

# Small Market Meetings™

The Publication for Planners Who Use Smaller Cities and Sites

## Back to the BEACH

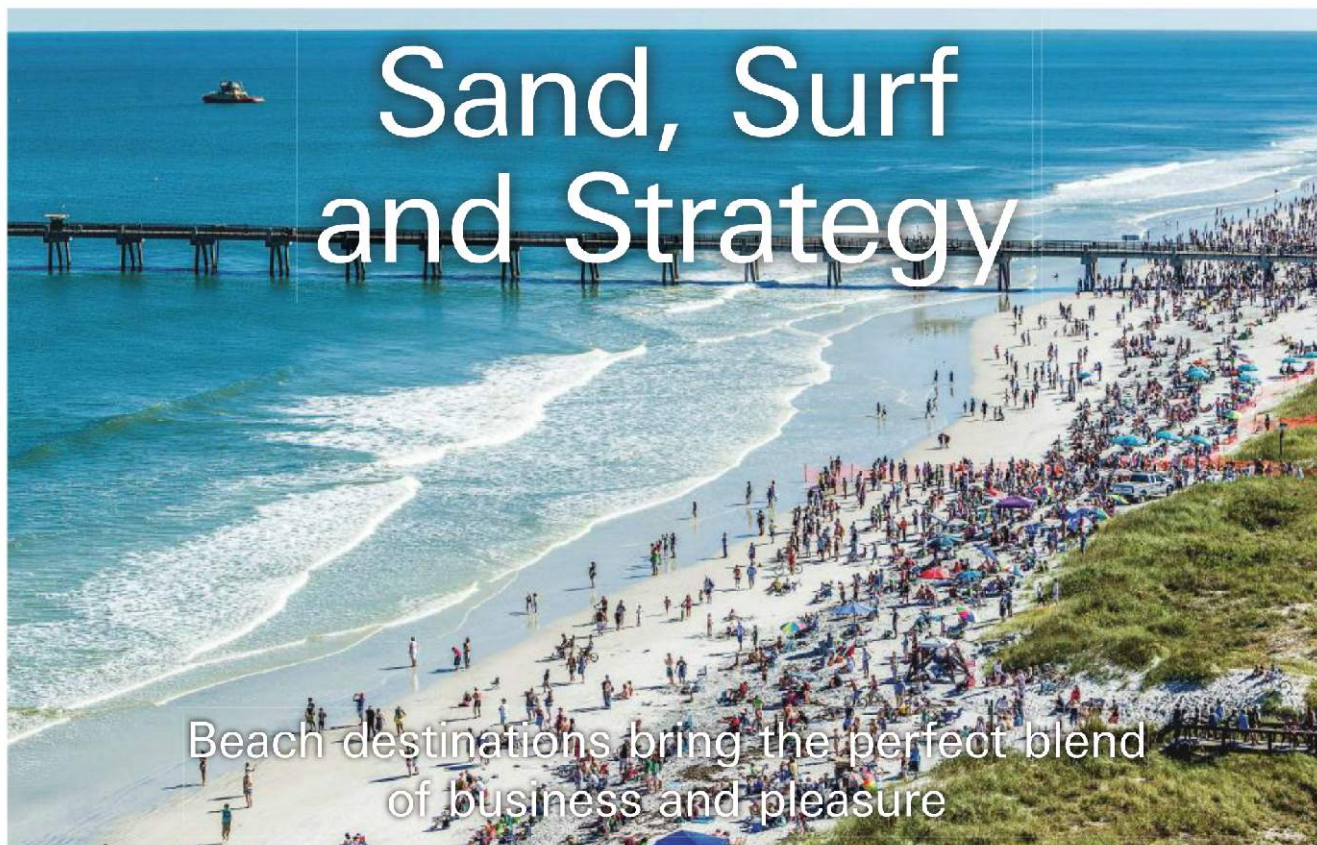
Shoulder Season Savings

Wilmington, Delaware

Lafayette, Louisiana

Arkansas Meeting Guide

O C T O B E R 2 0 1 5



*Courtesy Visit Jacksonville*

By Rachel Carter

A number of annual festivals and events bring big crowds to the beaches near Jacksonville.

Meetings and conferences in beach destinations mean attendees get to enjoy sand between their toes, sea breezes in their hair and salt water around their ankles. Oceanfront venues and on-the-beach activities inject meetings with a fresh vibe and give everyone there a fresh perspective.

### **Jacksonville, Florida**

Much of downtown Jacksonville sits on the waterfront – not the ocean, but the St. Johns River. Fifteen miles east, however, are long, sandy stretches of Atlantic Ocean beaches, something locals sometimes have to remind visitors.

