

Successful Meetings Start at Hotel Viking

Gone are the days when a spacious conference room, regularly scheduled snack breaks and state-of-the-art technology were the cornerstones of a successful meeting. These days, meeting planners are looking for a sense of place in addition to conventional services and amenities.

CVent, a leader in online event planning and technology, advises meeting planners to give at least as much thought to the destination as to the venue. Key points to consider:

- Walkability of the location
- Number of restaurants and the diversity of cuisine
- “Free time” access to a variety of activities
- Nearby family-friendly attractions for meetings that include partners and families

When the gathering involves incentives or teambuilding, the list gets even longer.

In its destination guide for meeting planners CVent describes Newport, R.I. as “Home to spectacular coastal scenery, awe-inspiring architecture, a thriving waterfront, miles of stunning beaches, celebrated restaurants, unique venues and warm hospitality.”

Welcome accolades, for sure, but let’s take a look at specifics.

From its perch atop Newport’s Historic Hill, Hotel Viking offers panoramic views of the harbor, the town and the surrounding area. For the most part, everything within sight is also within walking distance. Grab a pair of binoculars and extend the view to encompass significant sites of interest just a bit further afield, but still within an easy drive. For ideas, check our guide “10 Things to Do Within Five Miles of Hotel Viking,” including family-friendly suggestions for partners and kids of meeting attendees.

Clearly, some of Newport’s best eateries are located at Hotel Viking. Top of Newport Kitchen + Bar, with its spectacular 360-degree views, is a warm-weather must. Time it right, and group-friendly activities could include half-priced Friday raw bar, musical entertainment or special events like the annual Spirits & Stogies summer series of curated dinners pairing whiskey and cigars.

One Bellevue, the hotel’s main dining room, showcases Chef Barry Correia’s creative menu, also offered on the adjacent patio in season. Planning a winter meeting?

The patio remains an option as groups gather around the warm glow of an outdoor fireplace, hot chocolate or hot toddy in hand, toasting marshmallows for S'mores.

From hidden gems to guidebook staples, Newport is chock-full of iconic eateries suited to both meeting-goers and accompanying partners and kids. Breakfast is an all-day affair at Annie's. The old-fashioned diner (cash only), just a few blocks from Hotel Viking, is a Newport landmark. Slide into a booth or grab a stool at the counter and peruse the menu. Selections include everything from bacon and eggs to burgers and seafood.

Newport Creamery reigns supreme when it comes to legendary ice cream parlors. Established in 1928, the creamery's flagship location stands at the site of the original parlor on West Main Road in Middletown, RI. Good news: There's also an outlet just a few blocks from Hotel Viking at 181 Bellevue Ave.

Groups looking to experience authentic Old Newport should head for White Horse Tavern. America's oldest tavern, opened in 1673, was originally a private residence dating to 1652. During its first hundred years, the tavern was the de facto meeting place for private, public and even political gatherings. By the early 18th century, it was considered the place to lunch among Newport city councilors. The original structure's storied past includes an interim stint as a rooming house before it was purchased and restored as a tavern in the mid-1950s. Located on Marlborough Street, about a 10-minute walk from Hotel Viking, White Horse Tavern is known for serving fresh fish, clams and lobsters harvested in Narragansett Bay and complemented by produce grown at local farms. White Horse Tavern can accommodate groups of 12 to 120 in various configurations.

For optimal productivity, successful meetings require a delicate balance between business and recreation. Hotel Viking's Spa Fjör and the adjacent indoor swimming pool are made for relaxation. In its online guide for meeting planners, Discover Newport suggests myriad free-time activities, all within walking distance of Hotel Viking. Highlights include sailing, powerboat and sunset cruises by Classic Cruises of Newport, hop- aboard trolley tours by Viking Tours, curated visits to Newport's Gilded Age Mansions, tours of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, meandering strolls along the 3.5-mile Cliff Walk and stepping back in history at Fort Adams State Park.

In some cases, local and historic sites double as team- building venues. Fort Adams falls into that category. Newport Hospitality, Inc., part of the DMC Network worldwide alliance of independently owned destination management companies, often works in conjunction with Hotel Viking to plan and coordinate team-building activities. Among its popular events, an "Amazing Race"- style competition set in Fort Adams pits teams against one another in a race to discover clues and identify landmarks throughout the historic fort.

Other active team-building programs make the most of Newport's waterfront location.

"Newport is unique as an on-the-water destination," said Emily Ryan, director of operations, Newport Hospitality, Inc. "Some groups like to charter a few of the 12-meter racing boats. We assign 12 people to each team and they go out on the water in Narragansett Bay and race. We wrap up with a reception at the end where we announce the winners. It's a friendly competition that brings the group together."

Unique to Newport, the International Tennis Hall of Fame is available to groups for tennis and croquet tournaments. Customized scavenger hunts are another popular choice, giving participants an impromptu tour of historic Newport as they race to check off items on their lists. A perennially favorite team-building activity that also happens to be perfect when weather precludes outside adventures, Hotel Viking can stage Iron Chef- style competitions on site. As the chairman says at the start of each Iron Chef competition: "*Allez! Cuisine!*" Or, to turn the phrase and apply it to meeting planning, "*Allons-y!*" Let's go!

Now, to review our list: walkability, diverse dining and easy access to team-building and recreational activities. Check. Check. Check and check! Newport, RI gets high marks in all categories.

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