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GEORGIA CHAPTER

MEETING PROFESSIONALS INTERNATIONAL

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WELCOME TO GEORGIA

Georgia is a beautiful state with four distinct and enjoyable seasons. We offer opportunities for outside activities from the mountains to the coast. Georgia is a right-to-work state that offers greater value for each dollar invested in your meetings. The event and meeting professional can choose from an amazing array of lodging, meeting, and event facilities; frequent flights with competitive pricing; and experienced and professional support services.

Georgia also has an amazing inventory of cultural tourism attractions, affording planners the opportunity to infuse uniquely local flavors into their programs. Our world-renowned museums and historical sites offer unforgettable experiences and event venues; our performing arts programs may be showcased or integrated as a participatory element of your event or meeting; and our impressive slate of athletic offerings, indoors and out, promise to lend the excitement of Southern sports to your gathering.

Sean McGinnis

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TREND
REPORT

CORPORATE MEETINGS ON THE RISE

By Giannina Smith Bedford

Following years of cutting back, corporations are again using meetings and events as ways to train, teach, and interact with their employee teams. With 10 percent of all metro Atlanta visitors arriving for business meetings, the corporate event industry means big business for the city and state—direct spending from large business meetings accounts for \$1.9 billion, according to the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau (ACVB). As Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport preps for the opening of its new international terminal, the ACVB is expecting 2012 to be above the historical average for large conventions.

While corporate events are on the rise, budget concerns among corporations continue. As a result, events are returning as more scaled-back affairs, executed under a watchful eye and offering more purposeful agendas. “The meetings that are now being produced are better meetings because we are being forced to do just as much or more with less, so we are being more innovative and we are coming up with new ideas to make the information better and delivered better,” says Abby Freeman, vice president of education for Meeting Professionals International Georgia Chapter (GaMPI) and managing director and owner of Mitchell Meetings.

As a result of continued economic uncertainty, meeting planners are seeing shorter lead-time on bookings and smaller budgets from corporate clients. Leigh Ann Waters, director of



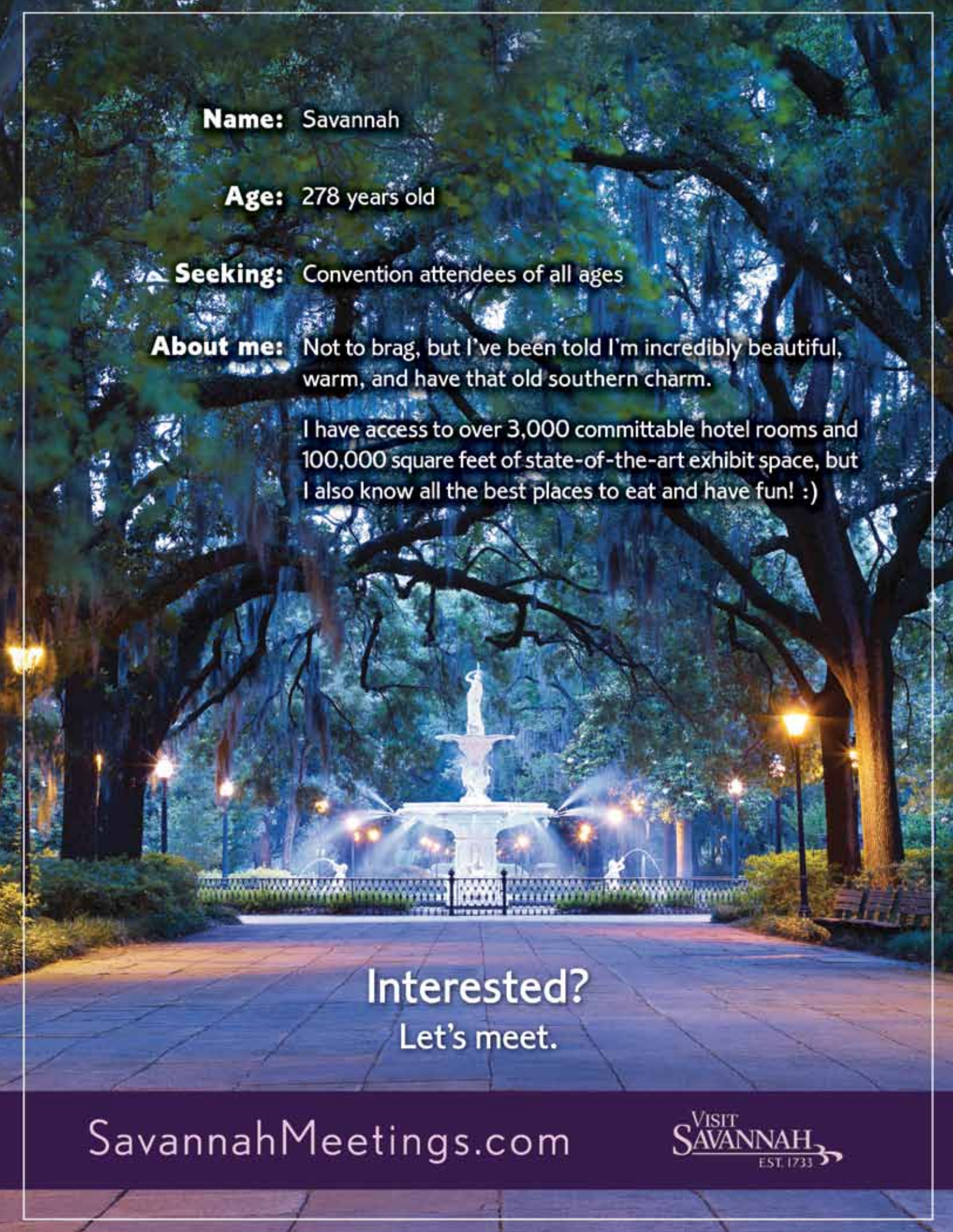
sales and marketing for The Westin Atlanta Perimeter North Hotel, says major events are booked as close as three months out. “A lot of our customers like to see how their forecast is going to be met—or maybe not met—at the end of a quarter, and they’re holding off on making decisions until they see how their organizations are performing,” she says.

