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Destination - June 2008



The USS Midway aircraft carrier, commissioned in 1945 and the longest-serving carrier in the history of the U.S. Navy, now serves as a museum, tribute and education center. Last year the carrier played host to 285 private events.

Carrier photo courtesy of USS Midway / www.sdGOdowntown.com. Biplane photo courtesy of Barnstorming Adventures.

SAN DIEGO



Hitting New Heights As A Meetings Destination

Adapted from an article written by Karen Brost for *Corporate & Incentive Travel*, June 2008.

Photographs were among those featured within the article.

It has 120 conference hotels, 70 miles of beaches, 93 golf courses and an enviable climate that averages 70.5 degrees year round. So what more could a planner ask for in a meeting destination? If it's San Diego you're talking about, the answer is: not much. This perennially popular SoCal city is brimming with exciting new choices for meetings and events.

"If you haven't been to San Diego lately, you haven't been to San Diego," said David Peckinpugh, CMP, president and CEO of the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau. He was referring



The hanger deck and flight deck of the USS Midway aircraft carrier accommodate up to 3,000 attendees and feature a 360-degree panoramic view of San Diego.

Photo courtesy of USS Midway/SDGO

to the number of meeting properties that have either just opened in San Diego or are about to open this year. "The development is really county-wide," he noted. And it doesn't end with this year's list of openings. Marriott, InterContinental and other big industry names have even more hotel projects on the drawing board.

One development project worth noting is a proposed convention center Marriott adjacent to Petco Park, home of the San Diego Padres. The project, tentatively named the Marriott Convention Hotel at Ballpark Village, is still in the preliminary planning stages, and all eyes will be watching the development of this property and others in the downtown area next to the ball field.

San Diego has also been chosen to host the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) annual meeting in 2012. "The timing of that will be incredible," Peckinpaugh commented. "It will be in the middle or at the completion of that next wave of development here in San Diego, so it will be a great showcase for us."

New In The North

Nessa M. Connor, U.S. marketing events manager for Hayward, CA-based medical devices manufacturer Thermage Inc., planned a sales

conference at The Grand Del Mar, a 249-room luxury property that recently opened in North San Diego County. Located near the scenic beach village of Del Mar, the resort features more than 20,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor meeting space. It also offers San Diego's only Tom Fazio-designed championship golf course, two tennis courts, a 21,000-square-foot spa and four swimming pools.

"It's beautiful," Connor commented. "I did a hard-hat tour of it before we signed the contract. Even at that point you knew it was going to be an amazing hotel. Every room you walk into has a very elegant and beautiful feel to it, but each one is completely different. The rooms were sort of a mini-suite for each person. Everyone thought the rooms were incredible, and the service was amazing across the board."

The Grand Del Mar was recently named to Condé Nast Traveler magazine's "Hot List" for 2008. It received accolades as a "Top New Hotel" and "Top New Spa."

Since Thermage's conference theme was "Sell Like Hell," Connor used Harley-Davidson motorcycles for a fun opening event. "We had the doors closed and our CEO sat on the Harley with the light shining on the doors. When we opened the doors, we played 'Bad to the Bone' and he was revving the Harley."

The CEO then introduced two more members of his "posse," Conner said. Thermage's vice presidents of sales for the U.S. and International markets rode into the session on Harleys. Next he introduced their vice president of marketing who, incidentally, didn't ride a Harley. "We had her come in on a Vespa, which was really cool and funny."



Thermage Inc. attendees participated in a bike-building event for underprivileged kids — just one of several activities that was organized for them by Access Destination Services during the company's San Diego sales conference. Photo courtesy of Thermage Inc.

"If you haven't been to San Diego lately, you haven't been to San Diego."

David Peckinpaugh, CMP, President and CEO
San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau
San Diego, CA



Strapped in and ready for a biplane tour provided by Barnstorming Adventures are sales conference attendees from Thermage Inc. who received a once-in-a-lifetime thrill.

Photo courtesy of Thermage Inc.

One of the teambuilding activities Connor planned involved firewalking. "It directly correlates with sales," she explained. "My goal is to try to get people to try to think outside of the box." She noted that firewalking helps individuals take a new approach to obstacles they've faced in the past. "Even though it was firewalking and it was totally scary, it was getting people to realize that you can do things that you didn't think you could do. The actual training for firewalking takes about 10 minutes. It's not brain surgery, it's 'go fast!'" she laughed.

Thermage held its awards dinner in The Grand Del Mar's Elizabeth Capella room, a 3,430-square-foot chapel with beautiful stained glass windows. Afterwards, attendees had an opportunity to perform in a karaoke band. Other activities included a '70s party featuring a local band called the Disco Pimps. "They were amazing," Connor said.

