



**Valuable assets.** Left: Buddha statue at RISD (Rhode Island School of Design) Museum in Providence, R.I. Above, from top: Fenway Park in Boston; Sands Casino Resort in Bethlehem in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley; and the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City.

# NOTABLE NORTHEAST

THE REGION MAY BE the oldest in the country, but pride in its deep-seated roots doesn't stop the Northeast from evolving. Whether it's a bustling metropolis like Manhattan or a charming New England town like Providence, each city possesses its own distinct energy and personality, complete with luxury hotels, innovative restaurants and attractions for the family if they decide to tag along. Producing roughly a quarter of the country's gross domestic product, cities in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New York and Rhode Island are affordable, exciting and easy to reach.

## **Boston, Massachusetts**

Perhaps best known for its rich history, higher education and wicked accent, Boston is a major player in the convention game in the Northeast as the city's long-term infrastructure investment continues. In the past decade, the Logan International Airport received a \$4.4 billion facelift, the \$800 million Boston Convention and Exhibition Center was built and about 5,000 hotel rooms were added to the city. Last year also marked the completion of the country's largest underground tunnel system, or the Big Dig, in Boston—a \$15 billion, 20-year investment.

2012 will be a big year for the city, too. Fenway Park, home to the Boston Red Sox, celebrates its 100th birthday in April. With 15 private rooms and a 50,000-sq.-ft. meeting space, one of America's most beloved ballparks is a place to consider for meetings and special events during its centennial year. The newly renovated and expanded Boston Tea Party Ships and Museum opens in June 2012. With a capacity of 499, it's a new venue to look at as well.

If you're looking for something more traditional, Boston has three convention centers, each with its own personality. The Boston Convention and

Exhibition Center, which opened in 2004, is a flexible, customer-friendly and technologically advanced convention facility located eight minutes from Logan International Airport and near an Amtrak station. The John B. Hynes Veteran Memorial Convention Center, located in the heart of Boston's Back Bay neighborhood, recently completed a \$30 million update featuring new interior design and technology upgrades. The World Trade Center, located at the Seaport Hotel in South Boston, boasts the largest convention hall of the three.

"Our proximity to the mountains and beaches makes Boston a perfect destination to take advantage of pre- and post-visits following a meeting," says Beth Stehley, vice president of convention services and sales at Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau. Stehley recommends heading out to the Boston Harbor Islands, Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket or The Berkshires for an authentic Boston-area getaway.

## **Hartford, Connecticut**

Hartford may be the Insurance Capital of the World, but there's so much more to the historic town. Its proximity to Springfield makes the Hartford-Springfield Metropolitan Area the second most populous region in New England and is revered by locals for its dining scene. With more than 40 independent three- and four-star restaurants within walking distance of downtown, there's something for every palette.

A sophisticated city with a small town feel, Hartford only accommodates one large group at a time. "Everyone knows when the group is in town and they get lots of recognition in the restaurants and shops," says Michael Van Parys, president of the Greater Hartford CVB. "When an association has a meeting or convention here, they are always blown away by the uptick in attendance," says Van Parys.

Pam Cerrone, manager of community relations at Price Chopper Supermarkets,

## **KNOW | Facts & Figures**

### **BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

Area guest rooms: 35,000

Convention center: Boston

Convention and Exhibition Center

▶ Exhibit space: 575,000 square feet

▶ Meeting rooms: 84

### **HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT**

Area guest rooms: 1,800

Convention center:

Connecticut Convention Center

▶ Exhibit space: 140,000 square feet

▶ Meeting rooms: 23

### **LEHIGH VALLEY, PENNSYLVANIA**

Area guest rooms: 5,000

Largest meeting facility: Holiday Inn

Conference Center, Allentown

▶ Meeting space: 15,364 square feet

▶ Meeting rooms: 8

### **NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

Area guest rooms: 71,000

Convention center:

Jacob K. Javits Convention Center

▶ Exhibit space: 760,000 square feet

▶ Meeting rooms: 75

### **PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND**

Area guest rooms: 5,500

Convention center:

Rhode Island Convention Center

▶ Exhibit space: 100,000 square feet

▶ Meeting rooms: 23

Go to [connectyourmeetings.com/places](http://connectyourmeetings.com/places) for more on Northeast destinations.