Those companies with frugal budgets are also putting a focus on the return on investment from meetings and making sure events are tied to company objectives. Meeting planners are held responsible for tracking these company goals and proving success in the finished product. “Corporations aren’t just going to have a conference because they’ve always had a conference. We don’t have that luxury anymore,” Freeman says. “We really have to prove why the meeting is taking place and what we are getting out of it.”

Financial cautiousness following the downturn also has affected companies’ decisions about keeping dedicated meeting planners on staff, says Jeff Whitney, president of Event Transportation/Atlanta and GaMPI. Many corporations have laid off seasoned and salaried planners, replacing them with less experienced and less costly ones or by transferring meeting-planning duties to an administrative assistant. “They are not as skilled or experienced and that makes our job a bit tougher because they oftentimes don’t know the information we need,” Whitney says.

Catering is also being downsized post-recession, says Walter Nemeth, director of catering at the Georgian Terrace Hotel and



A nighttime photograph of a park. In the center, a large, ornate fountain is illuminated, with water spraying upwards and outwards. The fountain is surrounded by a low, dark metal fence. The park is filled with large, mature trees with dense foliage, some of which are illuminated by warm, yellow streetlights. The ground is a paved walkway leading towards the fountain. The overall atmosphere is serene and well-maintained.

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president of the National Association of Catering Executives (NACE) Greater Atlanta Chapter. Companies are passing on elaborate board meetings and replacing them with casual lunches featuring lighter fare like soups and salads. For evening functions, extras like centerpieces, entertainment, and linens are also being trimmed. "As companies are coming back, they're coming back with a more conservative attitude in shopping," Nemeth says.

In doing more with less, corporate meeting planners are getting creative to engage attendees, from the interactive usage of event space and hands-on activities to tying together items like lighting and catering under an event theme. "It's a full-circle experience with the smell and lighting and types of food that will energize people in the morning being thought about," Whitney says. "Rather than sitting in the room and having someone on the stage expounding on this or the other, there is a lot more team-building and interactive [activities] being built into the sessions."

Technology is also adding a new, more efficient twist on the typical conference or corporate event. Meeting planners are creating smartphone apps for specific events, and attendees are using social media to discuss session topics before, during, and after events. Social media also acts as a tool to keep attendees informed about any last-minute updates and changes. "We are more reliant on technology than ever to meet the tight



deadlines. Fortunately, the systems available to us are getting more and more efficient," says Andrea Largay, manager of corporate marketing and event management at Georgia-Pacific LLC.

The efficiency of technology to help meet deadlines and keep attendees engaged is being incorporated into corporate events at an opportune time, as the number of events is on the rise since 2010. According to Waters, bookings at The Westin Atlanta Perimeter North Hotel increased 25 percent since the same time last year. While numbers are still not at their pre-recession highs, industry leaders are optimistic for future growth as companies stick to the belief that face-to-face interaction is an important way of doing business. "I think the business of meetings is on the upswing. We may see shorter agendas, perhaps with a one-night hotel stay versus two or three, but meetings are happening," Largay says. "There is no substitute for face-to-face interaction and hands-on training."

