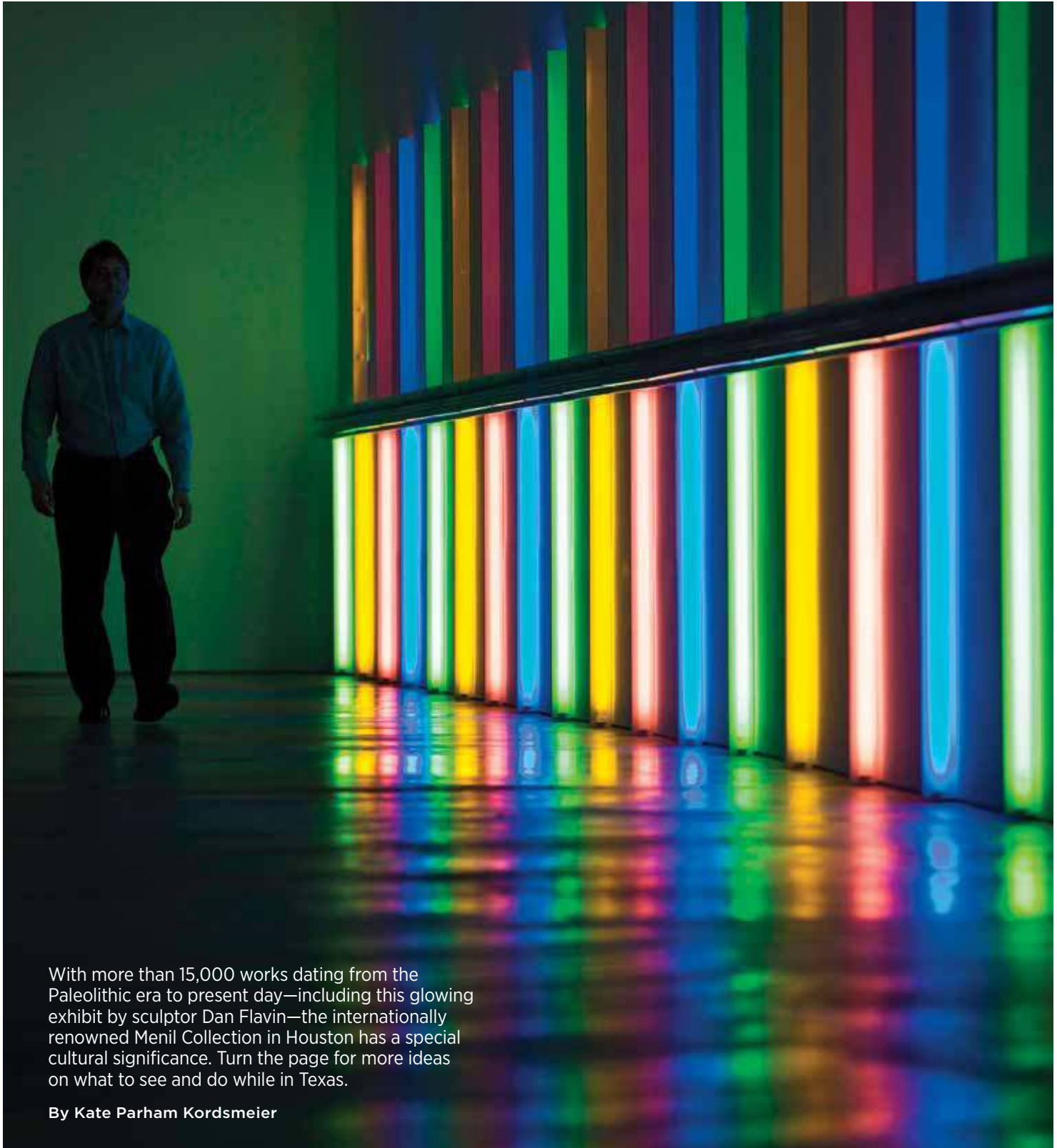

TEXAS



With more than 15,000 works dating from the Paleolithic era to present day—including this glowing exhibit by sculptor Dan Flavin—the internationally renowned Menil Collection in Houston has a special cultural significance. Turn the page for more ideas on what to see and do while in Texas.

