

# Smart meetings

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TO EVENTS

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MEETINGS**

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**IDAHO,  
MONTANA &  
WYOMING**

SKY'S THE  
LIMIT

**CONVENTION  
CENTERS**

SIZING UP THE  
OPTIONS

Smart Stars  
2016  
WINNERS



# JUNE 2016

# Smart meetings

The Intelligent Way to Plan

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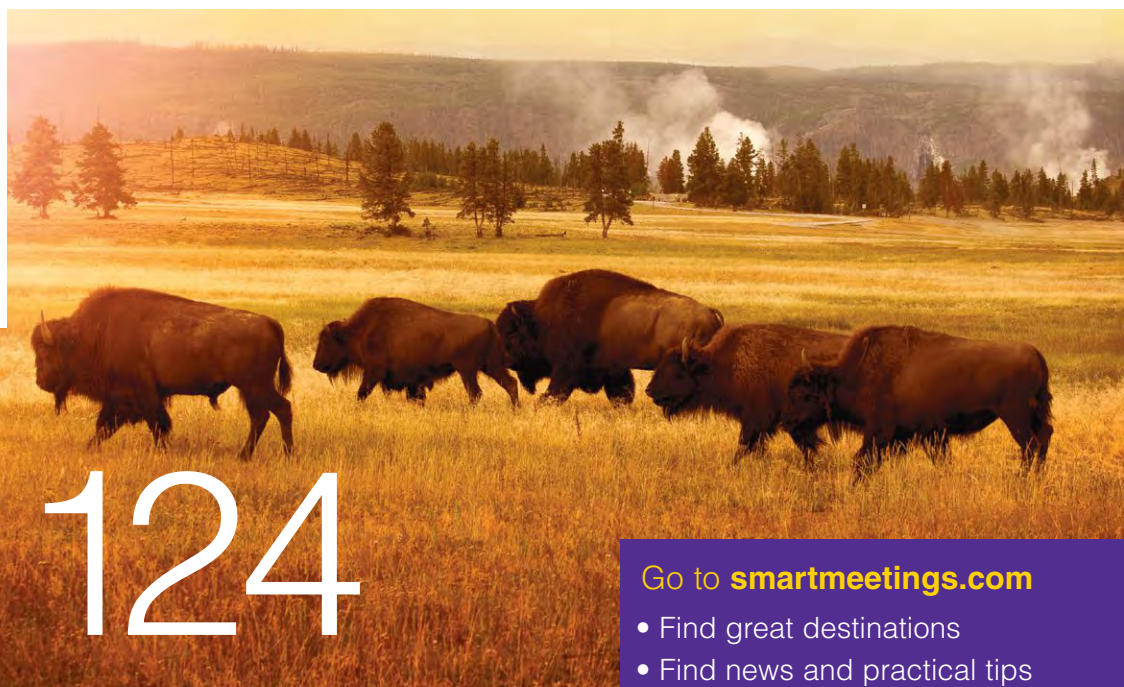
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- Find great destinations
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IDAHO, MONTANA & WYOMING

# WIDE-OPEN





A full-page background image showing a herd of bison in a vast, golden field. In the foreground, three bison are visible, with one partially cut off on the left. The field is filled with tall, dry grass. In the background, there are trees and rolling hills under a hazy, golden sky, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall tone is warm and natural.

# POSSIBILITIES

## GREAT OUTDOORS PROVIDES INSPIRATION AND PROMOTES TEAM BUILDING

By Rob Carey

Science has shown that when people move from the indoors to the outdoors, the sensory stimulation has a beneficial physical and psychological effect on them. Meeting planners sometimes try to take advantage of this natural occurrence to energize attendees and make events more productive.

But there's one very easy way for planners to guarantee that their efforts in this area will succeed: Hold a meeting or incentive program in Idaho, Montana or Wyoming. These Rocky Mountain states possess some of the most unique and striking natural beauty in the Western Hemisphere. Between countless mountain peaks and

ridges, national parks and forests, lakes and rivers, and wildlife only found in a handful of places, these states offer meeting and incentive participants opportunities to forge memories that will never fade.

For planners, another advantage is that the cities and resort destinations are well-versed at facilitating meetings and events for educational purposes as well as coordinating useful outdoor social and leisure activity. There are so many options that planners may have a hard time deciding which destination best matches their group's personality. Our guide identifies outdoor excursions, with unforgettable local experiences.





From left to right: Sun Valley Resort, Idaho; Boise Centre, Idaho

## Idaho

In the capital city of Boise, a 36,000-square-foot expansion of **Boise Centre** debuts this September, complemented by 550 new guest rooms in early 2017. Almost all business hotels in Boise offer free transportation to and from the airport, which is a 10-minute drive from downtown.

