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How to Keep
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Tech Is the Ticket

How meetings tools are helping
to draw attendees

Meri Summers, senior manager of corporate events for Citrix, turned the software company's annual conference into an online destination that still generates traffic six months after the event ended



FLORIDA'S WEST COAST
WISCONSIN
RENO/LAKE TAHOE
LOST PINES, TX



The grand sunsets provide all the decor required for a blow-out dinner on the beaches of Fort Myers

St. Petersburg/Clearwater

Just in its part of the region, Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater says 1,000 new rooms came online in 2016, and another 1,000 have opened or will open in 2017. And that's on top of (or perhaps because of) TripAdvisor's 2017 Travelers' Choice awards declaring St. Pete Beach No. 3 in its list of "Top 25 Beaches - United States." Neighboring Clearwater Beach came in at No. 4, and Dr. Beach (aka Dr. Stephen Leatherman) named Caladesi Island State Park, between Clearwater and Dunedin, his No. 7 beach for 2017.

But it is the quality of some of the new properties that is a game changer for the area. While it has had excellent meeting infrastructure for years, the highest end largely wasn't there, according to Mike May, president of Spear One, a meeting and event planning firm. "For many years, Clearwater won best beach awards for its powdery white sands, but incentive-quality hotels were lacking," May says. "Recent revitalization projects have produced many excellent group hotels including the Hyatt Regency Clearwater Beach; Sandpearl Resort; the Opal Sands Resort, Clearwater Beach, which opened 2016; and the Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach, which opened 2017."

The 343-room Wyndham Grand, located on the waterfront next to Pier 60 park, has 22,000 square feet of meeting space and fantastic Gulf views. So does the 230-room Opal Sands, which is located right at the water's edge and offers 17,000 square feet of waterfront meeting space. A sister property, the Treasure Island Beach Resort, also opened in 2016, with 77 one- and two-bedroom suites. The 175-room Hyatt Place, Downtown St. Pete, opens late 2017.

Marriott's dual-branded Residence Inn Tampa Clearwater Beach and SpringHill Suites Tampa Clearwater Beach opened in August with a combined 255 suites. The 217-room Sugar Sands Resort, St. Pete Beach opens next year. The area's incentive infrastructure will take another leap in 2019 with the addition of a five-star property — the \$120 million, 166-room JW Marriott, Clearwater Beach. Next April, the 83-room Fenway Hotel, Autograph Collection, will open near Clearwater with

11,126 square feet of event space in an historic hotel building with Jazz Age ties.

Sarasota

Just below Tampa Bay, Sarasota is also seeing a building boom, with 1,112 new hotel rooms coming over a two-year period, the majority of them in the downtown area. And Sarasota's sandy waterfront got its due, with Siesta Beach being named the Best Beach in America this year by Dr. Beach, as well as in TripAdvisor's 2017 Travelers' Choice Awards.

New properties include the 255-room Westin Sarasota, with 26,000 square feet of meeting space and the 187-room Zota on Longboat Key, which has 5,000 square feet of meeting space. Marriott's Autograph Collection has two properties set to open by the end of the year. First up is the 37-room Waterline Marina Resort & Beach Club, Autograph Collection, scheduled to open this month on Anna Maria Island. It will have 2,000 square feet of event space and a 50-slip marina. In December, the Art Ovation Hotel, Autograph Collection will open in

Sarasota with 162 rooms, 10,000 square feet of meeting and event space, and a rooftop pool bar with 360-degree views.

Starwood has The Sarasota Modern: A Tribute Portfolio Hotel, with 89 rooms set to open downtown next year, joining the 139-room Aloft Sarasota (which opened in early 2016 with 550 square feet of meeting space). And the Carlisle Inn is bringing nearly 100 rooms and 4,000

square feet of meeting space to the heart of Sarasota's Amish settlement later this year. Handcrafted beds are among traditional and modern comforts.

Tampa

Tampa's development news starts with the Tampa International Airport, which is scheduled to finish Phase 1 of its \$2.6 billion expansion next year. The project includes a



Sarasota's Siesta Key Beach, Dr. Beach's "Best Beach in America"