The meetings that are now being produced are better meetings because we are being forced to do just as much or more with less, so we are being more innovative.



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INSIDER
ADVICE

ASK THE EXPERTS

Insider advice on making the most of your meeting from some of the biggest players in Georgia's hospitality and events industries.



"It is important that people keep meeting and growing through face-to-face interaction. If you are feeling pressure to reduce your budget, think of smarter locations with easy access and affordable options. (Of course, I am going to say Augusta could be that location for you.)"

–Barry White, president and CEO, Augusta Convention & Visitors Bureau

White recommends that any meeting planner contact the Augusta Convention & Visitor Bureau (ACVB,) whether they are just thinking about having a meeting in Augusta or have already picked the perfect Augusta hotel. The ACVB can help with planning activities or set up a welcome booth. The personalized service includes custom dining guides, custom pub-crawl list, news releases, and signage. The ACVB also stands ready to help with marketing efforts through attendance builders, direct mail, website, and even social media. All of this help is free of charge.



"Invite everybody you can. Invest in great food, beverage, and service. Do not compromise on quality. Brand your business and bolster key relationships when hosting an event. Select vendors with a long history and make sure they understand the culture of your business and the goals of the special event."

–David Covell, CEO, Saratoga Event Group

The Saratoga Event Group manages multiple special event facilities, including the Chastain Horse Park in Buckhead, the Pavilion in East Cobb, the Dunwoody Farmhouse, and the historic Pace House in Vinings. Saratoga has full-time special event planners on staff, owns a premier catering company (Avenue Catering Concepts), and oversees several hundred events each year at its unique properties. Clients seeking special events, meetings, and conventions have a turnkey opportunity with the Saratoga Event Group.



"Have fun with it. Savannah offers much more than a typical convention city. Whether it's an outdoor reception in one of the city's twenty-two park-like squares or a meal aboard a paddle-wheel boat while traveling the Savannah River, Savannah promises many one-of-a-kind opportunities. Add to that the city's celebrated coastal cuisine and its legendary charm, history, and architecture and event attendees are sure to have an experience that is difficult to duplicate."

–Joe Marinelli, president, Savannah Convention & Visitors Bureau

Marinelli adds that while the Internet provides today's meeting or convention attendee every possible option for hotels, restaurants, transportation services, and the like, it can make the meeting professional's job more difficult to manage. This is where destination services professionals, like those at the Savannah CVB, can step in and help orchestrate the best possible outcome for both sides.



"The best way to sell any location is showing off the facilities. I encourage all qualified meeting planners to come and do a site visit. Let's review your agenda and see how it will fit. . . . We [in the hospitality and events industry] must be creative and give clients something they do not expect. Everyone has a banquet room. Step it up and make your location exceed everyone else's."

–Scott McQuade, president and CEO, Golden Isles Convention & Visitors Bureau

McQuade points out that outstanding accommodations, flexible meeting space, and abundant recreational opportunities combine to make the Golden Isles of Georgia an ideal destination for meetings. With boutique hotels, full service resorts, and the opportunity to rent an entire island (Little St. Simons Island) for meetings. Several area meeting venues have undergone complete renovations. The Jekyll Island Convention Center was torn down, and the all-new 128,000-square-foot LEED Silver–Certified Oceanfront Convention Center is scheduled to open this year, providing 78,000 square feet of prime meeting space.

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“Look at all your options, but weigh them carefully. Initially, factor out cost and look at the product’s features and weigh the benefits that they will bring to your organization. If you book an event solely based on cost, more than likely you will not be happy with the outcome.”

–**Michele Swann, general manager and CEO, Cobb Galleria**

Swann explains that the challenge for the venue will always be providing a setting, the tools, and attention to the customer’s every need, so that they can provide their constituents with the best possible experience, regardless of whether it’s a meeting, a trade show, or a special event.



“Focus on the details and secure endorsements from a company to determine their track record in the industry. Do your homework, and hire the best company for your goals! A special event has one shot at being remarkable. Don’t compromise or cut a corner.

“Explore your numbers and determine what flexibility the company you work with has in case your event grows larger in a short amount of time. Fully understand the limitations a space has so that you do not outgrow it. Consider weather and always have a plan B if you are doing an event outdoors or if travel is required.

“Be creative! We pride ourselves on creativity at A Legendary Event and know that, at the end of the day, a client’s event is a one-time opportunity to do the best we can do. We take every detail seriously and provide creative ideation that is nothing short of legendary.”

