



Left: Organ Mountains in New Mexico. Above, from top: Hot air balloons in Albuquerque, N.M.; traditional Southwest architecture in New Mexico; and the Tulsa Convention Center in Oklahoma .

AUTHENTIC SOUTHWEST

With sweeping desert valleys and cactus-strewn landscapes, rugged mountains and stunning vistas, the four states of the beautiful and diverse Southwest offer a treasure trove of scenic destinations. From the hip and urban to the charming and intimate, each city possesses its own distinct flavor, energy and personality. Whether it's a dynamic metropolis like Houston or a boutique city like Santa Fe or Tucson, the cities of the Southwest are virtual meccas for outdoor enthusiasts and adventurous spirits, as well as meeting planners seeking to add a little spice to their events.

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Set against the rosy backdrop of the Sandia Mountains, Albuquerque offers an array of hotel, entertainment and cultural options. With 310 days of sunshine per year, the historic capital city is not only a prime destination for outdoor-minded groups and visitors, but it's also considered the hot air ballooning capital of the world. Famous for its chili-infused cuisine, the city features plenty of local restaurants that serve up the flavor and culture of the New Mexican destination.

One of Albuquerque's most interesting developments is the recently opened Hotel Parq Central. Situated on historic Route 66 and built on the notable site of the city's old Memorial Hospital, the 1920s-themed, 74-room boutique hotel's design retains and references the site's original features while integrating modern amenities. A business center and three conference rooms total 2,600 square feet of space, and groups can take advantage of the property's rooftop bar with its skyline and mountain views for private events. The property also has lush landscaped gardens and a light-filled conservatory and is within walking distance of the trendy EDO (east of downtown) district, which has some of Albuquerque's best restaurants and up-and-coming galleries.

Another hotel metamorphosis taking place is the multimillion-dollar transition of the Isleta Casino and Resort into the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Albuquerque. It's a 201-room property with a six-story hotel tower, 30,000 square feet of convention space, a 100,000-sq.-ft. casino, indoor/outdoor pool and a 2,500-seat multipurpose theater. The rock 'n' roll-themed resort now bears the music memorabilia, cool vibe and hip merchandise that have made the Hard Rock brand a familiar favorite among travelers for decades.

Grapevine, Texas

Named for the wild Mustang grapes that blanketed its land when settlers arrived in 1844, the city of Grapevine is not only an internationally recognized place in the wine industry, it's also a popular destination for meetings.

The American Bus Association (ABA) returns to Grapevine in early 2012 for the second time to host the American Bus Marketplace due to overwhelmingly positive feedback following ABA's first Grapevine event in 2007, says Eron Shosteck, the association's senior vice president of communications. "Grapevine proved to be a very good combination of all the factors we look for in a host city," says Shosteck. "It's centrally located and has a very good regional portfolio of attractions that motorcoach operators and the ABA can build into their sight-seeing tours. They say everything's bigger in Texas, so there's that, blended with a very neighborly hospitality component, that gives you the best of both worlds. Grapevine has a lot to offer everyone and that's why we're going back."

Conveniently located just 10 minutes from the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, the city features plenty of fun, historic and valued-added offerings for groups, including 19 hotel properties with 800,000 square feet of combined meeting space. Gaylord Texan Hotel and Convention Center alone has 400,000 square feet of flexible meeting, exhibition and pre-function space, as well as 1,511 guest rooms, including 127 suites. A majority of

KNOW | Facts & Figures

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Area guest rooms: **16,000**

Convention center:

Albuquerque Convention Center

▶ **Exhibit space: 167,562** square feet

▶ **Meeting rooms: 27**

GRAPEVINE, TEXAS

Area guest rooms: **11,000**

Convention center:

Gaylord Texan Resort and Convention Center

▶ **Exhibit space: 180,000** square feet

▶ **Meeting rooms: 70**

Convention center:

Grapevine Convention Center

▶ **Exhibit space: 23,500** square feet

▶ **Meeting rooms: 9**

HOUSTON, TEXAS

Area guest rooms: **60,000**

Convention center:

George R. Brown Convention Center

▶ **Exhibit space: 893,590** square feet

▶ **Meeting rooms: 117**

Convention center:

Reliant Center

▶ **Exhibit space: 706,213** square feet

▶ **Meeting rooms: 61**

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

Area guest rooms: **5,700**

Convention center:

Santa Fe Convention Center

▶ **Exhibit space: 40,000** square feet

▶ **Meeting rooms: 12**

TUCSON, ARIZONA

Area guest rooms: **16,696**

Convention center:

Tucson Convention Center

▶ **Exhibit space: 205,000** square feet

▶ **Meeting rooms: 10**

TULSA, OKLAHOMA

Area guestrooms: **13,000**

Convention center:

Tulsa Convention Center

▶ **Exhibit space: 102,600** square feet

▶ **Meeting rooms: 35**

Go to ConnectYourMeetings.com for more on Southwest destinations.



DINE | Houston Downtown Aquarium

With floor-to-ceiling windows revealing dramatic views of the city's downtown skyline, the third-floor Nautilus Ballroom at Houston's Downtown Aquarium dining and entertainment complex has a 6,000-sq.-ft. function space that accommodates up to 600 guests. The space has a wrap-around private balcony and cylindrical foyer aquarium, as well as audiovisual services for events. The six-acre downtown complex is a 500,000-gallon aquatic wonderland with a variety of exhibits that house more than 200 species of aquatic life from around the globe. aquariumrestaurants.com/downtownaquariumhouston



Discovery Green park in Houston

ABA's events will take place at the Gaylord Texan property.

Grapevine also has several stops worth visiting in Historic Downtown Grapevine. Its shops, restaurants, wineries and artisan boutiques are set apart from big-box stores in the Grapevine Mills Mall area, which has every store or restaurant any attendee could want. New attractions debuting in Grapevine Mills next year include the Legoland Discovery Center and the Sea Life Aquarium, set to open in April and June, respectively. The attractions add to the sprawling mall, which already has a Bass Pro Shop, 30-screen movie theater and ice-skating rink.

The city hosts a range of events every year, including GrapeFest, the largest annual wine festival in the Southwest that celebrates the city's winemaking heritage. Held for four days every September, wine lovers get uncorked and sample more than 130 Texas wines from more than 30 wineries while they listen to live music, try true Texas barbecue and stomp grapes. "Grapevine continues to grow its hospitality opportunities for meeting planners, convention attendees, as well as leisure travelers," says Lisa Samuel, media rela-

tions manager of the Grapevine Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Grapevine visitors [can discover] a vintage Texas experience with all the modern-day technology and facilities necessary to operate a first-class meeting or event."

Houston, Texas

Besides its rugged pioneering and ranching heritage, Texas is home to a variety of convention cities big and small. And if big is your thing, Houston just might be your perfect meetings destination. With its impressive array of hotels and meeting, convention and event spaces, groups find plenty of room to stretch out in the country's fourth largest city.

As its convention hub, Houston's downtown area lays claim to two of the top convention facilities in the country: the George R. Brown Convention Center and the Reliant Center. But recent economic development has made the area even more of a draw, with newer amenities including the 12-acre Discovery Green park, hotels, restaurants and the Houston Pavilions multiuse entertainment and retail development. When it opens in 2011, a 262-room Embassy Suites Hotel, which

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Tulsa

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In the past two years, meeting space in downtown Tulsa alone has expanded to more than 850,000 square feet of centrally located, multi-functional space available to meet any of your conventions and meeting needs. These developments along with Tulsa's first-class accommodations, a host of new restaurants and multiple entertainment options, make Tulsa a great choice for your next event.

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VISIT | Mini-Time Machine Museum

Some things are just more interesting when they're tiny and intricate. You can find plenty of miniature models and figures at Tucson's newest attraction, the Mini-Time Machine Museum of Miniatures. The 15,560-sq.-ft. museum has a collection of more than 275 tiny houses and other enchanting collectibles depicting different lands and time periods, real or imagined. The museum also has one of the oldest miniature houses in the country: the Brooke Tucker house, a masterpiece of miniscule manufacturing, created in 1775. The museum hosts private events and meetings for groups and attendees with a wee sense of wonder. theminitimemachine.org



Santa Fe Convention Center

will include 6,000 square feet of meeting space, will overlook Discovery Green.

