

Winnipeg Well Positioned to Attract Groups

The Prairie city boasts the talent, culture and creative class that position it as an attractive city for incentive programmes. *By Allan Lynch, March 15, 2010*

Some tourism literature describes Winnipeg as the Paris of the Prairies. Most of the destination reps focus on its central location as the geographic heart of Canada. But what the city really could be is a prime example of the talent, tolerance and technology of the creative community that futurist- author and academic Richard Florida says is the driving force for the 21st century economy.

Culture Centre



Winnipeg has the culture. It is home to the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, a symphony, the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra, 55 museums, several live theatres and dozens of art galleries and dance companies. And they work together in fun ways. For example, the Winnipeg Art Gallery hosts live jazz evenings on its roof garden, which is a ready-made programme element for groups. Out on the street, an array of designer-owned shops, interspersed with a diverse selection of exotic cafes, restaurants and pubs, line the leafy streets of the Arts and Design neighbourhood. It very much feels like a dynamic small town.

Helping with the technology portion of the equation are the city's five universities, three colleges and culinary school. But what is really going to lead the modern renaissance is the new Canadian Museum of Human Rights (CMHR), opening in 2012. According to chief operating officer Patrick O'Reilly, "this is a new approach to a museum." He says the museum will challenge visitors' own points of view on subjects ranging from aboriginal people, immigrants, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender.

The architecturally edgy building in the Forks section of Winnipeg features a total of 52,500 ft. of gallery space, a 5,500-sq.- ft. gallery, 350-seat theatre, three classrooms, a garden, which could be used for receptions, and a Great Hall, which will seat 600 people for dinner.

Neighbourhoods

There is a liveliness to Winnipeg and a clear civic pride that is more easily seen in a smaller place. It is a city of neighbourhoods. In French-speaking St. Boniface, groups can have cocktails in the former convent of the Grey Nuns, now Le Musee de Saint Boniface Museum.

At The Forks, groups can play at the Manitoba Children's Museum or make the Assiniboine and Red Rivers part of their programme. In winter, they can have an outdoor hockey game or skating party on the 9-kmlong ice surface. In

summer, they can commute by water taxi or put the symphony on a barge and enjoy a musical evening at the fully wired riverside amphitheatre.



Canadian Museum of Human Rights

Winnipeg as a conference location “scored surprisingly high” with the 894 delegates attending the Canadian Public Health Association 2009 annual conference in June, according to conference coordinator Sarah Pettenuzzo.

It had been 10 years since they last were in Winnipeg. Pettenuzzo says, “It was a very popular choice.”

Her group met at the Winnipeg Convention Centre (WCC) and used the Delta Winnipeg, Place Louis Riel Suite Hotel and Fort Garry Hotel for accommodations, which eliminated the need for ground transportation. “Winnipeg was actually a very affordable city to host a large conference in.

The meeting-room rentals at the WCC were certainly within our budget and the hotel rates were all very reasonable for delegates.”

WCC Layout

Pettenuzzo was impressed by the WCC. “The layout of the WCC is fabulous. It allows for a wide variety of sessions, from large to small. You can have meeting rooms and concurrent sessions happening on three different levels and it really helps with the flow of people. There wasn’t any large area of congestion. It’s also a green meeting facility, so it’s

great to see that hosting environmentally friendly meetings is on their radar.”

For those who want to get out of the city and see the prairie, The Radisson Hecla Oasis Resort is a relatively new offering (March, 2008) about two hours north of the city.

Mark Dosman, president of Strategic Site Selection, based in Guelph, Ont., booked a 50-person, three-day international conference there in July, 2009. His rationale was simple, “We wanted a resort in Manitoba, and this is an option that isn’t too far off the beaten path.” His programme had a lot of meetings, but also broke for some golf, which at Hecla, is only \$40 for a regular weekday green fee.

Dosman says, “You get great value for your money in Winnipeg, it’s a central location for travellers and hotels are easy to work with.”

www.meetingscanada.com/public/content.jsf?id=/winnipeg-well-positioned-to-attract-groups-19794