



THE VALLEY OF THE SUN IS A HOTBED OF SPORTS TOURISM

By Ann Shepphird

The Greater Phoenix area's prowess in hosting big sports events has become well known. In recent years, the Valley of the Sun has welcomed the **NCAA Men's Basketball Final Four**, the **College Football Championships** and the **Super Bowl** (revisiting the area in 2023). The area also hosts large-scale annual events such as the **Waste Management Phoenix Open** (aka the "Greatest Show on Grass"). The biggest local sports event is one the Valley of the Sun has hosted since 1947: the **Cactus League**. Featuring 15 **Major League Baseball** teams holding games over a period of six weeks in 10 stadiums throughout the Valley of the Sun, the Cactus League attracts more than 1.9 million people and generates an estimated \$644.2 million in economic impact.

What might not be as well known are all the little extras the area provides for sports events and sports-related meetings of all sizes. From world-class museums and galleries to speakeasies and innovative restaurant concepts, the Greater Phoenix area offers a variety of unique venues for incoming groups.

DOWNTOWN PHOENIX

There are two Cactus League facilities located within the

Phoenix city limits — **Camelback Ranch-Glendale and Maryvale**. But it's the downtown area that's a real hub for sports activities, with **Chase Field** (regular season home to the **Arizona Diamondbacks**), **Talking Stick Resort Arena** (home to the city's **NBA** and **WNBA** teams, in addition to the **Indoor Football League's Arizona Rattlers**) and the **Phoenix Convention Center** all within walking distance of one another. Featuring 900,000 sq. ft. of meeting and exhibition space, the convention center not only hosts the fan festivals for large events like the Super Bowl and the Final Four, but can also accommodate tournaments for sports like basketball, volleyball, gymnastics and dance.

"Downtown Phoenix continues to be the epicenter of fan activity, with a state-of-the-art convention center, expanding hotel capacity, and an ever-growing list of dining and entertainment options, all within walking distance," says **Lorne Edwards**, Senior Vice President of Sales and Services for **Visit Phoenix**.

The center is located across the street from the 1,000-room **Sheraton Grand Phoenix**, which features 110,000 sq. ft. of meeting and event space. Last year, the hotel was purchased from the city by **Marriott International**, which plans to extensively renovate the property to show off its new strategy

for the Sheraton brand. Nearby, the 693-room **Hyatt Regency Phoenix** — which has more than 50,000 sq. ft. of meeting space — is also undergoing a major renovation project.

Also located downtown is the 517-room **Renaissance Phoenix**, which features more than 51,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. The hotel has its own speakeasy, *Melinda's Alley*, which (as its name suggests) is accessed through an alley with a red light indicating when it's open.

The downtown area is increasingly filled with these types of unique homegrown venues from cocktail bars (*Bitter & Twisted*) to underground speakeasies (*Valley Bar*) to concert spaces (*Crescent Ballroom*) to multiuse facilities like the *Duce*, which includes a boxing ring among its entertainment offerings.

In the **Roosevelt Row Arts District**, the boutique hotel **FOUND:RE Phoenix** features art-filled meeting space for groups of up to 200. Creative gathering spaces include the *Churchill*, *Sazerac*, *MonOrchid*, *The Dressing Room*, a new brewpub called *Wilderness* and a soon-to-be-opened female-owned one called *Greenwood Brewing*.

Not far from Roosevelt Row, the **Phoenix Art Museum** can accommodate everything from a small meeting to a large reception for up to 600 people amid its 18,000-piece art collection. Nearby, the **Heard Museum**, which was founded in 1929 and is dedicated to the advancement of American Indian art, can accommodate up to 1,000 participants.

Attendees looking for a unique way to get from site to site might consider using pedicabs. **Arizona Pedal Cab** — the oldest established pedicab company in the state — provides customized tours and an extensive knowledge of the area.

SCOTTSDALE

Scottsdale is home to two Cactus League stadiums: **Scottsdale Stadium** and **Salt River Fields at Talking Stick**. Located within walking distance of **Scottsdale Stadium**, the **Hotel Valley Ho** features meeting space for groups of up to 500 and is planning a complete revamp of its restaurant this summer.

The city is also home to the **Waste Management Phoenix Open**, which attracts more than 650,000 people each winter

and “has gained global notoriety as a not-to-be-missed stop on the PGA tour,” says Edwards. The **Phoenix Open** is held on the **TPC Stadium Course**, one of two 18-hole golf courses at the **Fairmont Scottsdale Princess**, which offers 316,000 sq. ft. of meeting and event space. In recent years, the Fairmont has added 102 new guestrooms, a new pool and the **Fairmont Gold Meeting Center** for smaller groups.