New offerings give repeat groups something to look forward to. The National Association of College Stores (NACS) is scheduled to hold its Campus Market Expo at the convention center in late February and early March. "Our last meeting was in Houston in 2006 and our attendees are really looking forward to all the new economic development that has occurred since then," says Hugh Easley, NACS vice president of meetings and expositions.

Houston's great value, two large airports, weather and added downtown options have made the city more desirable for NACS attendees, he says. "The downtown Houston area will provide a great deal of options for our people to enjoy lunch and dinner outside and still walk back to their hotel," he says. "Our event is in February/March so the weather will be wonderful for our attendees and exhibitors. All our members that are in cold weather climates will enjoy the opportunity to do things outside after being cooped up all winter."

Santa Fe, New Mexico

Known for its ancient pueblos, adobe churches, flavorful cuisine and art galleries, scenic Santa Fe offers meeting planners an authentic Southwest experience.

"Santa Fe is a great location," says Kristen Joyner, executive director of the South West Transit Association (SWTA), which held its 30th Annual Conference and Expo at the Santa Fe Convention Center in February. "It has an easy public transportation system, it's a walkable city with great food ... and has a relaxing art and spa atmosphere. The [convention center] is beautiful and has everything necessary to make you look great to your members and clients. Our attendees thought this was the best conference SWTA has ever produced," says Joyner.

Located within walking distance of the city's downtown hotels, restaurants, museums and shopping, the state-of-the-art LEED Gold-certified convention center features 40,000 square feet of event space, an 18,000-sq.-ft. ballroom, 11 breakout rooms, building-wide wireless Internet and a central outdoor courtyard. Art and historic amenities are plentiful in Santa

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Fe, so groups have plenty to occupy themselves outside the meeting room, including a couple of new attractions worth checking out. Featuring permanent and temporary exhibitions spanning the early history of indigenous people, the 2-year-old New Mexico History Museum is the centerpiece of a diverse campus dedicated to New Mexico historical education and research. Another must-see is the new Santa Fe Railyard, a 50-acre, multipurpose gathering place that includes a farmers market, a 10-acre park including a kid's play area, as well as a host of restaurants, shops and art galleries.

Tucson, Arizona

Nestled in a scenic valley adorned with groves of saguaro cacti, the Sonoran Desert city of Tucson is one of southern Arizona's best meeting destinations. Due to its unique blend of hotels, resorts and meeting venues, as well as added affordability in the summer months, Tucson is a favorite repeat destination for many.

As a budget-conscious group that doesn't mind the desert heat, Up With People (UWP) International Alumni Association keeps

coming back to Tucson year after year. Association members like the city so much, its annual reunion has been held there 15 times within the last three decades, says association President Jeff Zadroga.

"The affordability of Tucson in the summer is a big advantage for us and it has been home for UWP for many years," says Zadroga. "The JW Marriott Starr Pass Tucson Resort and Spa is a beautiful resort and the staff is extremely accommodating. We always feel welcome and part of the community."

And that community continues to grow. One of the city's newest hotel properties is The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain. Located at the foothills of the Tortolita Mountains, it features 250 guest rooms and suites, three ballrooms (9,000, 5,000 and 21,000 square feet), five meeting rooms, three restaurants, a 27-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course, and a 17,000-sq.-ft. spa and fitness center. Adventure-seekers can take advantage of horseback riding, hiking, cattle penning, biking, bird watching and stargazing offered by the resort.

TIP

Meet in Irving

In January, the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex adds another convention space to its crop. The \$133 million Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas opens, giving Irving five times more meeting space than it has in any existing facility with its 50,000-sq.-ft. exhibit hall. It officially opens Jan. 27; the next day, the Zest Fest spicy food festival moves in, bringing up to 25,000 people to town.