When meeting sessions end, groups can choose from dozens of restaurants and breweries within a 10-block area of downtown. Free outdoor concerts are held on Wednesdays in summer, there's an outdoor summer Shakespeare festival and art gallery open houses occur on the first Thursday of each month.

"The convention center was built at Grove Plaza two decades back to ignite economic development downtown, and it did just that," says Carrie Westergard, executive director of **Boise Convention & Visitors Bureau**. "We have so many restaurants and a thriving arts culture."

There are 800 guest rooms within three blocks of the convention center and 1,400 within a mile. The Grove Hotel offers 250 guest rooms and Courtyard Boise Downtown has 159 guest rooms.

The largest of the many leafy walking and jogging trails in town is the paved Greenbelt Trail, which meanders in and out of downtown for 25 miles along the Boise River. Float trips on the placid river are popular among meeting groups in the warmer months. For more adventurous groups,

whitewater rafting is a 45-minute drive away east of Boise, where the mountains begin. A thriving wine country with more than two dozen wineries is 30 minutes away. Westergard says Boise's wine region resembles Northern California's rolling hills and valleys.

Another venue in the foothills that can host a memorable reception is the **Old Idaho Penitentiary**, one of only four territorial prisons in America still open for tours. Built in 1870, the facility has majestic rose gardens that contrast with the striking limestone walls.

**Coeur D'Alene Resort** is in northern Idaho, 40 minutes from Spokane International Airport (GEG) in Washington. It's set on the shores of a mountain lake. The 338-room property has 32,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, including Hagadone Event Center, which sports retractable glass walls that allow for an open-air lakefront experience for up to 600 guests.

The resort's golf course, newly seeded with lush bentgrass, is renowned for having one green that floats on an artificial island in the lake; a 30-second boat ride gets golfers out there. Several larger boats at the resort's marina can accommodate catered group voyages across the lake, transporting attendees to explore the colorful cedar groves of Coeur D'Alene National Forest. Groups can also participate in team-building activities on the





From left to right: Big Sky Resort, Montana; 320 Guest Ranch, Gallatin Gateway, Montana

private beach, in nearby woodlands and on the lake in speed boats.

**Sun Valley Resort** is another prime meetings and incentives property snuggled up against stunning Idaho mountains. Located just outside the town of Ketchum—known to be Ernest Hemingway's favorite haunt and his final resting place—the resort completed a full renovation of its 108-room lodge in 2015 and added other amenities, as well.

"The response has been overwhelmingly positive to the rebirth of the lodge," says Jack Sibbach, the resort's director of sales and marketing. "The new 20,000-square-foot spa and new pool-side cafe have seen usage by groups that's even better than we anticipated."

While the lodge has three conference rooms and is ideal for groups of 30, the resort's nearby 105-room inn is home to the majority of the 26,083 sq. ft. of meeting space. There are 227 other guest rooms available in condos, apartments, townhomes and homes around the property.

A three-minute shuttle ride from the lodge and inn brings guests to the resort's golf club, featuring the tree-lined 18-hole Trail Creek course and a recently built nine-hole White Clouds course that runs atop the foothills to offer long views across the valley and to the mountains. An 18-hole natural-grass putting course is perfect for a team-building activity, followed by a reception on the huge clubhouse deck overlooking the green.

Sun Valley Resort has more than 30 miles of paved hiking and biking trails, plus sport-shooting facilities, horseback riding, fly-fishing, tennis, bowling and even summer ice-skating shows on a manicured outdoor rink. Come winter, the surrounding area is a ski mecca. In summer, a drive north into Sawtooth National Forest will bring folks to the small but activity-packed riverside town of Stanley, with some of America's most scenic views.

## Montana

Although the region's tagline is "Biggest Skiing in America" due to its 8,000 acres of skiable terrain, Big Sky accommodates meeting groups and boasts a slew of other outdoor activities.

One hour from Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport (BZN), **Big Sky Resort** offers 550 guest rooms, plus another 300 rooms in condos and upscale log homes nearby. Meeting groups can utilize the 55,000 sq. ft. of meeting space in the resort's Yellowstone Conference Center as well as Lone Peak Pavilion, an outdoor tent venue for 180 guests that provides up-close views of 11,166-foot Lone Peak.

The mountainside Big Sky Village shopping and residential area is adjacent to the resort and offers a base camp for many activities, plus a dozen eateries ranging from formal dining to smokehouse shack, to ice cream stand. And for the most amazing views in the region, meeting attendees can ride Lone Peak Tram to the top of the mountain. A shorter ski lift can take small groups up Andesite Mountain to Everett's 8800, an upscale dining experience in a timber ski lodge. And a few miles outside the village is Buck's T-4 Steakhouse, offering a large showroom for group dining and entertainment to go with its sterling culinary reputation.