By Kate Parham Kordsmeier

The Bite Stuff

Austin's roster of James Beard chefs, food trucks and mouthwatering tours makes for delicious meetings.

Austin, Texas, is home to more music venues per capita than any other city in the country and plays host to top music events like SXSW and Austin City Limits. It may be most famous for its music culture—its official slogan is Live Music Capital of the World, after all—but its award-winning dining scene has since made it the culinary capital of the Southwest. “Top Chef” winner Paul Qui, who also won a James Beard award, has led the charge. His small plates restaurant, Qui, was named Best New Restaurant of 2014 by GQ. But he’s not alone. Bryce Gilmore of Barley Swine was nominated for a James Beard Award, along with Philip Speer of Uchi, Laura Sawicki and Rene Ortiz of La Condesa, and David Bull of Congress and La Corsha Hospitality Group. And Jeffrey’s and Josephine House ranked among Bon Appetit’s 10 Best New Restaurants in America in 2013.

Today, meeting planners have a variety of ways to integrate Austin’s palatable story into events. For starters, many restaurants such as La Condesa offer private event space, perfect for intimate meetings or off-site group meals. Likewise, the city’s food tours are ideal for groups to explore the city together. Consider Austin Eats Food Tours or Rocket Electrics Austin Food Tours, both guided by knowledgeable epicureans who showcase local eats. Or head to one of Austin’s many food trucks, an affordably delicious way to dine with locals. Nearby, Texas Hill Country dishes up small-town charm with postcard-worthy views and more than 30 wine trails—a sure bet for group tours.

QUICK FACTS

Area guest rooms:
31,000

Nearest airport:
Austin-Bergstrom International

Convention center:
Austin Convention Center

Meeting space:
369,000 square feet

Meeting rooms: 54

COMING IN 2015

The 1,012-room JW Marriott Austin opened in February.

The boutique 360-room Hotel Van Zandt opens in spring with 12,000 square feet of meeting space.

New direct flights available from Austin to Branson, Missouri; Miami; Orlando; Seattle; and Toronto.



From top: Grilled fish at La Condesa; bar at Underbelly; flank steak at Uchi.

[CASE STUDY]

When you’re headquartered in a city as vibrant as Austin, there’s little reason to leave. Take it from Debbie Farnum, CMP, senior meetings planner for Texas Association of School Boards. “Our members enjoy coming to Austin,” she says. “With the capitol of Texas here, many attendees have been here to visit legislators, and it’s a great city with so many things to experience.” Farnum’s list of loves is long: She cites the hills, river, music, restaurants, friendly people, climate and more.

About 8,000 members (both from TASB and the Texas Association of School Administrators) traveled to Austin for a joint convention, setting up shop at Austin Convention Center and 16 different hotels. “The hotel sales staff is a tight-knit, familylike group in the meetings industry in Austin,” notes Farnum, also waxing about the convention center staff and the center’s free Wi-Fi. The only drawback to Austin, she says, is the difficulty of choosing only one restaurant for dinner. “Austin is a city with so many homegrown restaurants,” she notes. “And best of all, you don’t need to dress up. We’re a casual, fun-loving city.”

200
miles of
walking trails

3
city parks with
event space



LAC ONDESA; UNDERBELLY; MAI PHAM



Omni Dallas Hotel in downtown



Jack Daniel's Club

200
golf courses
12,000
food service
establishments
160
museums and
art galleries

**QUICK
FACTS**

Area guest rooms: 75,000

Nearest airports:
Dallas/Fort Worth International;
Dallas Love Field

Convention center:
Kay Bailey Hutchison
Convention Center Dallas

Meeting space:
1 million square feet

Meeting rooms: 96

**COMING
IN 2015**

Omni Dallas Hotel is adding four new restaurants as part of a \$27 million development with retail space and a 350-space parking garage.