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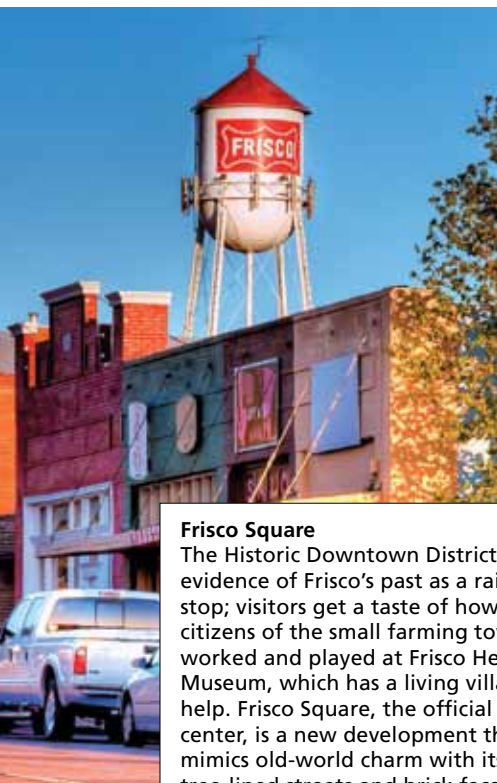
Meetings are easy in Texas' rising star city.

The first thing most visitors notice about Frisco is the IKEA store, the only version of the popular retailer in the Dallas Metroplex area. With several other impressive malls and retail districts, Frisco is a real contender for the kind of shopping opportunities associated with the big "D." But look again and you'll find a small-town, easy-going atmosphere and amenities that epitomize the benefits and appeal of second-tier cities. During the past decade this fastest-growing city in the country welcomed profile-raising hotels, four sporting venues, 120,000 square feet of meeting space and enough public art to fill not only the city's many gathering places but a coffee table book as well. New, fresh, clean and green (designated "Tree City USA" by the National Arbor Day Foundation), Frisco is a city that shines. — *Christine Born*



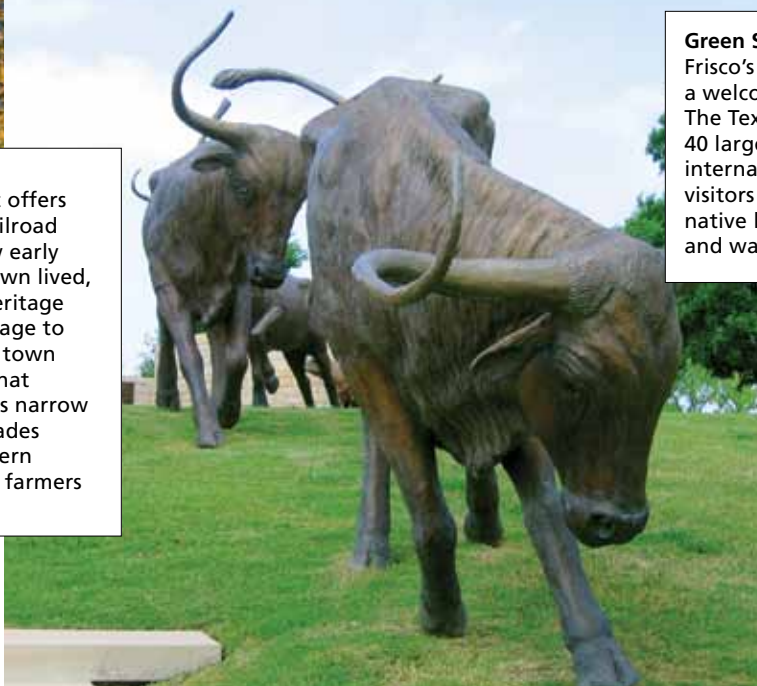
Dr Pepper Ballpark

"A Texas Size Playground!" is one of the many slogans the city has adopted and it's easy to see why. Where else can your attendees meet on the field, enjoy a dine-around at the concession stands and party decks, and watch a baseball game from their hotel balcony? Family friendly and diverse enough to satisfy any sports fan, Frisco's lineup of venues and teams is impressive.



