

THE EVOLUTION OF BUSINESS EVENTS

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MEETINGS AND CONVENTIONS

NORTHSTAR
TRAVEL & EVENTS

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Value-Added
Trade Shows

P. 29

25 of
the Hottest
Ideas

P. 25

Meetings
in the
Hurricane
Belt

P. 14

MARKETING RULES!

Why CMOs have taken a
leading role in events P. 19

Chief marketing
officers are now involved
in every part of the
planning process, notes
meetings consultant
Lyana Blokhina.

■ ATLANTIC CITY P. 49

■ COLORADO P. 39

■ HAWAII P. 45

■ INDIANA P. 54



Why here? Florida's West Coast offers groups an enticing array of settings, ranging from sophisticated cities like St. Petersburg (above) to tranquil beach resorts. Attendees and incentive winners will enjoy all the region has to offer: succulent Gulf seafood, great golf, water sports, outstanding museums and more.

NEWS FLASH

The 255-room **Westin Sarasota** debuted this summer. The property offers a spa, a fitness center, a rooftop pool, two restaurants — EVOQ and Roof Bar & Eats — and more than 26,000 square feet of event space.

The 323-room **Westshore Grand**, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel, recently opened in Tampa. In addition to a heated rooftop pool, the hotel features a Shula's Steak House and more than 14,000 square feet of function space.

ILLUSTRATION: FELIX S. DOWELL

ST. PETERSBURG AND CLEARWATER

Local Update

- The dual-branded **Residence Inn Clearwater Beach** and **SpringHill Suites Clearwater Beach** have opened. The Residence Inn offers 140 suites, while the SpringHill Suites has 115 such units. The properties share an outdoor pool and sundeck, a fitness center and three meeting rooms spanning a total of 2,400 square feet. Both hotels are pet-friendly and offer complimentary breakfast and free WiFi. The building, near a marina, also includes 7,000 square feet of ground-floor upscale retail space for shopping and dining.
 - The 175-room **Hyatt Place St. Petersburg Downtown** is set to open in late 2017. The hotel will include a 5,000-square-foot restaurant, a
- Continued on page 36*



Offbeat Olympics. For a decidedly different take on team building, try the "super duper slingshot," the "anything goes" relay or "pie diving." These group activities are offered at Tampa's Saddlebrook Resort & Spa.



MURAL MADNESS

A number of vibrant, clever street murals have popped up in recent years in the Central Arts District in downtown St. Pete. Attendees can enjoy the urban art on their own or via a private tour with FloridaCraftArt, which shares the inside stories of the making of some of the most iconic works found in the four-block area. bit.ly/2fuHBK1

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To find and compare hotels, send RFPs, visit mcvenues.com



Continued from page 33

5,500-square-foot elevated pool deck and 4,600 square feet of meeting space.



• The upscale **Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach** debuted in early 2017. The property has 343 guest rooms, three dining outlets — Ocean Hai, eSKPades and Docks Pool Bar & Grill — a spa, and 22,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event space.

• A 166-room **JW Marriott hotel** is slated to open in 2019 in Clearwater Beach. The 15-story property's top floor will house private residences, but what remains for guests includes an infinity pool, a number of outdoor decks, two

restaurants, and meeting and event space (the amount of which is still to be announced).

• The 230-room **Opal Sands Resort, Clearwater Beach**, opened last year. The property offers approximately 17,000 square feet of waterfront meeting space.

• The **Treasure Island Beach Resort**, part of the Opal Collection, has recently opened on Gulf Boulevard. The property offers 77 one-and two-bedroom suites, all with Gulf views, kitchens,



> The new Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach

and either a porch or a balcony. Other offerings include the BRGR Kitchen and Bar, a pool and a fitness center.

• The 217-room **Sugar Sands Resort, St. Pete Beach**, is scheduled to open in 2018 at the TradeWinds Resort; stay tuned for more details.



An icon reborn. In its heyday, the Fenway Hotel in Dunedin hosted explorers, artists, politicians and musicians, and served as the county's first radio station. The 1920s-built property gets a new lease on life next spring, when it becomes part of the Marriott Autograph Collection. The hotel will have 83 guest rooms, along with the HEW Parlor & Chophouse, the Hi-Fi Rooftop Bar and approximately 11,000 square feet of flexible meeting space.

MEETING HOTELS: To find a full list of area hotels, and to send RFPs, visit mcvenues.com.

CONVENTION CENTER: Sirata Beach Resort & Conference Center; exhibit space, 30,000 square feet; meeting rooms, 14. (855) 318-4768; sirata.com

AIRPORT TRANSIT: Tampa International Airport, about 18 miles east of Clearwater and 20 miles northeast of St. Petersburg. Transfer cost to Clearwater or St. Petersburg by taxi, \$50; by Uber, about \$20

TAXES: Room tax, 6%; sales tax, 7%; total tax on hotel rooms, 13%

GROUP VENUE: Organize a surreal dinner or reception for up to 650 guests at the **Dali Museum**, featuring the works of the flamboyant Spanish artist. Venue rental includes viewing of the art galleries for up to two hours. (727) 823-3767; thedali.org

CONTACT: Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater, (727) 464-7200 or (877) 352-3224; visitstpeteclearwater.com ■