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## Utah

### Mild West

by Kelly Crumrin



Well mannered and family-friendly, Utah represents a kinder, gentler Wild West. It is home to some of the most extravagantly beautiful terrain in the U.S., much of which can be hiked, climbed, skied, biked and golfed, and it is a proud curator of its rich pioneer heritage.

From the populous Wasatch Front in the north, where 80 percent of Utahns live in and around the cities of Salt Lake, Provo and Ogden, to the bucolic south, studded with picturesque national parks and forests, Utah possesses a strong year-round draw. Nature lovers, adventure sports enthusiasts, golfers and those who appreciate spas and top-drawer luxury will all be thrilled to have a reason to visit the Beehive State.

#### Salt Lake City

As the state capital and center of the Wasatch Front region, Salt Lake City offers fascinating frontier history, all the amenities of a diverse urban center and an ideal jumping-off point for outdoor activities of all sorts.

"With its pioneer heritage, Salt Lake offers visitors insight into the historic West combined with the contemporary West, plus easy access to year-round outdoor activity," says Mark H. White, vice president of sales at the Salt Lake CVB.

Lake CVB. "The 21 national parks and monuments within a day's drive have made Salt Lake the epicenter of Western vacations. While most meeting and convention attendees don't venture far beyond their hotels and nearby restaurants, everyone is taken by the city's spectacular scenery and warm sense of hospitality."

Large-scale investments are multiplying the many charms the city already holds for meeting planners. A new museum of natural history, a light rail connection between the airport and the convention district, and an ambitious new downtown entertainment complex will be enriching Salt Lake's inventory of attractions within the next two years.

"The largest and arguably the most significant development is the City Creek Center project. On track for completion in early 2012, this \$2 billion development is located across the street from the convention center and the state's most popular visitor attraction: Historic Temple Square," White says.

City Creek Center will include retail, restaurants, residences, offices and 5,000 underground parking spaces. Six of the 26 acres will feature gardens, fountains and a flowing river that's covered by a retractable glass roof.

Among the city's most popular sights is Historic Temple Square, a 10-acre section of downtown that is home to the Salt Lake Temple, the Tabernacle, Assembly Hall and other institutions important to the Church of Latter Day Saints. The city is also a renowned center for genealogy studies due to the extensive archives held by the church.

Salt Palace Convention Center, located downtown, boasts 515,000 square feet of exhibition space and 164,000 square feet of meeting space. The facility's 2006 expansion earned a Silver LEED certification.

Other large meeting venues in Salt Lake include South Towne Exposition Center, Energy Solutions Arena and the E Center.

Nearly 7,000 hotel rooms and more than 170 restaurants are located near the convention center. A few of the city's largest meeting hotels include Grand America Hotel, Sheraton Salt Lake City Hotel, Hilton Salt Lake City Center, Little America Hotel and Marriott Salt Lake City Downtown.

Meanwhile, Snowbird Resort and Conference Center offers year-round activities just 40 minutes from Salt Lake. There are 511 guest rooms and 50,000 square feet of meeting space.

Groups can start their engines at Miller Motorsports Park. A 30-minute drive from the convention center, this auto and motorcycle racing attraction welcomes groups of any size for team-building and entertainment outings.

Opportunities for group activities are endless. Golf, skiing, hiking and dinner cruises on the lake are among the most popular choices.

The CVB sees a sanguine future for Salt Lake City as a meetings destination.

"I see several trends within the meetings market that bode well for Salt Lake," White says. "These include an increasing demand for destinations that are authentic and safe, provide a high level of service and, of course, offer exceptional value. With rampant 'time poverty,' meeting planners are also looking for destinations that are easy to reach and offer opportunities for pre- and post-vacation options with their families."

#### Park City

With Olympic-level winter sports, a strong emphasis on sustainability, and more than 4,000 guest rooms, Park City is a top mountain resort destination.

"Our easy accessibility—only a 35-minute ride from the Salt Lake International Airport—means more time meeting and less time traveling," says Vicki Gaebe, meetings and conventions marketing manager at the Park City CVB. "Park City is also a smart economic choice because it offers a variety of year-round activities, many of which are low cost or no cost, value season rates between April and November, professional service and specialized meeting venues with advanced technology."

Among Park City area's many meetings-ready resorts, Stein Eriksen Lodge, the state's only AAA Five Diamond property, offers 180 guest rooms and meeting space for groups as large as 440.

Montage Deer Valley, a new resort set to open this year, will offer 17,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space.

Utah Olympic Park, an impressive remnant of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games, is home to an Olympic museum and activities including an alpine slide, a zip line and bobsled rides. Facilities available for group rentals include a 225-person theater, a ski museum that can host 144 and a conference room for 70.

High West Distillery and Saloon opened in November 2009. One of very few ski-in, ski-out distilleries in the world, the facility serves nouveau Western fare and award-winning, small-batch whiskeys and vodkas. There are banquet facilities for 180.

A 10-minute drive from Park City, Jupiter Bowl offers 12 lanes of bowling and party space for 300.

