

Smart Meetings: The Intelligent Way to Plan in the Western Region

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Smart Perspectives

Meet amid the vines to revive employees and wow clients. It's commonly held that environments best suited for grape-growing are also ideal for human well-beings. Though that's reason enough to plan your meeting in a wine-producing region, it helps that wine country's relaxing aura evokes focused thinking and fresh ideas.

In wine country, enlivened productivity stems in part from breathtaking scenery: endless rows of meticulously planted vines gnarl messily onto themselves; gold-flecked hills roll gracefully over the land. And there are other sensory stimuli—the scent of aged oak, the taste of rich tannins, a cellar's faint chill and the rosy vibrancy that locals exude.

You can start your preliminary research on WineCountry.com, an excellent resource chock-full of information about wine-related travel. Its extensive event-planning section covers many regions. But before deciding where to plan in wine country, first decide whether to plan there.

PROS

Barbara Llewellyn, a noted event planner in Northern California, suggests that “wine country venues are inherently more interesting than most traditional halls in urban areas.” Attendees, she points out, benefit from an ambience that allows immediate relaxation. “This, in turn, translates into an audience that is willing and able to inhale the experience.”

Michael Green (michaelgreen.com), a wine expert regularly hired by Fortune 500 companies to design wine programs for conferences, lauds wine country meetings because they “brand a more laid-back corporate culture.” Green (also the wine consultant for Gourmet magazine) further observes that wine country locales have a sophisticated infrastructure with very comfortable hotel rooms and meeting space, while offering wonderful wine-related activities.

CONS

On the other hand, according to Llewellyn, the drawbacks of planning in wine country can include travel-time charges (such as caterers traveling from urban areas), the heat (summer can hit 100 degrees) and that the wine-country theme can leave little menu flexibility.

And Green raises a delicate issue: “If folks have a drinking problem, putting them in wine country might not be a good idea.”

It's also important to remember that wine country can be pricey. The luxury inherent to these regions will imbue your meeting with all that you want, but it will also cost plenty.

PLANNING TIPS

Congratulations, you've decided to meet in wine country! Now what?

Llewellyn recommends that you visit your destination multiple times before the event. This, she says, will help you develop accurate timelines (driving times in wine country can vary) and realistic expectations of venues.

And though it's imperative for every event to be organized with a timeline and supplies, it's especially important in wine country, says Llewellyn, "because resources are not as easily accessed. You can't just run to the market for a missing ingredient or beverage supplies."

As a basic program for group activities, you'll want to consider hot-air balloon rides, a bike tour or a cooking class, and certainly a wine-themed dinner.

