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DESTINATION: MILWAUKEE ... A RISING STAR

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DESTINATION

A STAR ON THE RISE

MILWAUKEE

Not long ago, Milwaukee was plagued by a poor reputation, considered a city past its prime. But investments in the city and revitalization projects have Milwaukee's star on the rise, especially as a meetings destination.

BY AMANDA N. WEGNER



Iron Horse Hotel

"It always gets a smile when I say Milwaukee is a fly-into city, not a flyover city," says Joe Kurth, General Manager of the historic Pfister Hotel, located blocks from Lake Michigan in Milwaukee's East Town neighborhood.

Danica Potier, Director of Sales at The Iron Horse Hotel, adds "Milwaukee has been put on the map, even in the last five years. It is the place to be, whereas not long ago, it was just a blip on the radar."

Affordable, accessible and chockfull of amenities, Milwaukee, as evidenced by a handful of upcoming major conferences and expos with an estimated economic impact of \$8.5 million, is becoming the go-to destination for meeting planners near and far.

Big on value

For events large and small, Milwaukee is the place to be. "A big city, but without the big-city hassle," says Paul Upchurch, VISIT Milwaukee's new President and CEO. "The three keys to Milwaukee are value, accessibility and affordability. You really get a complete package here. We have the spaces, the places and the people. Within just a few blocks, you get amazing dining options, culture, history, entertainment and museums ... really everything your attendees might want to do. In fact, they'll have difficulty not rounding out their visit here!"

Kaelyn Perlberg, Catering Operations Man-

ager at Potawatomi Bingo Casino, where dining, culture and entertainment come bundled in one torch-topped package, echoes that. "We are a hidden gem for meetings. Clearly, there are a lot of things to do in, say, Chicago, but you can do that all here as well, but at a third of the price. It's easy for meeting planners to keep people entertained."

Milwaukee, with its central Midwest location, is also a value for travel. "Access to and around the area is fantastic compared to other larger cities in the Midwest," says Jason Hartlund, Vice President of Brewers Enterprises, which operates the meeting spaces at Miller Park. "That alone makes Milwaukee a pretty attractive destination."

Kurth even goes so far to say that with the recent expansion at Mitchell Airport and ensuing airfare wars, Milwaukee has netted some of the lowest fares in the country. All these amenities come at a great value. And they have for a while, regardless of the economic downturn. During the downturn, "value" has been the selling proposition for cities of all sizes when courting meetings. But as business turns around, as it already is, Milwaukee will continue to be a value, jam-packed with extras.

"The new normal is something that Milwaukee has always offered," says Kurth. "We thrive on quality offerings at a good price. Having your event in Milwaukee has al-

ways been, and will continue to be, a smart choice."

Milwaukee is a value destination where visitors can convene productively. In fact, Runzheimer International, the national consulting firm specializing in transportation, travel and living costs, ranked Milwaukee the most affordable city for food and lodging when compared to cities it competes with for visitors.

Milwaukee ranked as the 60th least expensive major city out of 69 cities on the Runzheimer Meal and Lodging index report. Travel Web site Hotwire ranked Milwaukee in its top 10 "2008 Best Places for Value Vacations."

"A lot of the allure of Milwaukee is that it has remained affordable. Planners also realize that there is a lot to do here. Attendees can go offsite, as a group or on their own, and find something around nearly every corner," says Iron Horse's Potier.

Even in the winter. "So what if it snows in January? We're people who know what to do in the offseason with phenomenal culture and outstanding facilities, and we're much more affordable than those sunny, major league locales," says Kurth. "Here, you'll always get a major league city with minor league pricing."

Choices abound

From the Wisconsin Center District, featuring the recently renamed Frontier Airlines Center that can accommodate over 12,000 in the Exhibit Hall — its largest space — to setting your attendees free to mingle in Windhover Hall at the Milwaukee Art Museum, there are plenty of meetings options in Milwaukee. Here are a few that are new or have recently been updated.

Miller Park: Since renovations brought the space up-to-date two seasons ago, the five meeting rooms in the Brewers Conference Center at Miller Park have been bustling.

"It's a great space for meeting planners," says Tai Chamness Pauls, Special Events Manager for Brewers Enterprises. The five rooms in the center, all named for Brewers celebrities, can accommodate 25 to 100 people for meetings, breakout sessions and seminars. Conference center space can be used in conjunction with other spaces within the park, such as