The new Texas Horse Park, a family-friendly outdoor recreation facility adjacent to Great Trinity Forest with miles of riding trails and private event space, opens in early 2015.

Construction continues on Dallas' modern streetcar system, which will take riders along a two-mile route from downtown to north Oak Cliff.

Sports Station

Dallas' abundance of sporting venues makes planning a meeting in the Big D a home run for energy and action.

They say everything's bigger in Texas—and nowhere is that sentiment more true than in Dallas, home to one of the country's largest convention centers. Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center Dallas (formerly Dallas Convention Center) has more than 1 million square feet of convention space, contains the country's largest column-free exhibit hall and is connected to the Omni Dallas Hotel, a 1,001-room affordable-yet-luxurious property perfect for large groups.

But convention space isn't the only area where Big D shines. With five sports teams, the city is rife with energetic meeting options sure to inspire your group. The American Airlines Center, home to the NHL's Dallas Stars and NBA's Dallas Mavericks, is an appealing option brimming with live entertainment and outstanding catering services, plus it's close to downtown. North of the city in Arlington is AT&T Stadium where the NFL's Dallas Cowboys play. It's not all football there, however. The large-scale arena can fit up to 105,000 people with standing room. In Arlington you'll also find Globe Life Park, home to the MLB's Texas Rangers, where nearly a dozen event spaces bring excitement to any meeting. Don't miss the Jack Daniel's Club, a 17,000-sq.-ft. recently renovated space with two ballrooms, two bars and three levels of seating facing the playing field.

DALLAS CLUB; KELLY GAVIN/TEXAS RANGERS



The Original Tex-Mex

Hungry attendees can explore El Paso based on their preference for burgers, enchiladas or barbecue.

Its location on the U.S.-Mexico border gives El Paso a culture unlike most other Texan cities. And what better way to experience the culture of a city than through its food? The influence of Mexican traditions on time-honored Texas plates like brisket (and vice versa) is evident throughout many of the city's dining hot spots. Whether it's the spice-infused flavor of the Toro burger from its namesake restaurant or the Mexican street vendor tastes combined with traditional Southwestern dishes at Cabo Joe's (don't leave without trying the green-chile chicken burrito topped with Sriracha sour cream), attendees don't have to wander far to find a meal with a kick.

The foodie experience is carried through to El Paso's meeting venues too. Southwest University Park—home to Minor League Baseball's Chihuahuas—partners with Ovations Food Service to bring locally sourced and cultivated dishes into the stadium, both on food carts around the concourse and in any of the three rentable spaces within the park. Favorites include green-chile bacon cheeseburgers at Sun Kings Saloon and tacos de camaron from Tacos de Mariscos. —*Natalie Dupuis*

[CASE STUDY]

When the El Paso CVB welcomed the United States Bowling Congress Women's Championships in 2010, years of preparation came to fruition. Over the course of four months, approximately 29,000 bowlers on 5,800 teams convened at Judson F. Williams Convention Center, transforming the center's 80,000 square feet of column-free exhibit space into bowling lanes.

After a successful 2010 event, tournament director Greg Moore decided to come back to El Paso in 2015. This year, the city expects 7,000 teams, including about 50,000 bowlers and their guests. "We chose El Paso because of the city's willingness to vacate the convention center for a four-month period and activate local businesses to welcome our bowlers," says Moore.

And the city and CVB certainly have done their part. They worked together with Moore and the USBC to develop a website filled with activity suggestions, housing options and dining recommendations especially for bowlers and guests. "Our participants take part in all facets of city life, as many of them use the event as a destination vacation," says Moore.

