

'Mass' Mixers

Springfield and the Berkshires are magnetic places to meet

PLANNERS SEEKING MASSACHUSETTS destinations that inspire creativity and productivity find that Springfield and the Berkshires are two great options. It's not just the region's natural beauty that makes it attractive, it's also the classic New England charm, the cultural landscape that has lured generations of artists and innovators and a roster of facilities and services to ensure meetings success.

GREATER SPRINGFIELD

Springfield is a city of notable firsts. It's the place where basketball was invented, and it's the birthplace of *Good Housekeeping* magazine, the Indian motorcycle and the nation's first armory to name a few. So a new marketing campaign, "Springfield First," celebrates the city's innovations and encourages meeting planners to think of the city first in their site selection process.

"We position ourselves as one of the most accessible and convenient locations in the Northeast and New England," says Mary Kay Wydra, president of the Greater Springfield CVB. "We are also competitively priced and offer great value in terms of accommodations. Groups who come to us get the 'big fish in the little pond' treatment with the many turnkey and customized services we have for them."

Wydra says the ideal group size for her region is two to 3,000 attendees. Many choose the MassMutual Center, with a 40,000-square-foot exhibition hall and 15,000-square-foot ballroom as its base. The center also has a 6,677-seat arena. Within steps of the center are about 900 of 1,100 hotel rooms in downtown Springfield. In the Greater Springfield inventory that includes nearby Pioneer Valley, there are 6,400 hotel rooms, all within convenient driving distance of the convention center.

MassMutual Center is near two interstate highways often called "New England's crossroads"—interstates 90 and 91—and 20 minutes from Bradley International Airport.

Sheraton Springfield Monarch Place Hotel is one of the area's principal group hotels, and it is completing a year-long renovation on guest rooms, meeting spaces and other key public areas. Other group-friendly lodging choices include Springfield Marriott; Hilton Garden Inn; and Clarion Hotel & Conference Center.

Springfield is home to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, an interactive attraction that hosts events of varying sizes. It has many engaging exhibits that include skills challenges, live clinics and basketball shooting contests.

The 47,000-square-foot Museum of Springfield History is a new attraction that is available for off-site events. The museum chronicles the area's significant contributions to the economic and social life of America from the Industrial Revolution to the late 19th century through the present day. Indian motorcycles and American Rolls Royces are among the artifacts that portray the city's heritage.

The Greater Springfield, Northampton, Amherst and Pioneer Valley region offers visitors an array of other cultural attractions, including college art museums and the Dr. Seuss National Memorial.

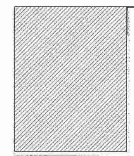
Colonial America comes alive in nearby Historic Deerfield or Old Sturbridge Village. And outer space exploration is the feature at Seymour Planetarium at the Springfield Science Museum. CityStage and Symphony Hall, amusement parks, outlet malls, antique shows and the surrounding bucolic countryside provide popular pre- or post-business options, as well as and spouse tours.

The region is home to several colleges and universities, including Amherst College; University of Massachusetts Department of Hospitality & Tourism Management; American International College; Bay Path College; Springfield College; Springfield Technical Community College; The Kittredge Center; and Western New England College. The college presence gives the region a vibrant ambience, with attractions such as Springfield's Club Quarter, where more than 60 of the hottest dining and nightlife venues are located.

THE BERKSHIRES

Few locations combine the rolling natural beauty of this New England region with so much culture and connections to American history.

Art is big in the Berkshires. The region lies within a couple hours of Boston and New York, and it has been home to literary greats such as Herman Melville, Edith Wharton and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Boston Symphony Orchestra's famous summer home, Tanglewood, is





BEHOLD THE BERKSHIRES Popular diversions in Western Massachusetts include river rafting, fall foliage tours and cross-country skiing at Canyon Ranch in Lenox.

in the Berkshires. Visitors can be transported to Elizabethan England via Shakespearean performances or take in some lilting Broadway musicals.

Another art mecca in Becket is Jacob's Pillow Dance, a National Historic Landmark and home to one of America's longest-running international summer dance festivals. With more than 50 dance companies, 200 free performances and a bucolic atmosphere, the Pillow offers a welcoming and culturally stimulating getaway for visitors. Discounts and customized itineraries are available to groups of 20 or more during festival season. The Pillow also offers unique spaces for special events and meetings. The Doris Duke Theatre, Sommers Studio and Ruth St. Denis Studio are available for events, conferences, meetings and workshops from mid-September through mid-May.

