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Sweet SURPRISES

Pennsylvania's Harrisburg, Hershey and Lancaster regions serve up tasty and creative group outlets

BY JEFF HEILMAN



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Around 1845, Harrisburg's leaders set aside Prospect Hill, the city's highest point, as a viewing area for the State Capitol and Susquehanna River. As the city grew, the hill's elevation favored development of a gravity-fed water supply system. In 1872, three massive reservoirs were built on the slope, renamed Reservoir Park in 1890.

Today, the sweeping views are as "visionary" as ever, and along with the mural-adorned reservoirs, emblematic of the many creative surprises awaiting groups in the region.

The 85-acre park features the event-capable Levitt Performing Arts Pavilion, an open-air bandshell built in 1933, and at its summit, the Smithsonian-affiliated National Civil War Museum, offering its grand rotunda and other spaces for events.

The discoveries, many unexpected, extend throughout neighboring Hershey and Lancaster.

Hershey/Harrisburg Hallmarks

"Our new meeting and event clients can initially be unaware of the vast opportunities our region offers for arts, culture, and creative outlets," said Rick Dunlap, spokesperson for Visit Hershey

& Harrisburg. "Population-wise, we are classified as a second- or third-tier city. As the state capital and home to Hershey, however, our region becomes a hub for inbound travel which affords us the amenities of a much larger city. That scenario makes us a highly competitive destination with an inventory of event venues, lodging and entertainment typical for a larger market, but with price points more aligned with a smaller market area."

Inspired by St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, the Pennsylvania State Capitol's dome crowns this "Palace of Art," offering tours and versatile rental venues including the Forum Auditorium. The adjacent State Museum of Pennsylvania is also an inspiring option for tours and events.

Rentals in the nearby resurgent Midtown District include the Susquehanna Art Museum. Housed in a former 1916 bank, this once-nomadic institution offers three event spaces include the 100-capacity marble-floored central room. Updating a former mill, nearby Millworks incorporates artist studios (group art classes available) with a craft brewery, restaurant and rooftop beer garden.

The Lost Pint offers diverse private educational programs throughout the region, including pub crawls, wine tours and history tours.

Completed in 1905 on farmland just east of Harrisburg, Hershey, the "Town Built on Chocolate," forever embodies founder Milton S. Hershey's singular vision. In creating his factory-community, Hershey always put people first, and the lasting perpetuation of his values makes the "Sweetest Place on Earth" an especially sweet deal for groups.

"Hershey delights meeting attendees with its history and legacy," said Michael Reynoldson, managing director of re-



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PHOTOS, TOP TO BOTTOM: HERSEYPARK'S SKYRUSH, HERSEY, PA.; BUBE'S BREWERY, MOUNT JOY, PA.; SUSQUEHANNA ART MUSEUM MURAL, HARRISBURG, PA.; CORK FACTORY HOTEL, LANCASTER, PA.

sorts sales and revenue management for Hershey Entertainment & Resorts. "From inquiry to execution, meeting planners and attendees experience unmatched personalized service that creates a nostalgic energy and a place where they want to make memories again and again."

With three properties collectively offering more than 137,000 square feet of flexible space and 900-plus guest rooms, and seamless support from Hershey Destination Services, groups of all sizes are in good hands.

Offering 100,000-plus square feet of versatile space, 665-room Hershey Lodge's 35 meeting rooms include the 32,000-square-foot Great American Hall.

Opened in 1933, the 276-room The Hotel Hershey offers 25,000 square feet of space and amenities including signature chocolate treatments at The Spa At The Hotel Hershey, ziplining and rope climbing, and raptor demonstrations at the Falconry Experience. This perennial AAA Four Diamond and Forbes Four Star recipient scored its 18th "Best of the East" honors from *Meetings Today's* readers in 2018.

More than 12,000 square feet of space at the Hershey Country Club includes the all-season Picard Grand Pavilion, scenically overlooking the East and West golf courses.

The delights extend to Hersheypark's 70-plus rides and attractions, and customized experiences at The Hershey Story, The Museum on Chocolate Avenue.

Groups can also explore Hershey Harrisburg Wine Country, featuring 15 award-winning, family-owned wineries.

Lancaster Luminaries

Home to the most preserved farmland in the U.S., Lancaster County is fertile with unexpected and rewarding discoveries for groups.

"Lancaster County's creative energy is displayed at many of our group spaces, from performance venues to preserved structures," said Joel Cliff, spokesman for Discover Lancaster.

Ready examples include the Ware Center. One of world-renowned architect Philip Johnson's final projects, this world-class performing arts facility on the Millersville University campus is available for event rental.

Close by the Lancaster County Convention Center, multi-venue Tellus360 offers spaces including the Temple. Created by leading sound, lighting, and stage tech designers, this rocking venue features a touring stage used by stars including The Rolling Stones and Lady Gaga. The entire building, which includes the recently remodeled 10,000-square-foot outdoor Green Roof, is rentable.

Integrated with the convention center, the landmark 299-room Lancaster Marriott at Penn Square, offering 78,628 square feet of total space, is adding a \$30 million, 110-room tower, scheduled for completion in spring 2019.

Other special event showcases include the Fulton Theatre and American Music Theatre, the latter just east of Lancaster City.

Repurposed heirlooms include the 63-room Lancaster Arts Hotel, a former tobacco warehouse offering 1,100-plus square feet of space. Once housing the Armstrong Cork and Kerr Glass companies, the 77-room Cork Factory Hotel offers 9,750 square feet of versatile space.

In nearby Elizabethtown, Stone Gables Estate is home to two dedicated event venues, Ironhorse Ranch and Star Barn Village. The former is a 275-acre working horse ranch and farm with restored 1860 barn, while the latter is the fetching update of a

landmark Gothic Revival-style barn complex from 1877.

Close by in Mount Joy, Bube's Brewery is an intact 19th century brewery and museum offering multiple venues for group dining, tours and events. Thirsty groups can also experience the co-located Thistle Finch Distillery and Wacker Brewing Company in Lancaster City.

The surprises continue north of the city in Manheim, where Spooky Nook Sports is North America's largest indoor sports, family entertainment and event facility. Housed in a repurposed 65-acre warehouse, the 10,000-capacity venue, offering 700,000 square feet of space, includes 135-room The Warehouse Hotel, as well as Forklift & Palate restaurant.

And the Lancaster market keeps expanding with projects like Rock Litz in Warwick Township. Billed as "the world's first business park for the live-event industry," this \$55 million production and rehearsal campus is adding the Hotel at Rock Litz.

Slated for fall 2018, the 139-room property will include 3,000 square feet of meeting space. 



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