## EXPERIENCE | Lehigh Valley Factory Tours

In the Lehigh Valley region of Pennsylvania, there are a number of factories and sites worth visiting. Headquartered in Nazareth, Pa., five miles from Lehigh Valley, is the world-famous Martin guitars factory, with tours offered Monday through Friday. Attendees can swirl, sniff and sip along the Lehigh Valley Wine Trail, home to nine family-owned wineries, any of which can host a special VIP event. If attendees are bringing children, plan a trip to the Crayola Experience in Easton, where they'll enter a world of discovery as they encounter more than a dozen hands-on activities and learn how Crayola crayons and markers are made. Two other options for off-site trips are the Just Born Candy Company (the brains behind Peeps, Mike and Ike, and Hot Tamales), headquartered in Bethlehem, and the Mack Trucks assembly plant in Allentown.



**Where the chips fall.** Sands Casino Resort opened in 2009 in Bethlehem, Pa., providing planners with another venue option for meetings and events in the state's Lehigh Valley.

loves meeting in Hartford. "The Connecticut Convention Center is one of a handful of locations that can accommodate the large group of teammates [1,500] and trade partners [750+] that we bring," says Cerrone, who opts for the four-star Hartford Marriott Downtown for accommodations. "It's also close to a number of our stores, and the city is clean and easily accessible."

The New England Region Volleyball Association is returning to Hartford for the third year for its Mizuno Winterfest tournament at the convention center. Dave Peixoto, commissioner for the association, likes how affordable the city is and how helpful the staff at the center is. "[They went] above and beyond working with us during our event. One of their key staff even volunteered to sing the national anthem to open our event. That's service," says Peixoto, who booked his next three annual meetings in Hartford.

### Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania

Lehigh Valley, which is made up of the three towns of Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton, is Pennsylvania's fastest-

growing region. Each town has historic downtown districts and eclectic, trendy neighborhoods.

"We have locations for each different type of meeting," says Marc Kaminetsky, national sales manager at Discover Lehigh Valley. For example, the newly opened ArtsQuest Center at SteelStacks, located on the site of the former Bethlehem Steel plant, is a 65,000-sq.-ft., multiuse performing arts center featuring floor-to-ceiling glass walls offering a spectacular view of the plant's iconic blast furnaces.

Also in Bethlehem, the Sands Casino Resort, which opened in 2009, features 300 guest rooms, 5,000 square feet of modern meeting space and more than 3,000 square feet of exhibition space. Located 10 minutes from the Lehigh Valley International Airport, the resort has an in-house team of meeting planners and AV specialists.

"The airport is a tremendous asset," says Kaminetsky. "It has very convenient flights from hub cities, the lines are never very long, parking is a lot less expensive and there's no tram needed," says Kaminetsky. He also emphasizes the

value found at the region’s hotels. “The majority of our hotels don’t charge for parking and don’t have a lot of those hidden fees that major cities tend to hit you with.”

There are plenty of teambuilding activities in Lehigh Valley. Take your group for an exhilarating ride at the Lehigh Valley Grand Prix, or to learn something new at Sagra Bistro, a restaurant that offers mozzarella cheese-making classes and murder mystery dinners. Dutch Springs recreational facility in Bethlehem offers a wide variety of teambuilding activities, like trust exercises, highropes courses and an aqua park.

**New York, New York**

As the most populous city in the United States, New York City remains the nation’s biggest draw for people who want to take care of business and have a little fun, too. The energy, vibrancy and diversity of New York City is an iconic draw offering a multitude of possibilities,

from small meetings to in-house hotel conferences to large conventions and trade shows. With the promise of record-breaking attendance, New York provides your group with thousands of options, low transportation costs and easy access.

“New York’s the center of the universe,” says Jaclyn Bernstein, president and partner at Empire Force Events. “Business revolves and evolves here. It’s a destination people want to go to anyway.”

When Bernstein is planning a meeting or special event in New York, she often opts for the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. “In order to get to Ellis Island, you have to take a ferry from Battery Park, so you get to see a lot of the city from the water, which accomplishes something very New York.” Bernstein also recommends the skyline-sweeping rooms at Top of the Rock Observation Deck.

There are plenty of new lodging and events options in New York. “By year’s end, New York will have approximately 90,000 hotel rooms throughout the five

boroughs, and 7,000 more rooms in the pipeline,” says Christopher Heywood, vice president of communications at NYC and Company. “The number of hotels has tripled, offering excellent opportunities for meeting planners with options at every price point.”