Besides the golf, rafting, horseback riding, fly-fishing and other local activities, visual offerings in Big Sky are outstanding: There are abundant animal-sighting opportunities at dawn and dusk, plus unrivaled stargazing. Of major importance, the west gate of Yellowstone National Park is one hour away, making unforgettable day trips easy to coordinate.

Another group-friendly resort is **320 Guest Ranch**, 12 miles from the Big Sky Village, on the Gallatin River. It offers 87 sleeping rooms in 59 upscale cabins, a stable of horses and experienced ranch hands. The year-round ranch has two A/V-equipped function rooms with 2,500 sq.

## RESOURCES

- **Boise Convention & Visitors Bureau**  
boise.org
- **Buffalo Bill's Cody/ Yellowstone Country**  
yellowstonecountry.org
- **Destination Missoula**  
destinationmissoula.org
- **Helena Tourism Alliance**  
helenamt.com
- **Idaho Tourism**  
visitidaho.org
- **Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce**  
jacksonholechamber.com
- **Montana Office of Tourism**  
visitmt.com
- **Visit Big Sky**  
visitbigskymt.com
- **Visit Billings**  
visitbillings.com
- **Wyoming Office of Tourism**  
wyomingtourism.org





*From left to right: MetraPark, Billings, Montana; Hilton Garden Inn Missoula, Montana; The Lodge at Whitefish Lake, Montana*

ft. each. A riverside tent hosts receptions and authentic cowboy cookouts. The ranch has a steak house and a rustic saloon, as well.

Another gateway city to explore Yellowstone National Park is Billings, which actually refers to itself as Montana's Trailhead. Besides Yellowstone, other notable outdoor sites near Billings include scenic Beartooth Highway, Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, and Little Bighorn Battlefield and Pompeys Pillar national monuments.

Motorcycle tourism is a significant market to Montana's largest city and the southeast Montana region. Gold Wing Road Riders Association (GWRRA) Wing Ding 38 will come to town for the fourth time Aug. 31–Sept. 3.

Expected to draw up to 10,000, Wing Ding 38 will use the 231-room **Billings Hotel and Convention Center** and **Radisson Hotel Billings** as host properties. The hotel and convention center provide 26,000 sq. ft. of space that can accommodate up to 1,000. The 316-room Radisson offers 50,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. Billings' **MetraPark**, which includes Rimrock Auto Arena, will host many GWRRA events.

"This was a victory for our community and region, because GWRRA members are a wonderful group to host," says Alex Tyson, executive director of **Visit Billings**. "We would not be able to be competitive in such bid efforts without the support of our hote-

liers and the Billings Tourism Business Improvement District."

Helena, the capital of Montana, has two hotels that garner strong business from meetings and events. The first is **Radisson Colonial Helena Hotel**, with 149 guest rooms and 17,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. The property completed a full renovation in March, several months after becoming a Radisson. It's become the center of the city's social scene.

"It's now a pretty chic and modern venue," says Mike Mergenthaler, director of **Helena Tourism Alliance**.

**Best Western Premier Helena Great Northern** has 100 guest rooms and 8,900 sq. ft. of meeting space. Carroll College is across the street, and faculty members are available to speak on topics including the area's history and natural features.

For a personal experience with Helena's history and nature, groups can travel 20 miles north to board a sightseeing boat on the Missouri River that makes a winding trip through the unique Gates of the Mountains. First seen by explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in 1805, these towering walls of limestone have large outcroppings where deer, bighorn sheep and mountain goats gather, plus 120 species of birds overhead. The 90-minute tour can be complemented with a reception at a riverside chalet.





Helena is the only gold-rush town in Montana that survived. The Last Chance Tour Train is a rubber-wheeled replica that takes guests past the Capitol building and the Mansion District to Last Chance Gulch, the heart of downtown, which has largely kept its 19th-century boomtown feel. A dine-around is ideal here, given the number of restaurants and breweries.

In Missoula, the combination of University of Montana students and many outdoors-focused residents makes for a uniquely energetic atmosphere. Group-friendly hotels include the 146-room **Hilton Garden Inn Missoula**, with 22,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, and a few limited-service properties within walking distance.

**Holiday Inn Missoula Downtown** has 200 guest rooms and 8,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, plus the adjacent 6,500-square-foot Bess Reed Park set on the Clark Fork River. A full renovation of the property will be completed by early 2017.

One block from the Holiday Inn is Caras Park, where a permanent, covered pavilion with retractable walls hosts summer food-truck festivals and music performances alongside the rocky, fast-moving river. Groups can



rent this space for private events.