For R&R, Thermage's attendees had a choice of a spa treatment, round of golf or a "barnstorming" tour on a biplane. "We had two biplanes that went up at the same time," Connor explained. "You wouldn't believe how close we were. We could see each other and wave and see the expressions on their faces. If all parties are willing, you can kind of chase after each other and do dives in the air. We went along the coast, and it was totally beautiful and exciting. People loved it." Another new property recently opened in North San Diego County. The 250-room Sheraton Carlsbad Resort & Spa is being billed as Southern California's newest oceanview resort. The Spanish Mediterranean-style property offers 25,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, a full-service business center, fitness center, outdoor heated pool and the Ocean Pearl Spa.

Doing Good For The Community

One highlight of the Thermage conference was a teambuilding event that involved building bikes for underprivileged kids. "When all the children ran into the room, I don't think there was a dry eye in the room," Connor commented. "It really pulls on people's heartstrings. It was my CEO's favorite activity because we were giving back."

Thermage worked with Access Destination Services-San Diego to coordinate the bike-building activity and several other events. Jennifer Miller, general manager for the DMC's San Diego office, is seeing a trend toward companies wanting to give back. "A lot of our clients are looking to leave some type of imprint on the city where they're holding their meeting. We've done a lot of charitable teambuilding events where they've adopted a school that's in a lower income area."

Miller referenced one group that adopted a local Head Start classroom. They donated shoes to the entire school and built a playground for them. Other groups have been going into parks or school playgrounds and taking part in beautification projects. "We're seeing quite a bit of that," she said.

More Rooms With A View

San Diego's scenic views are a main attraction for groups. The semiconductor manufacturer Osram, headquartered in Santa Clara, CA, chose the 300-room Coronado Island Marriott Resort & Spa for its annual sales conference for approximately 140 guests. "We wanted the feel of San Diego," explained Lupe Lopez, price center supervisor for Osram. "We wanted to look at water."



The Gaslamp Quarter, San Diego's most notable downtown landmark, offers more than 130 restaurants and nightclubs, and 80 boutiques and specialty stores. The 16.5-square-block district is within walking distance of the convention center. Photo courtesy of San DieGO Downtown www.sdgodowntown.com



The Marriott, which recently completed a \$15 million renovation project, is located on Coronado Island. The resort's waterfront location offers spectacular views of San Diego Bay, the city skyline and the Coronado Island Bridge. One of the special events the resort can arrange for groups is called "Salsa and Sunset."

Guests relax in wicker and leather furnishings while they enjoy a California sunset and listen to a flamenco guitarist. Food stations, bars and a master Cuban cigar roller round out the entertainment for the event.

Lopez described some of the other factors that made the Marriott a great choice for Osram's conference. "The rooms were amazing. The meeting space was great because we could have everything together. We weren't in different areas of the hotel." The property offers 15 meeting rooms totaling 14,000 square feet of space.

Osram booked a bay cruise through San Diego Excursions for its attendees, and it also arranged for a special treat. "We did 'The Amazing Race,' Lopez said. "It started at the Marriott, went downtown, and ended at the Marriott. They loved it. It was a way for them to see San Diego."

Osram hired a company called American Outback Adventures to put on the event, which is based on the popular TV reality show. As part of the contest, participants had to answer questions about Osram's product line. "They also had to do some physical activity, but not too strenuous because the age ranges of our people are very different," Lopez explained.



"Our downtown area is just growing and expanding since the ballpark went in downtown."

Jennifer Miller, General Manager
Access Destination Services-San Diego

She described how the race worked.

"They do it just like the show. They were given money. They couldn't get rental cars. They had to get across the water. They could beg or borrow. They actually asked people off the street to help them." She complimented the hotel staff on the welcome they gave the exhausted "racers" when they returned. "The staff was amazing," she said. "They wouldn't let a drink get out of their hand...water...soda...everything they needed, they had."

Lopez experienced that same high level of service throughout her meeting. "Everyone, from the person who ran shipping and receiving to the maitre d', kept introducing themselves and asking if we needed anything."

Right In The Ballpark

San Diego's hotel room inventory is increasing at a rapid rate. "Our downtown area is just growing and expanding since the ballpark went in downtown," Miller explained. Petco Park opened in 2004. "It's just south of what's considered our Gaslamp (Quarter).



"It's such an easy city to do a convention in, and the hotel is so well located and part of Petco Park."