“When people think of Jacksonville, it’s often concentrated on the downtown area, and then the beaches are used as a daytrip,” said Patty Jimenez, leisure communications specialist for Visit Jacksonville. “We remind people you can meet [at the beach] and use downtown for a special trip.”

One Ocean Resort and Spa is the city’s largest beachfront venue. The 195-room hotel has 10,500 square feet of indoor and outdoor function space, including a 3,800-square-foot ballroom and a 1,600-square-foot, covered oceanfront patio. On-site event staff help with team-building activities, and the resort sits right next to the Beaches Town Center, a hub for shopping, dining and nightlife.

“You can walk right outside the hotel and be in the sand or go shopping and dining,” Jimenez said.

The 1925 Spanish-style Casa Marina hotel has 25 guest rooms, and groups can book the Penthouse Lounge overlooking the ocean or reserve the entire third floor for events. The SeaWalk Pavilion is an oceanfront plaza and amphitheater that can be rented for events, and Kathryn Abbey Hanna Park is a 450-acre park and public beach that has picnic shelters, bike trails and a freshwater lake for kayaking, canoeing, fishing and bird-watch-

ing. Coastal Fossil Adventures will lead groups on beach-combing tours to find shark teeth, and Kayak Amelia offers kayaking, paddleboarding and paddleboard yoga.

[www.visitjacksonville.com](http://www.visitjacksonville.com)

### **Wilmington, North Carolina**

Wilmington, North Carolina, is home to three barrier-island beaches, each with its own personality. Wrightsville Beach is a contemporary beach town that’s home to many of the area’s resort hotels.

All of Shell Island Resort’s 140 guest suites front the ocean, and the hotel has 6,000 square feet of conference space, including an oceanfront ballroom. The Blockade Runner Resort straddles a narrow swath of island, so it fronts both the Intercoastal Waterway and the Atlantic Ocean. The resort’s largest meeting room is the 2,800-square foot Lee Ballroom, and groups can go kayaking or paddleboarding and take scenic boat tours.



*Courtesy Wilmington and the Beaches CVB*

A boardwalk swing overlooks the beach near Wilmington.

The Holiday Inn Resort has 8,400 square feet of meeting space and two terraces for sunrises and sunsets. Both Blockade and the Holiday Inn offer a distinctive local meal option: a "shrimparoo" shrimp feast.

Kure Beach has a small-town feel and few facilities, but Carolina Beach delivers a vintage vibe along with meeting venues. Shops, restaurants and bars, as well as a seaside amusement park, line the recently rebuilt wood-plank boardwalk, which is open year-round, although some stores close in the offseason.

"[Carolina Beach] preserves that feel of days gone by," said Connie Nelson, communications/public relations director for the Wilmington and Beaches Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Marriott's Courtyard Carolina Beach Oceanfront hotel has a 3,200-square-foot ballroom, and construction is underway on a new oceanfront Hampton Inn that will have about 100 guest rooms and 5,000 square feet of function space when it opens next summer.

**[www.wilmingtonandbeaches.com](http://www.wilmingtonandbeaches.com)**

### **Mississippi Gulf Coast**

The Mississippi Gulf Coast stretches 62 miles between the Louisiana and Alabama state lines, and meeting destinations dot the scenic shoreline. In Biloxi, the Mississippi Coast Coliseum and Convention Center has 400,000 square feet of meeting and exhibit space and an

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Air boats take visitors on tours of the wetlands on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

*Courtesy Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast*

8,200-seat arena, and the complex sits directly across the street from the beach.

Attendees can “walk across the street, dip their toes in the water, take in the fresh air and be back in their meeting in no time,” said Karen Conner, director of marketing for Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Several oceanfront casino resorts offer event space and easy beach access. In Biloxi, the 1,740-room Beau Rivage is “steps away from the beach,” she said, and has 50,000 square feet of flexible meeting space. The Hard Rock Hotel and Casino’s event space includes the 13,000-square-foot Hard Rock Live venue and theater, and the Golden Nugget’s largest function space is its 9,650-square-foot Grand Ballroom.

In Gulfport, the Island View Casino and Resort opened its \$58 million beachfront tower in April. Each of the tower’s 405 rooms has ocean views, and the addition brought the resort’s total number of guest rooms to 970. The tower also includes 14,000 square feet of convention space, five new restaurants and a spa.

Outfitters along the coast can set up beach yoga, paddleboarding, kayaking, Wave Runner rentals and bike rentals for attendees. Area beaches also feature picnic shelters, fire

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### ***Ocean City, Maryland***

Ocean City, Maryland's Roland E. Powell Convention Center is nicknamed "the sandcastle of convention centers," and for good reason. Water from the Isle of Wight Bay laps the edges of the center's bay-front promenade.

The center's two-phase, \$22 million expansion and renovation project wrapped up last year, adding meeting space and a 1,200-seat performing-arts center. The convention center has 25 meetings rooms, including two that offer water views: the 24,000-square-foot Bayfront Ballroom on the second floor and the 14,000-square-foot Dockside Hall beneath it on the first floor.