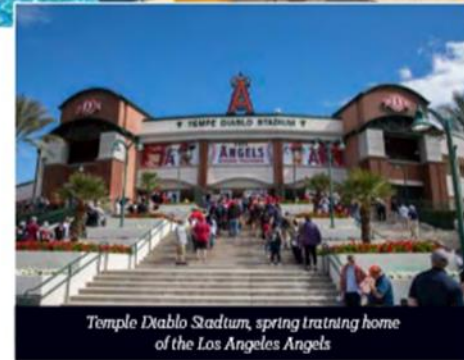
Also in Scottsdale, **The Phoenician** recently completed a three-year renovation project — the most extensive since the resort opened in 1988. It included a redesign of the golf course, guestrooms and public areas, and a brand-new, three-story spa that features a rooftop pool and 24 treatment rooms. The 643-room hotel offers 160,000 sq. ft. of indoor-outdoor meeting and event space.

TEMPE

Tempe Diablo Stadium is the oldest of the Cactus League's spring training facilities. Tempe is also home to the main campus of **Arizona State University**, which features the **Mona Plummer Aquatic Center** and **Sun Devil Fitness Center**, offering 135,000 sq. ft. of indoor space that can host sports such as badminton, gymnastics, soccer, volleyball, racquetball, weightlifting and basketball, in addition to outdoor soccer fields and tennis courts. ASU's **Sun Devil Stadium** is undergoing a \$300 million renovation designed to transform the venue into a year-round events center and entertainment district.



Salt River Fields, Scottsdale



Temple Diablo Stadium, spring training home of the Los Angeles Angels

Offsite arts venues available for groups include the **ASU Gammage** theater, the **Tempe Center for the Arts** and (for the culinary arts) **Culinary Dropout Tempe**. Breweries with private space include **Pedal Haus Brewery** and **Four Peaks Brewing Company**, which provides space at its 8th Street location and at its Wilson Street Tasting Room. For something a little different, Tempe's new **Lumberjaxes** axe-throwing facility can be rented for groups of up to 100.

Recently renovated hotels with meeting space include the 353-room **Phoenix Marriott Resort Tempe at The Buttes** and the 303-room **Tempe Mission Palms**. A new **Canopy by Hilton** hotel is expected to open in mid 2020.

venues for groups: The Farmhouse, the Big Red Barn and the Meadow.

In a twist on the brewpub concept, Mesa is home to **Cider Corps**, Arizona's first cidery, which features a variety of ciders brewed onsite and space for groups in the downtown area.

GLENDALE AND PEORIA

The Super Bowl, the College Football Championships and the Final Four — not to mention the home games for the NFL's **Arizona Cardinals** — are all played at **State Farm Stadium** (formerly the University of Phoenix Stadium) in Glendale. Located across from the stadium in the **Westgate** shopping



Sloan Park in Mesa, the spring training home of the Chicago Cubs

MESA

In Mesa, the **Chicago Cubs** play at **Sloan Park** while the **Oakland A's** play at **Hohokam Stadium**, which recently completed a multimillion-dollar renovation. But the city also welcomes a variety of other sports, according to **Suzanne Keller**, Visit Mesa's Director of Sports. "We have hosted a wide range of sporting events here in Mesa over the years," says Keller. "Our fields are full pretty much year round with soccer, baseball, golf, flag football and lacrosse events."

Keller also pointed to a rise in new sporting events, including a **Tough Mudder** obstacle race course. "We are seeing incredible growth in untraditional sports, which gives destinations like Mesa the chance to bring events that utilize more of our unique space and hotels," she says.

The main meeting facility is the **Mesa Convention Center**, which features 20,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. Also available for group events is the **Mesa Arts Center** and, just east of Mesa in Queen Creek, **Schnepf Farms**, which provides three

and entertainment district, the **Renaissance Glendale Hotel & Spa** features more than 115,000 sq. ft. of meeting space.

The city also boasts the **Gila River Arena**, which is home to the NHL's **Arizona Coyotes**, and **Camelback Ranch-Glendale**, which is the Cactus League home for the **Los Angeles Dodgers** and the **Chicago White Sox**.

In Peoria, they've built a unique meeting space right into the park where Cactus League games are held for the **Seattle Mariners** and the **San Diego Padres**. The **Colonnade at Peoria Sports Complex** features 3,300 sq. ft. of space with views onto the field at Peoria Stadium along with state-of-the-art AV technology and full-service catering. Across from the field, the **P83** entertainment district offers restaurants, shopping and a new virtual shooting range in an upscale lounge called **Modern Round**.

Overall, the Valley of the Sun's portfolio of sports venues, convention centers, resorts and entertainment and cultural assets promise a rich hospitality experience, on gameday and beyond.