Mary Jewett, Event Coordinator
Lockton Companies LLC, Kansas City, MO

"Our Hard Rock Hotel opened recently," she continued. "We use that quite a bit as a venue for groups coming here. It has great rooftop space."

The 12-story Hard Rock Hotel San Diego, which opened in December, features 420 suites and 40,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space. It's located at the entrance of the Gaslamp Quarter across from the San Diego Convention Center. Nightlife entrepreneurs Rande and Scott Gerber operate two bars, the Moonstone Lounge and Sweetwater Saloon, on the property. Other amenities include a Rock Spa, fitness center and a landscaped rooftop pool deck with private cabanas.

The Ivy Hotel, a 159-room luxury property also recently opened in the heart of the Gaslamp Quarter after a \$100 million renovation of an historic building that dates back to 1914. Guest rooms are equipped with luxurious linens, 42-inch flat screen TVs, a work space and full in-room bar service. Meeting space includes a 3,290-square-foot ballroom, a boardroom, private lounge, rooftop area and wine cellar.

Another luxury hotel, the Setai San Diego, is projected to make its debut late this summer or early fall. Located at Fifth Avenue and Broadway adjacent to the House of Blues, the property will offer 184 guest rooms — of which 34 are suites — and The Spa at Setai. The hotel's 20,000 square feet of high-tech meeting space will include a recording studio and screening room.

The 357-room Hilton San Diego Resort, overlooking Mission Bay, has just completed a phase two \$8 million renovation to its lobby, The Olive Bar and Acqua restaurant. Also, the property now features a café offering breakfast, lunch and pastries from the resort's Austrian executive chef.

Late this year, the 1,190-room Hilton San Diego Bayfront will make its debut adjacent to the San Diego Convention Center and within walking distance of Petco Park and the Gaslamp Quarter. The hotel will offer more than 100,000 square feet of indoor meeting space along with a waterfront restaurant, a Fox Sports Grill, upscale retail outlets, and a health club and spa.

In fact, there is so much going on in downtown San Diego that a regional and national campaign called San DieGO Downtown has been launched. The campaign's Web site sdGODowntown.com offers updated information on the city's hotels, restaurants, nightlife and attractions. Visitors can also go to the site to learn more about each of San Diego's neighborhoods and what they have to offer.

Getting Better All The Time

There may be a lot of new hotel construction in San Diego, but the existing properties certainly aren't standing still. Many are doing their fair share to make their facilities better than ever.

The Hotel Del Coronado, the grand dame of San Diego hotels, recently completed \$150 million in luxury enhancements. The upgrade includes the creation of Beach Village, an enclave of 78 seaside cottages and villas. The Village's accommodations offer fully equipped kitchens, plush bedding, Bose surround-sound systems with docking stations, large flat panel TVs and wireless Internet. Outdoor living areas equipped with hot tubs and fire pits are interspersed between the units.

The Del, as it is commonly called, first opened its doors to the public in 1888. This historic Victorian-style resort occupies 28 oceanfront acres and offers 679 guest rooms as well as a new Beach Village complex. It also features 65,000 square feet of meeting space including the elegant Crown Room that is highlighted by a 30-foot sugar pine ceiling and crown chandeliers designed by author L. Frank Baum who wrote *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

The recent renovations to this San Diego landmark also included the addition of the Spa at The Del. It features 21 treatment rooms and an outdoor terrace with a vanishing-edge pool.

The Hyatt Regency Mission Bay Spa and Marina recently completed a \$65 million renovation project. All 430 guest rooms and suites and the pool area have been transformed, and a new HyattPure Spa and StayFit Hyatt health club have been added. The bayfront resort also upgraded its 30,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space.

L'Auberge Del Mar Resort and Spa, located in North San Diego County, is wrapping up a \$25 million renovation. All 120 of the resort's guest rooms are being redone, and a new 4,100-square-foot luxury spa is being added. More than 12,000 square feet of meeting space is also being revamped, including several outdoor areas that deliver ocean views. Guests no longer have to stand in-line at the front desk when they arrive. Instead, they will be escorted directly to their rooms for a private check-in.

Going Green

The 511-room Omni San Diego Hotel, which is connected by a skybridge to Petco Park, is making it easier for planners to hold green meetings. The hotel, which has 27,000 square feet of function space, offers a list of green options to choose from. The list includes airport transfers via hybrid cars, waived valet charges for

meeting attendees driving hybrid vehicles, an organic menu featuring local seasonal fare, and energy-efficient lighting in meeting rooms. The Omni offers a choice of 21 meeting rooms totaling 27,000 square feet.