Executive retreats and other small to midsize gatherings often utilize the region's quaint and restored historic inns. One of the most famous is the historic Red Lion Inn in the eclectic arts community of Stockbridge near the Norman Rockwell Museum.

"We are an eco-conscious, historic property in a charming New England village," says Carol Bosco Baumann, director of marketing and communications for The Red Lion Inn and its sister property, The Porches Inn. "We offer free WiFi throughout the inn, and cuisine by a chef who sources a large percentage of menu ingredients from local farmers and food producers."

Porches Inn at MASS MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art) in North Adams is located in the community known as the "Town of Steeples and Peaks" because it has so many church spires. The inn hosts executive

retreats and other small meetings.

The two inns are both owned by Nancy Fitzgerald, second-generation family owner of Red Lion Inn, which dates to the 18th century. Fitzgerald's interest in lodgings built before the development of the U.S. highway system has prompted her to restore the 1930s Wigwam Cabins, located along the Mohawk Trail, a popular scenic drive. With an opening set for next May, it will feature eight cabins and a house that has four additional rooms.

"I can see a corporate group taking over this complex—it has one of the most magnificent views of three states—Massachusetts, Vermont and New York," Fitzgerald says.

Cranwell Resort, Spa and Golf Club in the charming hamlet of Lenox is one of the region's most popular meetings properties. Its amenities include golf, a spa and innovative team-building programs.

"We create meetings breaks that engage attendees and promote the team-building process," says Norma Probst, Cranwell's director of marketing. "To infuse the meeting experience with playful originality, our team has added drumming breaks with John de Kadt, and chocolate tastings and chocolate and wine pairings with CIA-trained Joshua Needleman of Chocolate Springs Cafe."

Other group lodging choices include Hampton Inn & Suites, one of the region's newest properties; Seven Hills Inn, a Gilded Age mansion conversion; and Crowne Plaza Hotel Pittsfield.

Meanwhile, Ventfort Hall in Lenox, built in 1893 by J.P. Morgan's sister Sarah and her husband George, has grand salons and other venues that will accommodate up to 300 people for receptions and meetings. It is also the site of the Gilded Age Museum. **ME**

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CVB Contacts

Berkshire Visitors Bureau
 413.743.4500
www.berkshires.org

Greater Springfield CVB
 413.787.1548
www.valleyvisitor.com

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Planner's Perspective

Donna Wikstrand
Vice President, Conference Hotels Unlimited; Hull, Mass.

- **Describe your event.** We did a meeting in May at Cranwell Resort, Spa and Golf Club for one of our association clients. About 90 people were there for a two-and-a-half-day educational and networking program that combined meetings, golf and individual use of the spa.
- **Why did you decide to host the meeting in the Berkshires?** The people were coming from all over New England, and Cranwell provides a great central geographic location. It was also a nice change for attendees who often think of resorts in the region being north or east of Boston. The Berkshires are west, and are a nice alternative that isn't on most people's radar. Also, it takes less time (about two hours) to access those foothills. The region has so many cultural aspects, so you have them and the resort along with natural beauty, quaint towns for antiques and so on to keep everyone happy.
- **What did your attendees seem to enjoy the most?** The main part of the hotel is a grand historic mansion, and it has wonderful views of the rolling hills. They also liked having so much available for business and relaxation only a couple of hours away from their lives and realities.
- **What were some of the unique off-site venues you used?** The Norman Rockwell Museum is excellent for small dinners and corporate retreats. It's on 36 acres in a beautiful setting, only about 15 minutes from Lenox and close to Stockbridge.
- **How does the Berkshires compare to other destinations where you have hosted meetings?** The combination of culture, history and great geographical location makes it an excellent site choice.
- **Do you have any advice for other planners who might bring a meeting to the Berkshires?** Season matters. Take advantage of May, before the major season, when you can have wonderful weather, enjoy the amenities but not pay peak summer prices. Like most places, they are very interested in weekday business, so think of The Berkshires, especially if you're in Boston. They have anything you want at a conference site, but there's so much else to do. In only a couple of hours, you get a place that feels completely different.