"Park City is positioned to be one of the top mountain meeting destinations in the West," Gaebe says. "We have also seen a trend where planners are seeking out green options for their meetings; Park City is at the top when sustainability is mentioned."

#### Utah Valley

Provo and its surrounding communities and resorts provide breathtaking Rocky Mountain scenery and world-class skiing just 40 minutes from Salt Lake City International Airport. Its world-class Sundance Resort is one of the area's top group options.

"Utah Valley continues to be an area that is recognized as one of the best cities in which to live, work and play," says Charlene Christensen, director of services at the Utah Valley CVB. "Home to two major universities, Utah Valley University and Brigham Young University, Utah Valley has become immersed in technological advancements, the arts, business achievements and more. This has led to a vibrant population that meets and exceeds the needs of event planners and attendees."

With a new convention center on the way in Provo and significant expansion and renovations at the legendary Sundance Resort, the Utah Valley is leveling up its bid for meetings business. The area is also undertaking several public transit projects, including commuter rail and increased flights to Provo Airport, designed to increase its accessibility.

Provo Marriott Hotel and Conference Center offers 28,000 square feet of meeting space. The area's two universities also offer conference space.

"We have definitely noticed trends changing with the economy as there is a greater need for more affordable venues to accommodate small to midsize groups," Christensen says. "Utah Valley continues to be recognized as a destination that offers both value and service for these sizes of groups."

#### Northern Utah

Long a railroad hub and Utah's second most populous city, Ogden possesses a fascinating history reflected in its architecture. The city is also located in prime territory for all sorts of outdoor adventures.

"Ogden is a memorable mix of urban amenities right next to a dramatic backdrop of mountains providing exceptional recreational opportunities—pre and post meetings," says Rich Koski, director of sales at the Ogden/Weber CVB. "The Ogden area is very affordable and accessible. We are just 40 miles north of the Salt Lake City International Airport. Ogden is a city that has both historical significance and great access to outdoor activities, including hiking, biking, skiing, fishing, water sports, climbing and golf."

Ogden Eccles Conference Center, Ogden Marriott and resorts such as Pineview Lodge at Wolf Creek, Earl's Lodge and Needles Lodge at Snowbasin are top choices for meeting venues.

Salomon Center is a unique indoor recreation center offering indoor surfing, rock climbing, skydiving and bowling. Team-building groups are welcome.

Groups can enjoy the historic backdrop of Ogden's Union Station during banquets for as many as 350. The station is home to the John M. Browning Firearms Museum, Utah State Railroad Museum and Browning-Kimball Classic Car Museum.

"Ogden's future as a meetings destination continues to grow," Koski says. "Our unique mix of accessibility and affordability paired with our proximity to a beautiful mountain environment continues to attract the interest of planners looking for something different."

#### Southern Utah

The sun-drenched land and fantastic geology of Southern Utah draws tourists from all over the world. Although the cities of St. George and Moab are a little off the beaten path, they can offer smaller meetings a sense of rejuvenation and a matchless backdrop that can't be found in bigger cities.

The desert meets the mountains in St. George, known for its warm weather and once referred to as Utah's Dixie due to a climate suitable for growing cotton. The city boasts the spectacular Zion National Park as its backyard.

"St. George is the only destination in Utah that boasts year-round golf, a full-service convention center and a national park all within in a short distance of each other," says Brittany McMichael, meeting and convention marketing manager at the St. George Area CVB. "We truly have 'Everything from A to Zion.'"

The city is currently most easily accessible via McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas, 119 miles away, or by Delta connection from Salt Lake City. However, 2011 will bring a massively expanded municipal airport capable of accommodating larger aircraft.

Dixie Convention Center offers a 47,500-square-foot convention hall and more than 30,000 square feet of meeting space.

Groups can relax and rejuvenate at Red Mountain and Green Valley Spas. Corporate packages and team-building options are available.

Warm, sunny weather, a par-72 golf course and some of the most awe-inspiring landscapes in the nation are just a few of the lures of Moab, located in the Southeastern part of the state. In recent years, the city has been increasing its focus on sustainable and green practices.

"The world has traveled to Moab for three decades to enjoy Canyonlands and Arches National Parks, Dead Horse Point State Park, mountain bike and jeep trails, and the Colorado River for recreation and leisure," says Marian DeLay, executive director at the Moab Area Travel Council. "The public lands surrounding Moab refresh harried minds by merely sightseeing, and yet adventure awaits those young and old. Because of Moab's friendliness to family travel, spousal programs are a cinch."

Larger meetings hotels include Red Cliffs Lodge and Sorrel River Ranch, both located on the banks of the Colorado River minutes from downtown Moab.

Interesting off-site venues include the 289-seat theater at Historic Star Hall and the 1,100-seat bleachers and 24,000 square feet of event space at the Old Spanish Trail Arena.

"For the foreseeable future, we envision Moab with big appeal to the smaller meetings market," DeLay says. "Management retreats, executive team building, board conferences or product launches looking for a location to conduct their business and use the opportunity to clear their minds will find Moab the perfect location."

*Kelly Crumrin is a freelance writer based in San Francisco. A family vacation spent exploring Arches and Bryce Canyon national parks is one of her fondest memories.*

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