Mary Jewett, event planner for Lockton Companies LLC based in Kansas City, MO, recently brought 80 attendees to the Omni San Diego Hotel for the Risk and Insurance Management Convention at the San Diego Convention Center.

"I love the Omni for the simple fact that it is so well located," she stated. "It's right across the street from the convention center and it is on the corner of the Gaslamp District. You can just walk out the front door and be at numerous restaurants and places to shop. There are taxis and the trolley, and you can walk to the convention center. It's such an easy city to do a convention in, and the hotel is so well located and part of Petco Park. A lot of my guys went to ballgames. It just makes it so easy to do when you don't have to deal with transportation and getting everyone around. Plus, the Omni hotel has some of the best staff I've ever worked with."

Another Kind Of Green

While sun, sand and surf may be some of the first images that come to mind when people think of San Diego, the area is a golf mecca as well. In fact, this year's U.S. Open Championship will take place in June at Torrey Pines in La Jolla. "We really think the U.S. Open is going to put us on the map," Peckinpaugh said. "We have 93 courses here in San Diego. We have everything from ocean courses to links courses to desert courses to mountain courses. There are very few destinations in the world where you can go and have that diversity."

Another La Jolla gem, situated on one of Southern California's only private beaches, is the exclusive La Jolla Beach and Tennis Club resort. The resort includes the 98-room La Jolla Beach and Tennis Club, the 128-room oceanfront La Jolla Shores Hotel and the historic Marine Room restaurant. Amenities include a nine-hole, par-3 golf course, 14 championship tennis courts and two additional oceanfront restaurants. The La Jolla Shores Hotel, which offers more than 7,500 square feet of meeting and banquet space, will finish remodeling 63 guest rooms this month. The second phase, which will renovate the remaining 65 guest rooms, will be complete in early 2009. The La Jolla Beach and Tennis Club has just finished a complete remodeling of its oceanfront guest suites.

Smooth Sailing

San Diego's coastal location makes it easy to plan plenty of water-based fun. During its April meeting, Lockton chartered a 222-foot, catamaran-style luxury yacht called the Inspiration Hornblower for a dinner cruise for 600 clients and other guests. The yacht, which can provide a fine dining experience for up to 1,200 guests in two glass-enclosed decks, also has a 12,000-square-foot sun deck that provides panoramic views of San Diego Bay and the city skyline.

Lopez got the results every planner dreams of from her San Diego sales conference at the Coronado Island Marriott. "From the day we got there to the day we left, nothing went wrong. We did a survey. The conference got the highest rating ever, the hotel got the highest rating, and the staff got the highest rating. I was asked 'Would you go back to the Marriott?' I said, 'In a heartbeat!'" **C&IT**

continued next page...



Photo courtesy of the San Diego Convention Center

San Diego Convention Center Makes It Easy To Go Green

While many facilities are just getting their green initiatives underway, the San Diego Convention Center Corporation began going green in 1990 when it started participating in the City of San Diego's recycling program. Since that time, the corporation has received several city and state awards for its conservation and recycling efforts. Here are a few of the programs the center now has in place:

- ◆ The food and beverage department collects cooking oil which is recycled into biodiesel fuel.
- ◆ Energy-efficient dishwashers save 3,297 kilowatt hours of energy and more than 8,000 gallons of water each year.
- ◆ Low-flow automatic sinks and toilets have been installed in all restrooms.
- ◆ A food composting program that began last year is projected to divert 260 tons of food waste annually. The center's ultimate goal is to completely eliminate the use of garbage disposals.
- ◆ The convention center only uses paper products made of biodegradable, recycled materials.
- ◆ Beef, pork and lamb are purchased through a network of local family-owned farms. No antibiotics or growth hormones are used. Organic produce is also purchased locally.
- ◆ Environmentally responsible cleaning products are used for carpets, floors, kitchens and bathrooms.
- ◆ Biodegradable corn- and sugarcane-based disposable cutlery, cups and plates are used.
- ◆ The center works with clients to donate excess food to local charities. Last year, more than 45 tons of food were donated.
- ◆ Leftover convention items and unclaimed lost-and-found items are donated to local schools and social service organizations.

The San Diego Convention Center, which overlooks San Diego Bay, offers more than 615,000 square feet of exhibit space and 72 meeting rooms totaling more than 204,000 square feet. For more information on the center and its green initiatives, visit www.sdccc.org. — **KB**

Since 1970, **ACCESS Destination Services** has provided the highest caliber of full-service, professional destination management and event production services in the West, including the Anaheim/Orange County, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Palm Springs and San Diego areas.