→ Only 35 miles outside Missoula in Greenough, **The Resort at Paws Up** is a luxury retreat that offers a robust roster of wilderness activities, including an authentic cattle drive, fly-fishing, horseback riding, ATV tours, sporting clay shooting, a new ropes course and yoga. Renowned for helping launch the term "glamping," the resort offers 30 one- and two-bedroom luxury tents and 28 vacation homes. Paws Up can accommodate a maximum of 250 guests in the summer and 150 guests in winter. There's event space in the bull barn and Equestrian Center.

About two hours north of Missoula is perhaps the greatest natural feature in the lower 48 states: Glacier National Park, near the quaint town of Whitefish. The park may be accessed by flying into Glacier Park International Airport (FCA), which is located between Whitefish and Kalispell, or via Amtrak.

The top meeting property near Glacier National Park is **The Lodge at Whitefish Lake**. This amazing AAA Four Diamond lakefront resort features its own marina. There are 145 total accommodations, including traditional guest rooms, suites and condos. There are also five luxury cabins. Meeting space is generous, with more than 8,000 sq. ft. indoors, including a 6,366-square-foot ballroom.

Dating back to 1945, **Averill's Flathead Lake Lodge** offers an all-inclusive dude ranch experience that is great for executive retreats and team-building experiences. It's located in Bigfork, 35 miles from Glacier National Park. Its 46 accommodation units consist of historic log lodges and rustic cabins. There are five conference rooms, with the largest seating 150.

## Wyoming

Wyoming rivals the almost-overpowering scenery of Montana's Glacier National Park thanks to Jackson, an upscale four-season town on the eastern side of Grand Teton National Park and one hour from the south gate of Yellowstone. Jackson is also the biggest meeting and incentive destination in the state.

At the base of Snow King Mountain near historic downtown is **Snow King Resort & Grandview Lodge**, offering 203 recently refurbished guest rooms, 150 condo rooms, 20,000 sq. ft. of meeting space and a tented event lawn.

The heart of town features several small, upscale properties, including **The Wort Hotel** and **Hotel Jackson**, which are great for executive board meetings. Just steps away are a variety of restaurants, shops and galleries, while the town square is the setting for a regularly scheduled reenactment of a







*Left: The Resort at Paws Up, Greenough, Montana; above: Snake River Lodge & Spa, Teton Village, Wyoming*

Wild West shootout, with some comedy thrown in.

Two miles from town square is **The Lodge at Jackson Hole**, with 8,000 sq. ft. of meeting space and 154 guest rooms. Teton Village, 25 minutes from town, features the 124-room **Four Seasons Resort Jackson Hole**, which also offers private residences. **Snake River Lodge & Spa**, also at the base of the major ski mountains, has 6,000 sq. ft. of event space, 125 guest rooms and suites, and 30 condos and residences.

One of the most unique properties in Jackson is **Spring Creek Ranch**, set on a 1,000-acre parcel that looks directly across at the 13,700-foot Grand Teton peak. Its 125 guest rooms include hotel rooms and townhomes ranging from three-bedroom units to a five-bedroom villa.

"Our sweet spot for meetings is 40 to 60 people," says Stephen Price, owner and general manager of Spring Creek Ranch, which has 3,200 sq. ft. of formal meeting space, plus decks and other



manicured natural spaces. “We use the outdoors as much as possible to provide meeting and incentive groups with memorable experiences.”

Guests can ride horses to breakfast or nightly cookouts, or take a safari tour with a staff naturalist who provides binoculars and scopes to spy on bison, bears, elk and eagles in Yellowstone or Grand Teton Park. Even closer is National Elk Refuge, where thousands of the animals can be viewed. Other activities in the area include guided hikes, rafting and fly-fishing on the Snake River,




Four Seasons Resort Jackson Hole, Wyoming

hot-air ballooning and golf.

Cody, east of Yellowstone National Park, features authentic cowboy culture, with artists and outfitters who reinforce a Western vibe. The main drag is reminiscent of its 1895 founding, when Buffalo Bill Cody helped build The Irma Hotel for rich folks to come see his Wild West Shows (which still take place). Cody's main meeting property is the **Holiday Inn Buffalo Bill Village Resort**, with 345 guest rooms and 10,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. The hour drive from Cody to Yellowstone was described by President Theodore Roosevelt as “the 50 most beautiful miles in America.”

## Beauty Abounds

Idaho, Montana and Wyoming may be overlooked when it comes to meetings, but they are certainly always in the mix for those seeking to explore America's natural beauty and wildlife.

The region boasts the spectacular geysers of Yellowstone National Park and the grandiose Rocky Mountains that have sculpted Glacier National Park, as well as stellar resorts such as Idaho's Coeur D'Alene Resort and Sun Valley Resort that help make meetings and conferences in the great outdoors a win-win proposition. 

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