–**Tony Conway, CEO and founder, A Legendary Event**


Conway founded A Legendary Event in 1997. Since then it has grown into a multi-million-dollar, full-service event enterprise handling more than 2,500 events a year and specializing in catering, decor, and floral design. Conway is known for his Midas touch, and his talented team is admired for their attention to detail and penchant for providing fresh, trendsetting, and uniquely presented fare—with the client always in mind. Able to handle groups of 10,000, as well as small, intimate gatherings, A Legendary Event has an endless stream of supporters who value their outstanding service and awe-inspiring events from company launches and corporate parties to at-home events, weddings, and parties throughout Atlanta and across the United States.



“Social media platforms provide technology based tools for reaching, connecting, and engaging the meeting attendee, as well as offering interactivity that can create excitement for, participation during, and retention after the meeting and/or event. Social media is an effective tool to connect people to one another; however, it is important to note that nothing can replace the most valuable emotional engagement process: the face-to-face meeting, or simply picking up the phone.”

–**Jeff Whitney, president, Georgia Chapter of Meeting Planners International**


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HOSTS WITH THE MOST

Four Georgia cities that set the standard for meetings and conventions.

ATLANTA

Atlanta's compact convention district is within walking distance of the fourth largest convention center in the country, the Georgia World Congress Center, 12,000 hotel rooms, more than 315 restaurants, and the city's top attractions.

Nearly 80 percent of the U.S. population is within a two-hour flight of Atlanta. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport is just ten miles south of the city, and MARTA is accessible in the baggage claim of the airport, the Georgia World Congress Center, and near most attractions. The world's most accessible airport expands with the opening of a new international terminal this year. This, combined with the fact that Atlanta has the second highest number of U.S. consulates outside of Washington, D.C., makes the city a great meeting destination for those looking to boost their global attendance.



COLUMBUS

Columbus combines the best of the past with the present, boasting a plethora of museums, including the National Infantry Museum, and a beautifully preserved downtown.

The Chattahoochee RiverWalk, a fifteen-mile outdoor linear park hugging the banks of the

Chattahoochee River, provides a fun way to see the city and relax with a group. The city is also home to more than thirty unique meetings venues, totaling over half a million square feet of meeting space. The Columbus Convention & Trade Center, a renovated architectural wonder, has been recognized nationally for outstanding adaptive reuse of a structure.



SAVANNAH

The Savannah experience is truly one that meets most any need for convention and meeting planners, as well as their attendees. From one of the finest convention centers in the country to a diverse and interesting accommodations package, Savannah has it all. Meeting organizers typically experience higher-than-expected attendance at events in Savannah because of the increased general interest in visiting the city—as well as the influence of spouses or significant others that want to visit. From house and garden tours to haunted pub crawls, Savannah provides something for everyone. And being one of America's only "open container law" cities is always a popular draw.



AUGUSTA

Augusta's rich history makes the city unique, and the fact that visitors can experience many of its attractions

as a group recommend it as a great meeting destination. Board a Petersburg boat for a tour along the Augusta Canal, book dinner in a historic cotton mill, plan a cocktail reception in the garden of the Boyhood Home of President Woodrow Wilson, or schedule a private tour of the James Brown exhibit at the Augusta Museum of History led by one of his daughters.

Located along the Savannah River in the historic downtown area, the city's conference center includes 49,000 square feet of meeting space and 372 attached Marriott hotel rooms. The addition of the 38,000-square-foot Trade, Exhibit and Event Center is scheduled for later this year.



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LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

From classic to cutting-edge, bustling to bucolic, Georgia offers an impressive range of meetings venues promising outstanding settings, state-of-the-art technological capabilities, and unparalleled amenities.

The **Atlanta Convention Center at AmericasMart** contains three distinct facilities, fully customizable for intimate meetings or mega-conferences. Directly accessible from the airport via MARTA, this unique facility is within four blocks of 8,000 hotel rooms in the heart of Downtown, with a wealth of dining, entertainment, and cultural activities nearby. It also offers access to an exclusive shopping experience at AmericasMart, where the world's largest collection of retail products is available at wholesale prices. 240 Peachtree Street NW, Suite 2200, Atlanta, atlconventioncenter.com



Situated on the grounds of a storied nineteenth-century estate, **Barnsley Gardens Resort** offers ninety guest rooms and suites, three restaurants, spa, golf course, horseback riding, sporting clays course, hunting, paintball, hiking, and biking. Work with a conference coordinator to arrange a private banquet, a tented event on the lawn, or a tournament on the championship golf course. The resort also offers nine meeting spaces, catering, and corporate team-building activities. 597 Barnsley Gardens Road NW, Adairsville, barnsleyresort.com

