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meetings + events

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Rolling the Dice



Promising intriguing locations and amenities, Colorado's three casino towns and two Native American Indian casinos offer winning settings as meeting and event destinations.

Cripple Creek

It seems that Chris Herndon, who has planned annual meetings for the Colorado Coroners Association for many years, hit the jackpot when she opted to bring her group to a casino town. Cripple Creek "is our favorite venue," Herndon says, after planning her association's meetings at the Double Eagle Hotel and Casino Conference Center there in 2006 and 2008.

Cripple Creek and the Double Eagle offered good value, strong customer service and a fun, central location, Herndon says. Just 40 miles from Colorado's geographic center, easy-to-reach Cripple Creek is worlds away from the state's larger metropolitan areas when it comes to the cost of rooms and food, she notes.

The Double Eagle has conference and banquet facilities for groups of up to 360 with a state-of-the-art audio-visual system.

Situated on the southwest slopes of Pikes Peak, just one hour from Colorado Springs, Cripple Creek's roots are as an old mining town, explains Mary Lou Kime, group sales manager at the Double Eagle. Visitors can quickly orient themselves with a trip to the Pikes Peak Heritage Center. "It gives the whole history of the Pikes Peak region back to the dinosaurs."

The historic city is home to a number of museums including the Outlaws and Lawmen Jail Museum, Old Homestead House Museum and others. From mid-May to mid-October, a restored steam engine chugs along a four-mile tour through the goldmining district. There's the 174-seat Butte Opera House, dating back to 1896, for plays and melodramas. Accommodations in Cripple Creek range from historic B&Bs to up-to-date hotels.

Black Hawk and Central City

Black Hawk and Central City to the north, just about an hour west of Denver, also have their roots in the state's mining history. For Sid Wilson, president of A Private Guide, the casino towns represent the roots of his business as well. "We've been in business since 1991. We actually started the company because casino gambling was passed by the state's voters in 1991."

Today, Wilson's company whisks groups from Denver to Black Hawk and Central City for daytrips. The towns offer an easy-to-access mountain experience coupled with fine dining and the exotic fun of gambling.

In August 2008, A Private Guide hosted a group of nearly 400 guests who were part of a larger convention taking place in Denver. They boarded spacious motor coaches for the trip up scenic Clear Creek Canyon and professional guides provided interpretation of the scenery and history along the way.

"They arrived and were able to have a nice dining experience up there and got a chance to pull a few handles," Wilson says. "They had a good time and were back in Denver by midnight."

While the two casino towns currently are a bit limited for meeting space, the near future is bright with Ameristar

Casino Black Hawk planning an expansion. Event space for 500 that includes a grand ballroom holding up to 300 to 350 for a sit-down dinner, 536 hotel rooms, a rooftop pool and a full-service spa are all on the to-do list for the project, says Heather Leigh, Ameristar Black Hawk's public relations manager. Completion is projected for September 2009.

Until then, the towns feature venues suited to small groups, with meeting spaces for up to about 60 people and 600 hotel rooms. Like Cripple Creek, Black Hawk and Central City have rich mining histories. The area features three churches dating to the mid- 1800s, the renowned and carefully preserved Central City Opera House and numerous historic homes and buildings.

"This is an untapped market," says Joanne Lah, executive director for the Black Hawk/ Central City Visitors & Convention Bureau. "If people are looking to do something that's unique, we're it. We have great history, great cultural opportunities and gaming, and then we have these great amenities."

Sky Ute Casino Resort

Colorado's Four Corners Region is home to the brand new Southern Ute Indian Tribe's Sky Ute Casino Resort and Conference Center in Ignacio. The facility opened in late November 2008 to excitement and a rapidly filling calendar, says Ben Fernandez, executive director of marketing. Located just 10 minutes from the Durango airport, Sky Ute Casino is easy to reach, yet offers the allure of a southwestern Colorado setting. Should guests tire of 400 slot machines, an indoor pool with a lazy river and the 24-lane bowling center that are just steps from the conference facilities, they can head to Durango, Mesa Verde National Park or other attractions.



Sky Ute Casino can host crowds of up to 2,000 people for conferences, live sporting and entertainment events, banquets and receptions. The 19,000-square-foot conference center can be divided into four smaller, more intimate meeting spaces.

Ute Mountain Casino Hotel Resort

Farther west in the heart of Colorado's southwestern corner, Towaoc is located southwest of Cortez and home to the Ute Mountain Casino Hotel Resort, nestled in the shadow of the Sleeping Ute Mountain. The full-service resort offers 90 hotel rooms, an RV park, restaurant and gift shop as well as conference and meeting space for up to 800. Large meeting spaces can be divided into smaller rooms as well. The facility can seat groups of up to about 500 for sit-down banquets.

Looking for a close-in mountain setting or the dramatic Western beauty that Colorado's Four Corners Region exudes? Calling on a casino venue could be a gamble that pays off as a new favorite destination.

Get Connected:

Black Hawk/Central City Visitors & Convention Bureau // 877.282.8804 / www.visitbhcc.com

Cripple Creek // 877.858.4653 / www.cripple-creek.co.us

Sky Ute Casino Resort // 888.842.4180 / www.skyutecasino.com

Ute Mountain Casino Hotel Resort // 800.258.8007 / www.utemountaincasino.com