QUICK FACTS

Area guest rooms: 9,600

Nearest airport:
El Paso International

Convention center: Judson F. Williams Convention Center

Meeting space:
133,000 square feet

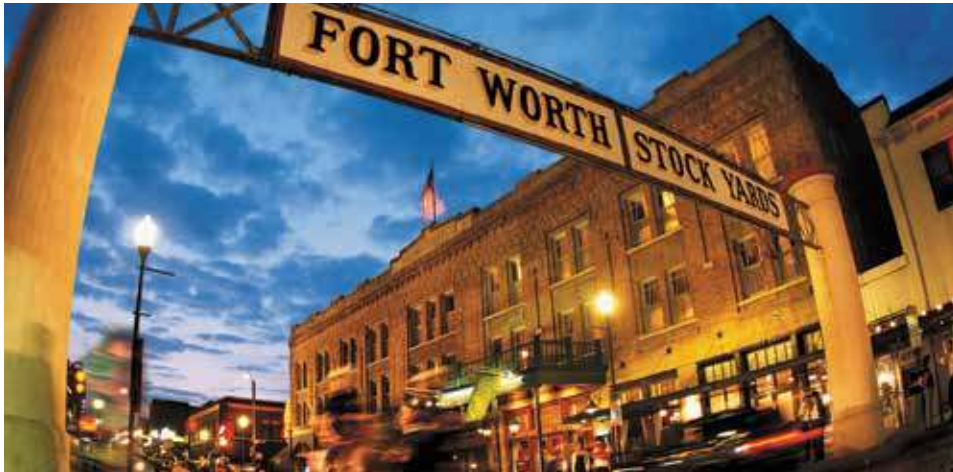
Meeting rooms: 17

COMING IN 2015

The El Paso Museum of History debuted the country's Touch City 3D Digital Wall in February.

The 110-room Hotel Indigo is expected to open midyear.

A renovation will convert Bassett Tower into an Aloft Hotel by 2016.



Cowtown Culture

Planning your next meeting in Fort Worth may be as easy as determining whether attendees prefer modern art or science museums.

Fort Worth is home to the world's only twice-daily cattle drive and many a honky-tonk. It's got that Old West thing down pat: Residents really do wear cowboy boots, and saloons straight out of a John Wayne film litter the streets of the Stockyards. But for all its Southwestern country charm, the city is a modern metropolis, complete with a world-class symphony orchestra, award-winning modern art gallery, nationally recognized, chef-driven restaurants and AAA Four Diamond hotels, like Omni Fort Worth Hotel, to boot (pun intended!).

Planners shouldn't miss Fort Worth's Cultural District, home to five impressive museums. While the Amon Carter Museum of American Art is known for its extensive American Western art collection, it also plays host to a variety of free guided tours led by trained museum volunteers. Take a peek at Michelangelo's first painting at Kimbell Art Museum before hosting an after-hours event in the stunning space. And be sure to stop in to Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth to see one of the country's foremost collections of international modern and contemporary art, alongside a 1,000-capacity meeting facility and cafe. The Fort Worth Museum of Science and History's 166,000-sq.-ft. facility also provides catering and event services by Sodexo Leisure Services, whether your objective is to host a small seated dinner in Noble Planetarium or rent the entire museum for a day.



Sundance Square Plaza

40
bike-sharing
stations
throughout
the city

155,000
capacity at
Fort Worth's Texas
Motor Speedway

[CASE STUDY]

"I found Fort Worth to have a real sense of community and a comfortable feel," says Geoffrey Cooke, vice president of global accounts at HPN Global, who planned the MWI Veterinary Supply annual sales meeting for 700 attendees in Fort Worth in February 2015. Cooke says the group wanted an authentic Western feel, and he found that in the Stockyards National Historic District. "So many cities have places you can go to stage an experience, but the Stockyards is a place where you can just let people enjoy."

The 614-room Omni Fort Worth Hotel served as the host hotel, and they used the 25,000-sq.-ft. trade show space across the street at the convention center. "The folks at the CVB did an exceptional job of conceptualizing the proper flow and being creative with the hotel. It felt like a seamless partnership, and they even had incentives that help offset some of the displaced F&B spend," notes Cooke. He says the recent buildup of Sundance Square also offers many top restaurants, galleries and a walkable downtown for exploring.