Located in a beautiful campus-like setting in northwest Atlanta, the **Cobb Galleria Centre** is attached to the 521-room Renaissance Waverly Hotel and the Galleria Specialty Shops. The 320,000-square-foot center bills itself as more a five-star hotel than a typical convention center, with a staff consistently applauded for outstanding customer service and friendliness. The meeting rooms, located in close proximity to each other and to the ballroom, are wired with high-speed Internet access and feature state-of-the-art technology. Free parking available. Two Galleria Parkway, Atlanta, cobb Galleria.com



In addition to world-class cuisine and legendary hospitality, the four metro-Atlanta **Ruth's Chris** restaurants offer a variety of private-dining and meeting-room options. Many feature presentation-ready plasma screens, wireless Internet, and dedicated phone line capabilities. The restaurant also provides select meeting rooms with sophisticated satellite broadcast and webcast technologies, and some locations can accommodate up to 300 guests. Multiple locations including Buckhead, Centennial Park, Kennesaw, and Sandy Springs; ruthschris.com

Located on thirty-three acres in Buckhead, the **Atlanta History Center** is comprised of historic houses, gardens, and exhibition galleries. Capable of accommodating groups of varying sizes, the Center's elegant spaces include the Grand Overlook, a 500-person ballroom replete with a barrel vault ceiling, Brazilian cherry-wood floors, and floor-to-ceiling windows; the iconic 1928 Swan House mansion and gardens; and the Members Room in McElreath Hall, which overlooks the Quarry and Asian-American Gardens and is perfect for private board meetings. 130 West Paces Ferry Road NW, Atlanta, atlantahistorycenter.com





The **Woodruff Arts Center**, one of the nation's premier cultural centers, boasts world-class arts, exceptional cuisine, and several optimal meeting rooms. The Circle Room can seat up to 125 guests and features a built-in AV system and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Midtown. The Event Room—located just off the Galleria, the two-level main entrance with soaring ceilings and marble stairs—contains a built-in screen. Also adjacent to the Galleria is the Conference Room, ideal for pre-functions and small meetings. 1280 Peachtree Street NE, Atlanta, woodruffcenter.org

Nestled in the heart of Midtown, the **Atlanta Botanical Garden** is known for its beautiful exteriors, but also boasts well-equipped conference spaces. Mershon Hall features a catering kitchen, bamboo floors, and double Palladian doors, while the Hardin Visitor Center and Conference Room offers an eight-seat conference room and space for 200 guests in its transparent, light-filled structure. Gorgeous outdoor spaces, such as the tranquil Cascades Garden and the spectacular Edible Garden Outdoor Kitchen, are also available for events. 1345 Piedmont Avenue NE, Atlanta, atlantabotanicalgarden.org



Foxhall Resort & Sporting Club, located just twenty minutes west of Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, has multiple open-air pavilions and event lawns capable of accommodating parties numbering from five to 50,000. The Legacy Lookout Club and the Grand Pavilion are glass-enclosed event spaces that feature beautiful lawn views, full kitchens, stacked-stone fireplaces, and patios. The resort is also home to equestrian paddocks, Lunger Lake, and polo fields. 8000 Capps Ferry Road, Douglasville, foxhallsportingclub.com

Gwinnett Center's eighty-acre lakefront campus is beautifully landscaped and architecturally stunning, with soaring atriums and modern angles. The multipurpose campus includes the 50,000-square-foot Exhibit Hall, the 21,600-square-foot Grand Ballroom, twenty-two versatile meeting rooms, the stunning 700-seat Performing Arts Center, and an award-winning outdoor private garden. Convenient to both Atlanta and the Gwinnett area, the center also provides free parking. 6400 Sugarloaf Parkway, Duluth, gwinnettcenter.com



The **Legacy Lodge and Conference Center** is the centerpiece of Lake Lanier Islands Resort. The resort features complimentary Wi-Fi, state-of-the-art audio/visual and lighting equipment, a well-appointed boardroom, catering, spa and fitness services, unique team-building options, and twenty-two meeting and event rooms that can accommodate fifteen to 500 guests. 7000 Lanier Islands Parkway, Buford, lakelanierislands.com

A TOAST TO THE HOST

2012 Atlanta Ballet Ball La Fête Nouvelle



As A Legendary Event celebrates our 15th Anniversary, we proudly salute the chairs of the Atlanta Ballet Ball, Merry Carlos and Su Longman. La Fête Nouvelle will be February 4, 2012 at the St. Regis Atlanta to support Atlanta Ballet and the Centre for Dance Education.

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