Park and Disney California Adventure Park, as are the restaurants and shops of Downtown Disney District.

**Runners-up:** Six Flags Discovery Kingdom;  
Monterey Bay Aquarium

### BEST TEAM-BUILDING ACTIVITY

#### Formula 3 Racing Experience, Sonoma Raceway

simracewaydrivingschool.com  
800.733.0345

From Google to GE, Cisco to Sony, corporate groups have gathered at the Sonoma Raceway for team-building and flat-out thrills. The events team at the historical raceway can put together a half or full day of activities for groups of up to 400 with attendees getting behind the wheel of a user-friendly go kart or adrenaline junkies opting for a spin around the track in a single-seat Formula 3 race car.

**Runners-up:** Porsche Experience Center;  
Sand Castle Building, Hyatt Regency,  
Huntington Beach

### BEST ROOFTOP VENUE

#### The Inn at Laguna Beach

innatlagunabeach.com | 949.497.9722

After a day of meetings or leisure, there is no lovelier place to perch in Orange County than on the elevated Pacific Terrace Bar at The Inn at Laguna Beach, a luxury boutique hotel. Sip a cocktail and gaze at Main Beach as the sun sets. Then, again, it's just as lovely for breakfast. The rooftop bar (capacity 75) is adjacent to the Pacific meeting room (capacity 40), which has equally spectacular coastline views.

**Runners-up:** L'Auberge Del Mar;  
Scott's Seafood

#### Bodega Bay Lodge



#### Monterey Bay Aquarium

PHOTOS: MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM; MISSION SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO; BODEGA BAY LODGE





**BEST HISTORIC OR CULTURAL  
VENUE (NORTHERN CALIFORNIA)**

**Monterey Bay  
Aquarium, Monterey**

montereybayaquarium.org  
831.648.4800

A repeat winner, the Monterey Bay Aquarium continues to innovate the ways that groups can interact with marine life. Case in point: the behind-the-scenes “Feeding Frenzy” tour now gives guests the opportunity to serve breakfast to bat rays. On the more formal side of things, in October 2018 more than 300 guests gathered in a temporary ocean-themed pavilion at the Aquarium for a gala that raised \$3.7 million in funds to support the institution’s mission. The guest of honor was Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates.

**Runners-up:** California Academy of Sciences; Alcatraz Island



**Mission San Juan  
Capistrano**

**BEST HISTORIC OR CULTURAL  
VENUE (SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA)**

**Mission San Juan  
Capistrano**

missionsjc.com | 949.234.1300

Founded in 1776, the 10-acre Historic Mission San Juan Capistrano brings both Old World hospitality and idyllic beauty to events for 50 guests to as many as 1,000. The Soldiers Barracks Gallery, with an attached private patio, is an intimate space for small corporate meetings, while the Front and Central Courtyards, which wrap around a Spanish-style fountain and koi pond, can accommodate 800 seated guests and 1,000 for cocktails. The grounds are a dramatic setting for a private flamenco show, mariachi performance or strolling fiestas.

**Runners-up:** Balboa Park; Hearst Castle 🏰