QUICK FACTS

Area guest rooms: 14,000

Nearest airport:
Dallas/Fort Worth International

Convention center:
Fort Worth Convention Center

Meeting space:
253,000 square feet

Meeting rooms: 41

COMING IN 2015

A \$117 million redevelopment of Lake Worth's Casino Beach, including an event center and a Ferris wheel, opens in late 2015.

Construction begins on a long-term project connecting every neighborhood in Fort Worth to the Trinity River.

Addition of a 50,000-sq.-ft. ballroom and more meeting and exhibit space to the convention center.



Clockwise from top left:
Uchi restaurant; George R. Brown
Convention Center; Houston
Museum of Natural Science.

[CASE STUDY]

The Texas Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development held both its 2010 and 2014 annual conferences at The Westin Galleria Houston. Laura Stubbins, leader of business development for the group, says her decision was heavily based on the number of topic-specific breakout rooms ASCD needs (at least 75). Stubbins lists the hotel's attachment to famed The Galleria as a draw that many attendees enjoyed. Likewise, Houston's cultural scene was appealing to the group of educators. "Houston's museums, notably the Children's Museum of Houston or the Houston Museum of Natural Science, can serve as conference field trip locations, or even pre- or post-conference venues for standalone events," she says. Another plus: the CVB. "My representative was quite helpful. She hand-delivered maps, dining guides and Galleria store coupons to my convention office the day before the event," reports Stubbins.

QUICK FACTS

Area guest rooms: 75,000

Nearest airports:
William P. Hobby;
George Bush Intercontinental

Convention centers:
George R. Brown
Convention Center; NRG Park

Meeting space:
1.2 million square feet;
1.3 million square feet

Meeting rooms: 100; 59

A Green Scene

When your members crave the great outdoors, head to Houston, one of the country's greenest cities with eco-friendly facilities to boot.

Yes, we know—Houston is the energy capital of the world, where big oil reigns supreme (and there are the mansions to prove it). But did you know Houston is also the leading municipal purchaser of green power in the nation and one of the 10 greenest cities in the country, with more than 56,000 acres of park space and more than 100 miles of hiking and biking trails?

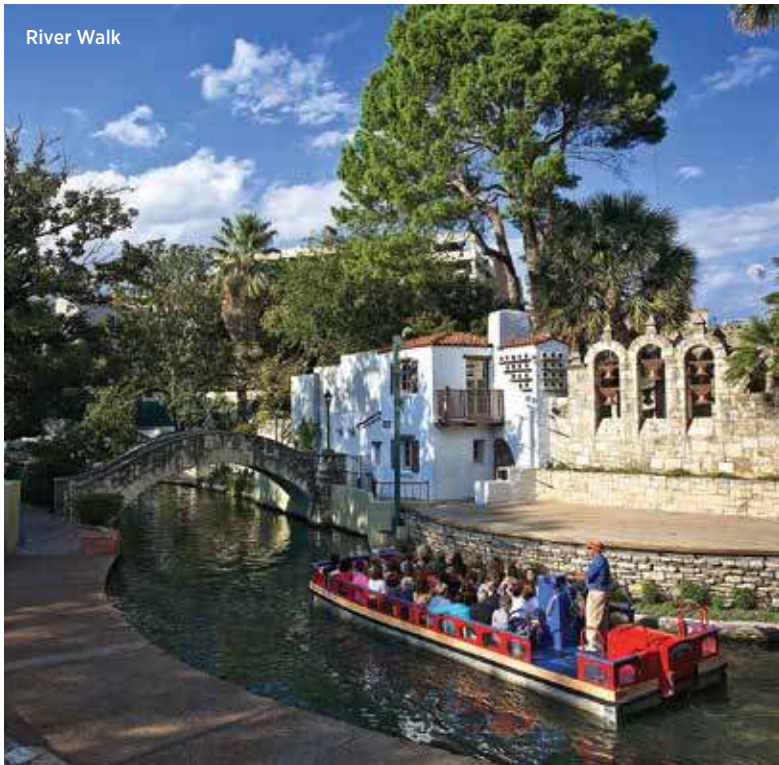
It's true. Even George R. Brown Convention Center has plenty of eco-friendly incentives for your next meeting. The center uses only electronic ballasts and high-efficiency lightbulbs; its new reflective roof and high-efficiency water towers reduce energy and water usage; and it has an exemplary recycling program. Groups who want to spend time outside can consider the 155-acre Houston Arboretum & Nature Center, where more than five miles of nature trails—in forest, pond, wetland and meadow habitats—co-star with five outdoor spaces and three indoor meeting rooms. Explore the rest of Houston's vibrant culture with a stroll down trendy Westheimer Road, where farm-to-table hot spots like Underbelly (brainchild of James Beard winner Chris Shepherd) and Uchi (an outpost of Austin's popular Japanese restaurant) line the walkable street, which begs for a sustainable food tour.