Frisco Square

The Historic Downtown District offers evidence of Frisco's past as a railroad stop; visitors get a taste of how early citizens of the small farming town lived, worked and played at Frisco Heritage Museum, which has a living village to help. Frisco Square, the official town center, is a new development that mimics old-world charm with its narrow tree-lined streets and brick facades while housing thoroughly modern eateries, a striking town hall, a farmers market and seasonal festivals.



Green Space

Frisco's parks and plazas provide a welcome break from meetings. The Texas Sculpture Garden has 40 large-scale works by Texas and international artists. At Central Park, visitors walk, bicycle and picnic amid native landscaping, cattle sculptures and waterfalls.



MEET | Las Cruces, New Mexico

Situated on the Rio Grande at the foot of the Organ Mountains in Mesilla Valley, Las Cruces, N.M., has more than 2,500 guest rooms and close to 50 hotels. In December, the city unveils its first convention venue, the Las Cruces Convention Center, a LEED-certified facility with more than 30,000 square feet of space, including a 14,500-sq.-ft., column-free exhibit hall, 8,950-sq.-ft. ballroom, six break-out rooms and 5,000 square feet of outdoor event space. With 350 days of sunshine a year, Las Cruces works for groups that want to get outdoors for golf or sports, and it's also good when attendees want to take part in local festivals, like the Southern New Mexico Wine Festival, the Renaissance ArtsFaire, Cowboy Days and Frontier Days. lascrucescvb.org

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TIP

Ride the Wave

Meeting attendees in Houston have a new way to get around the Washington Avenue dining and nightlife district. They can hope a ride on the Washington Wave, a jitney service that takes riders up and down the three-mile corridor for \$10 all night. Riders wear a Wave bracelet, which also gives them discounts at a few cafes and bars. Find Wave routes and more information at thewashingtonwave.com.

Tulsa, Oklahoma

Oklahoma inspired the famed Rogers and Hammerstein musical bearing its name, and though the state's Old West spirit remains alive and well, it's a thoroughly modern destination. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the comfortably cosmopolitan city of Tulsa. Affordable and easy to navigate, this Southwest city has become a favorite meetings destination for groups that prefer friendly, personable places with plenty to do and see. Teach for America, which held its annual induction event in downtown Tulsa in June, is such a group.

"Tulsa has an abundance of big-city benefits like the professional sports teams, downtown nightlife and major art attractions, yet maintains small-city perks like short commutes, low cost of living and affordable event prices," says Justin Harlan, Teach for America operations associate. "The people in Tulsa are always welcoming visitors with open arms and are excited to show off their town. With great meeting spaces available and [all the] entertainment options, I have found Tulsa to be a great place to plan events."

The past year has been a busy one for the city, with several new hotels and meeting and entertainment venues making their debuts downtown. The recently completed \$50.5-million renovation and expansion of the Tulsa Convention Center created the state's largest ballroom at 30,000 square feet. The new \$39.2 million ONEOK Field ballpark in the Greenwood District, home to the Tulsa Drillers baseball team, is located near several entertainment districts that feature bars, coffee shops, pubs and restaurants.

The mix of big-city amenities in a small-town atmosphere appealed to the American Farm Bureau (AFB), which held its Young Farmers and Ranchers Leadership Conference in Tulsa in February. "When Oklahoma was selected, Tulsa quickly rose to the top because of the value the city had to offer," says Dan Durham, AFB coordinator. "There was a lot of nightlife for our attendees and yet the city is safe for families. The diversity of the offerings was superb," says Durham. "Once you commit to the site visit, you will simply fall in love with the people who represent Tulsa."

— Lisa Plummer

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PLAY | Musical Instrument Museum

Celebrate and explore the rich, diverse world of music at Phoenix's newest cultural attraction, the Musical Instrument Museum. The 190,000-sq.-ft. building's two gallery floors display more than 3,000 musical instruments. The Experience Gallery allows guests to touch, play and listen to exotic instruments, and the Artists Gallery has instruments and artifacts linked to famous musicians including John Lennon, Eric Clapton, Carlos Santana and Paul Simon. Guests can watch live performances, films and seminars in the 299-seat theater, which can be used for group events. The museum offers discounted docent or self-guided group tours. The campus has a range of indoor and outdoor spaces for small to mid-sized meetings and receptions. themim.org



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