

Arizona offers countless beautiful scenes, such as this winter sunset in the Chiricahua National Monument, located 120 miles southeast of Tucson.

RAISING ARIZONA

Planners Are Finding the Grand Canyon State Ideal for Meetings

BY KEITH LORIA

Adrienne McLeod / Visit Tucson

While best known for the picturesque Grand Canyon, Arizona has plenty of amazing sites to see, including Saguaro National Park and Sedona and Antelope Canyon, and that's a big draw for attendance at meetings and conventions in Arizona.

"For our clients, it's an 'exotic' and different location, and you can also rely on the weather to be nice and sunny," says Bryan Mattimore, co-founder for Growth Engine, a 20-year-old innovation agency based in Westport, Connecticut, which designs and facilitates nearly 50 meetings a year. "The attendees like being able to enjoy the outdoors. For example, we facilitated several meetings for the United States Tennis Association, so it was key that the attendees could get out and play some tennis in nice weather."

Scottsdale is one of the top destinations for corporate and incentive travel in America due to its natural beauty and unique ecosystem, abundant opportunity for adventure and destination experiences and superb quality of resorts with fresh, newly renovated rooms and event space.

But it's not just Scottsdale. Spending time outdoors is a lifestyle that is enjoyed all year in cities such as Phoenix, Tucson, Mesa, Tempe and more. Thanks to more than 300 days of sunshine in Arizona each year, meeting professionals can also take advantage of the wide variety of outdoor meeting and event spaces available.

TUCSON HAS EVERYTHING

Robin Wilczynski, director of events at El Conquistador Tucson, A Hilton Resort, the only resort in Arizona to achieve the AAA Four Diamond designation for 35 years straight, says the resort understands how to engage people and embrace the local culture.

"Here you will find a thoughtfully blended atmosphere of local and indigenous offerings paired with an evolving portfolio of touches," she says. "Our highly trained and welcoming team can help eventgoers discover the magic of Oro Valley and the legends of gold hidden behind the Lost Iron Door Mine in the nearby Catalina Mountains."

El Conquistador's location at the base of Pusch Ridge — part of the Catalina Mountains — makes it highly in demand for meetings.

"With more than 100,000 sf of exceptional and versatile indoor and outdoor function space, we offer more meeting and event options than anywhere else in southern Arizona," Wilczynski says. "We boast two 12,000-sf ballrooms for maximum flexibility and an IACC Conference facility with amazing views."

"We had our first meeting there and it's become a standard request because it was such a great venue."

DANIEL G. SHARP

Chief of Police, Oro Valley, Arizona
Chair, Highway Safety Committee for the
International Association
of Chiefs of Police



El Conquistador Tucson, a Hilton Resort, offers more than 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space.

There's also the Last Territory Western venue — an on-site location that provides a taste of the Old West.

"This is the answer to any meeting planner's dream, an indoor and outdoor venue with picnic tables, string lighting, fire pits, built-in outdoor barbecue, space for a band and/or dancing, indoor bar, etc.," Wilczynski says. "Guests feel like they've gone off property, but without the hassle and expense of transportation."

Meetings and events at El Conquistador Tucson span far beyond the ballroom. Wilczynski notes attendees can engage in impromptu networking sessions around a fire pit or recap a conference while sitting next to the chef's herb garden.

Come dusk, a Native American flute player delights meeting attendees with the soothing sounds of indigenous music, which has been described as one of the greatest expressions of 'spirit, heart and healing.'

Outside of the meeting rooms, guests can enjoy the Linda Vista Loop Trail accessible from the property, tennis, golf, the resort's five pools, as well as bird watching, photography, biking, guided hikes and fitness classes. Catalina State Park is just a quick 5 minutes from the door, and horseback trail riding is accessible nearby.

"Hiking is the best way for attendees to experience the Sonoran Desert and all its beauty and wonder," Wilczynski says. "Catalina State Park nearby is the perfect way to get acquainted with the different types of flora and fauna — and maybe even spot a deer or roadrunner. Horseback trail riding is another distinctive way to see and experience the setting, and allows you to unleash your inner cowboy."

Daniel G. Sharp, police chief of Oro Valley, 6 miles south



of Tucson, chairman of the Highway Safety Committee for the International Association of Chiefs of Police, says for the past three years, their mid-year meeting has been held at the El Conquistador Tucson.

“The reason we choose it, is because our committee members — who are from all over — request it,” he says. “We had our first meeting there and it’s become a standard request because it was such a great venue. We had representatives from the U.K., Canada, Brazil, Spain, Italy and people from all over the U.S., so it’s a group that travels a lot and has stayed in many different venues, but they always want to come back.”

The committee has a lot to accomplish at these meetings, and Sharp notes they are meeting all day long, with little time for breaks. But what people enjoy is, once the evening comes, there is so much to do at the resort — including luaus at the pool and amenities aplenty.

SCOTTSDALE IS ALWAYS A POPULAR CHOICE

Another planner favorite is the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, rooted in the blooming Sonoran Desert. The resort provides attendees an inspiring setting to play outdoors and enjoy the No. 1 reason why so many planners and attendees favor Scottsdale’s beautiful climate.