COMING IN 2015

The \$29 million Gorillas of the African Forest habitat, will open at Houston Zoo in spring.

Southwest Airlines' \$150 million upgrade to William P. Hobby Airport will be finalized mid-2015.

A \$58 million renovation to the Buffalo Bayou Park will be completed in spring.



River Walk

History in the Making

San Antonio's historic sites and lively River Walk will breathe new life into your next event.

Few cities have as much depth of history and fun as San Antonio. Planners can incorporate tours at five 18th century Spanish Colonial missions currently nominated for World Heritage status, including the legendary Alamo. Let one of the country's most visited attractions, the River Walk (dubbed the world's largest hotel lobby), speak for itself.

Indeed, River Walk offers a vibrant setting for networking and entertaining. Typical convention center meetings get a boost when river barges transport attendees to nearby restaurants, shops and historic sites for teambuilding, group dinners and off-site events. Not only can these cruises take groups up and down the river like a taxi, but charters also can be booked for private dinners, cocktail cruises and tours.

Incorporate that tourist element into your next meeting by heading to Morgan's Wonderland, one of the world's only accessible theme parks for people with special needs. The park is available for breakfast, lunch, dinner or all-day seminars with a 120-person-capacity conference center equipped with audiovisual equipment and wireless Internet.

STUART DEE/SAN ANTONIO CVB

"The food was fantastic. The convention center was very helpful and flexible with our schedules. We will definitely use Beaumont for meetings in the future."
 - Texas Asphalt Pavement Association

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[CASE STUDY]

The National Association of Elevator Contractors has an ironic dilemma. "We have a tall and heavy show, so there's not too many convention centers we fit in," explains Kerrie Rebmann, NAEC's meeting and trade show manager. But San Antonio's center was one of them. So, in 2014, 2,000-plus industry pros traveled to the River City for the group's 65th Annual Convention & Exposition, using Grand Hyatt San Antonio as the headquarters hotel and Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center for the show. "We saved a ton by not having to run shuttles from other hotels, and costs at the convention center were especially reasonable," notes Rebmann, who says she also appreciated how walkable and safe the city was. "All of the CVB staff were excellent and very helpful, both leading up to the event and on-site as well, as they assisted during my pre-planning visits; helped find venues for golf, outings and dinners; and provided marketing materials and even a website that looked customized for us to help promote our event and the city."

QUICK FACTS

Area guest rooms: 44,000

Nearest airport:
San Antonio International

Convention center:
Henry B. Gonzalez
Convention Center

Meeting space:
1.3 million square feet

Meeting rooms: 63

COMING IN 2015

The convention center will complete a \$325 million expansion, including the addition of 270,000 square feet of event space, by 2016.

The 146-room Hotel Emma will open in summer, as will the Do Seum children's museum, with event space.



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