New hotels, including Hyatt 48 Lex and the Conrad New York, open this year, and many more are undergoing renovations in order to be competitive with the new inventory popping up in the city. Also, the massive, glass-enclosed Jacob K. Javits Convention Center has been undergoing renovations since 2009, and is currently installing the largest green roof in the Northeast. The facility has 1.1 million square feet of meeting space after the nine-phase expansion added exhibition, pre-function and outdoor space.

**Providence, Rhode Island**

Providence has been called many things over the years, from the “Beehive of

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## TIPS

**Laugh Out Loud**

One of Boston's best venues for comedy, Improv Asylum in the North End, has group training, custom shows and a student training center to lighten meeting attendees' moods.

**Row, Row, Row**

The Charles Regatta, the largest rowing race in the world, is held in Boston every year, but you can get your team working in unison anytime with teambuilding rowing programs through Community Rowing Inc., which plans outings for organizations and corporations on the Charles River. Learn more at [communityrowing.org](http://communityrowing.org).

**Plan to Return**

When planning meetings in New York City, don't put too much on the itinerary. New York City offers so many entertainment options, it's impossible to fit everything into one event. Plan one big event at an iconic venue, and encourage attendees to add a day or two of leisure time to their trips if they'd like to experience more of the city.



**Creative capital.** That's the moniker for Providence, R.I., which is home to a number of artistic institutions including the Rhode Island School of Design and Johnson and Wales University.

Industry" to "The Renaissance City" and now, the "Creative Capital." Today, the name fits in the city with its vibrant arts scene and large community of talented chefs (some of whom are James Beard-award nominees). Home to Ivy League Brown University, the Rhode Island School of Design, and Johnson and Wales University, Providence is truly a college town: smart, stylish, passionate and creative.

With an intimate, small-town feel, you can easily walk from venue to venue without feeling overwhelmed. And yet, there are all the amenities of a metropolis: great restaurants, noteworthy hotels, shopping and fascinating attractions, like the Trinity Repertory Theater Company, where Oscar-nominees Richard Jenkins and Viola Davis got their starts.

Jean Plotkin, Labs21 conference manager, came away with a great impression of the city after planning a meeting in Providence. "Everyone we worked with, from the Providence Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau to the Rhode Island Convention Center to the local businesses, treated us with incredibly personalized attention, like we were their only clients.

"We took attendees over to [the universities] for off-site tours of the school's laboratory facilities, [which] were fantastic, but the drives were particularly interesting, as we got to see a lot of the historic homes along the way," says Plotkin. "The conference staff also headed over to Federal Hill for dinner one night. I definitely recommend that other groups go there at least once during their stay."

Plotkin was also pleased with the city's sustainability efforts. "Our conference focuses on green high-tech facilities, so it's important for our event to walk the talk," she says. "The Rhode Island Convention Center has green hospitality certification, and our event managers helped us build more sustainable elements into our catering and operations."

She also liked that Providence is a foot-friendly city with a good public transit system and it's welcoming for families. "[About] a quarter of our attendees brought family with them and made a vacation out of the trip," she says. "With so much to do in Providence, and with Boston and Newport so close by, it was easy for them to see other sights while in the area."

—Kate Parham

Go to [connectyourmeetings.com/providence-ri](http://connectyourmeetings.com/providence-ri) for more on the Providence, R.I., area.



**Q&A | Brian Hodge,**  
**Communications and Social Media Manager,**  
**Providence Warwick CVB**

**What do you most recommend meeting attendees do during their time off in Providence?**

I would have to highlight our fantastic restaurants. Providence is a great city where it is very easy to entertain over a meal.

**What's your favorite attraction?**

The RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] Museum. [It's] within walking distance to most hotels and is really an unexpected treat. Their collection is extensive and truly world class without being overwhelming.

**What do you love most about Providence?**

As much as I love spending time in the city, I enjoy that Rhode Island is the Ocean State, [home to] some of the best beaches in New England. It's just a short drive to the beach from just about everywhere in the state—a trait I especially value on that first warm day of spring.



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👑 Lehigh Valley has two of the most unique meeting venues on the East Coast. ArtsQuest Center at SteelStacks is a shining new arts, culture and entertainment center built on the grounds of the former Bethlehem Steel. About a minute away, the industry-inspired Sands Casino Resort Bethlehem features a luxurious new hotel, an events center and plenty of entertainment and dining. Meeting planners will find Lehigh Valley conveniently located with a wide range of affordable venues, dining, lodging and activities for any sized budget.

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