Beyond the picturesque Spanish Mission design and lushly landscaped desert grounds, the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess has been able to maintain its AAA Five Diamond rating for 28 consecutive years. The resort boasts 65 acres, with 106,000 sf of indoor event space and 200,000 sf of outdoor venues.

For planners requiring early setup, the summer months and the period from Thanksgiving through New Year’s are where you’ll find the most flexibility. A favorite recommendation is for groups to explore the unique eco-

Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum features 2 miles of walking paths over 21 acres of desert landscape.

system of the Sonoran Desert by land, air and water. Within minutes of the resort, you can: hike mountain trails, take flight over the Sonoran Desert in hot air balloons, ride horseback or kayak down a waterway. There are wonderful historic sites to visit such as: Taliesin West, the Frank Lloyd Wright House and Museum of Musical Instruments, which is less than five minutes from the resort, with options for groups to host events and private exhibit showings.

The resort has incentive and executive meetings that return each year, with many occurring annually, for as many as 20 years. Each year more than half of its meetings are repeat clients and groups.

Planners are encouraged to include some ‘play time’ to really experience the Sonoran Desert and give attendees an opportunity to gain new perspective on their lives and their work. Attendees can take advantage of a full portfolio of wellness, team building and fitness classes designed for groups that take place on its lawns, verandas and pools. Options include: Float Fit, Silent Savasana, 5K runs, laughing yoga, aromatherapy blending bars and nature walks.

Another favorite is Sanctuary Camelback Mountain Resort and Spa in Scottsdale. If Mother Nature is a source of inspiration for meetings and events, then meeting planners should look no further than Sanctuary.

Terraced high on one of Arizona’s best-known landmarks, Camelback Mountain, the resort features compelling views of Paradise Valley and surrounding mountains from every vantage point. The resort offers 9,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and catering space, and provides the ideal venue for small groups, business professionals and associations who seek

Tucson offers indoor and outdoor activities to suit any preference for attendees and planners alike.

BEYOND THE BALLROOM



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Sanctuary Camelback Mountain Resort and Spa in Scottsdale offers 9,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space.

an exceptional attention to detail to ensure a productive, focused and well-orchestrated meeting.

Sanctuary's signature restaurant, elements, offers a host of unique group options. The private dining room, XII, appropriately seats 12 for dinner. The room opens to Sanctuary's state-of-the-art kitchen, run by celebrity chef Beau MacMillan, giving guests a private peek into the workings of a world-class restaurant. Adjacent to elements, Praying Monk features stunning views of Camelback Mountain, offering indoor/outdoor space for up to 60 guests.

Each of the eight Villas at Sanctuary are available to VIPs and executives who crave privacy or want to host smaller events and meetings. These multimillion-dollar villas feature exclusive amenities, exceptional décor, extensive patios, swimming pools and sweeping views of the lush desert landscape.

The resort's intimate size reinforces privacy for each meeting group and close proximity to guest casitas and facilities, including the acclaimed Sanctuary Spa, which offers group wellness programs designed to rejuvenate and inspire. For active groups, a vast infinity-edge pool, tennis and pickle ball compound, hiking and biking trails and fitness center are available along with golf privileges at Phoenix/Scottsdale's most

renowned courses.

Meeting planners can build a customized event from an extensive menu of activities. An Iron Chef America-inspired culinary competition, aura reading and photography workshop are among the activities designed to fuel attendees' creativity, while team-building hikes, corporate yoga and Pilates, and a Be Kind to Your Spine workout help them keep fit on the road. And then there's the motivational Corporate Power-Up — a choice of cardio beats/drumming, boot camp, ZUMBA class or tennis match

“Arizona is a great mid-ground for attendees, providing shorter airlifts for them coming from all over the country.”

AMANDA HOUSTON
Director of Corporate Events and Marketing
INNOVATX Events



designed to increase strength, endurance and corporate fun. Mini-breaks range from a 15-minute Breathe and Rejuvenate session to a Take 10 Office Retreat featuring chair exercises.

Additionally, Sanctuary provides a welcome respite for attendees to unwind and shift gears into a restorative Sonoran escape when their meetings are over. Attendees are welcomed to an oasis in the middle of the desert with famed sunsets each night, where they can enjoy a world-class

spa, top-notch dining in elements restaurant and recently renovated guest rooms featuring soaking tubs, fireplaces and chic décor.

Along with the inviting weather, the greater Scottsdale area is home to world-class shopping, art galleries, museums and professional sports venues all just a short, 20-minute drive from Sanctuary.

TOP SPOTS FOR PLANNERS

Chane Steiner, CEO of Scottsdale-based Crediful, has been involved in several meetings in his home state and recommends the downtown Phoenix Convention Center.

“It's an amazing venue for business events and at 900,000 sf, it can handle just about any large event,” he says. “If you are planning a smaller meeting, I'd recommend the 24th Street Conference

Center. This venue has five meeting rooms with 3,000 sf of space. It's an excellent spot for more intimate occasions with a smaller budget.”