Both spaces are great for dinners, receptions and other social events, but when planners use those rooms for meetings, they sometimes have to face attendees away from the view to keep their attention, said Larry Noccolino, executive director of the convention center.

On the Atlantic Ocean side, attendees will find 10 miles of beach and the city's three-mile-long boardwalk, which is a favorite



The Ocean City boardwalk hums with activity.

*Courtesy Town of Ocean City*



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# GOLF MEETINGS

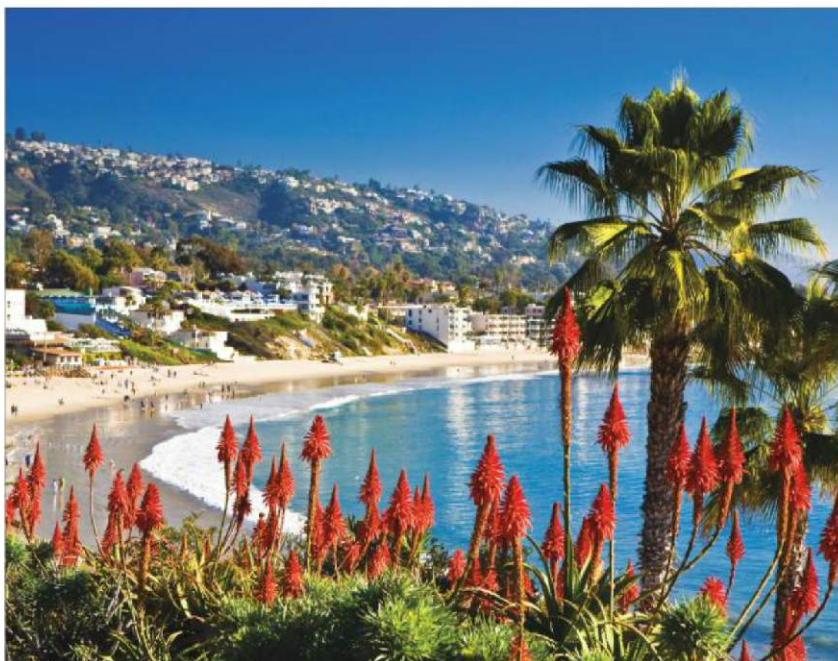


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*Courtesy VisitLagunaBeach.com*

**Beautiful plants and a West Coast vibe welcome visitors to Laguna Beach.**

seaside attraction. Trams shuttle guests to bars and restaurants along the boardwalk.

The oceanfront Clarion Resort Fontainebleu Hotel has a 40,000-square-foot conference center; the Carousel Hotel, the Princess Royale, the Dunes Manor, the Holiday Inn, the Hilton and the Grand Hotel are Atlantic-facing properties with a range of meeting and function spaces.

Planners can also charter boats for parties or fishing trips, and attendees enjoy the city's two amusement parks: the Jolly Roger Park on the north end of town and the Jolly Roger on the Pier.

**[www.ococcan.com](http://www.ococcan.com)**

## **Laguna Beach, California**

Laguna Beach sits smack between Santa Monica and San Diego on southern California's Pacific Coast. The city has nearly eight miles of beaches, all connected and all dotted with beachfront hotels.

The 167-room Surf and Sand Resort has 10,000 square feet of meeting space in 12 meeting rooms, and the 248-room Montage Laguna Beach has 35,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space, including two oceanfront lawns and a beach terrace. The Loft, one of the Montage's three restaurants, can be divided to offer private

dining and meeting space with balconies overlooking the ocean.

The Pacific Edge Hotel has a "hip surf vibe," said Ashley Johnson, director of brand marketing and communications for Visit Laguna Beach. The 125-room hotel converted guest rooms into five 10-person beach bungalows, each with its own bar and beach deck. The Ranch at Laguna Beach recently held its soft opening and expects to be fully open by year's end. Formerly the Aliso Creek Inn, the renovated hotel expanded to 90 rooms and will have a spa, a restaurant and about 20,000 square feet of meeting space.

The ocean off Laguna Beach is a marine reserve that doesn't allow motorized watercraft, which means pristine waters for kayaking, paddleboarding and paddleboard yoga. The Laughter Yoga Institute offers group beach-yoga sessions to teach people how to laugh uncontrollably as a form of exercise.

Laguna Outreach for Community Arts gives docent-led tours of the beaches' popular tide pools where groups learn about the sea life before setting up on the beach to paint the creatures they encountered, Johnson said.

**[www.visitlagunabeach.com](http://www.visitlagunabeach.com)**

[www.smallmarketmeetings.com](http://www.smallmarketmeetings.com)