Amanda Houston, director of corporate events and marketing for INNOVATX Events, a planning company based in Austin, Texas, says Arizona is a treasure to the United States thanks to its dry and warm weather providing ample opportunities for groups to get out and explore the amazing scenery and natural aspects

of the state, which is why the company plans many corporate meetings there.

“For meetings and incentives, Arizona provides flavor-infused southwestern dishes and some of the best team-building and outdoor excursions that give groups a needed mental break from the day-in-day out hotel conference room vibe,” she says. “What could be more fun after a long day of meetings than an evening event or a team building excursion that includes a hot air balloon ride over the picturesque Sonoran Desert?”

The company has planned a number of annual meetings and incentive trips for groups over the years there and has found planning in Arizona to be straightforward, with staff at most locations accustomed to facilitating group planning and able to flex to help accommodate unique and individualized event requests. One recent annual meeting was for a group of 500, and a recent incentive trip was for a group of 100.

“Historically, we've had larger meeting groups at The Phoenician and Omni Montelucia Resort & Spa, and our incentive groups utilizing resorts like the Arizona Biltmore and the Boulders Resort & Spa,” Houston says. “Most recently we've just had a group hold a smaller annual meeting at the Mountain Shadows Resort. A lot of these groups do a rotation for their



Phoenix Convention Center offers 900,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, including a 312,500-sf main exhibit hall and a 46,000-sf ballroom.

meetings traveling East Coast, Central Southwest, and West Coast in rotating years. Arizona is a great mid-ground for attendees, providing shorter airlifts for them coming from all over the country.” When she surveys attendees at the end of Arizona-based meetings, they are often raving about amazing spa and wellness packages, golf courses and unique culture and art.

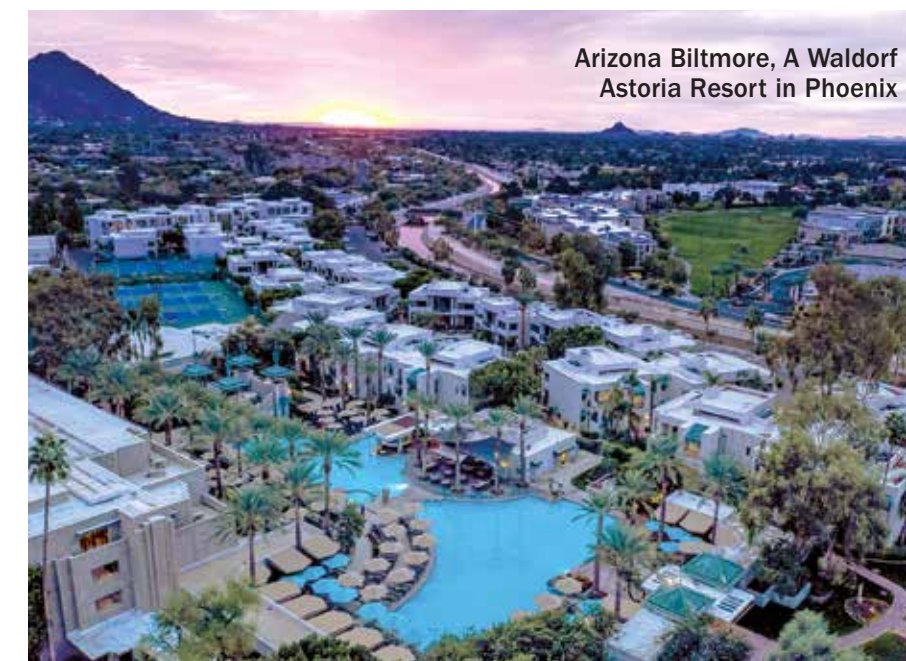
Growth Engine's Mattimore generally works with the client, not as much with the hotel meeting planners. However, what he likes about the hotels in Arizona is that when he works with them directly — doing meeting set-up, creating ideation stations, putting flip chart paper on the walls, etc. — they are flexible enough to accommodate

the unique needs for workshops. The Arizona Biltmore, A Waldorf Astoria Resort's large conference/meeting hall allowed the company to facilitate an ideation session with the 150 meeting attendees.

“We created 30 ideation stations in the meeting hall by taping flip chart paper to the walls,” Mattimore says. “Often, such a high-profile, four-star venue will be less than flexible in allowing us to transform the space into an appropriate environment for creating new ideas. But the Biltmore management was great, including setting up the room with 25 round tables to facilitate small team creative exercises.” He held another meeting at the Enchantment Resort in Sedona for 150 people from Christian Dior and the staff was flexible and accommodating and wonderful to work with in setting up and allowing them to facilitate an all-day ideation session.

“One of the more successful meetings we designed and facilitated in Arizona was for 150 regional and store managers for the LVMH owned company, Benefits Cosmetics,” he says. “The multiday ideation and sales training session was held at the Arizona Biltmore in Phoenix. It was a fantastic venue for the meeting. The atmosphere is relaxed and comfortable, and the Frank Lloyd Wright design-inspired building was aligned with the creative theme of the meeting.”

Arizona certainly offers plenty to do. *C&IT*



Arizona Biltmore, A Waldorf Astoria Resort in Phoenix