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MEETINGS
INDUSTRY

The words 'MEETINGS' and 'INDUSTRY' are rendered in large, 3D block letters. The letters are white with a yellow-to-orange gradient on the right side. Several small, stylized human figures in red shirts are shown climbing or standing on the letters, adding a sense of scale and activity. The background is a teal color with white clouds and decorative white lines and swirls.

FORECAST

CONVENE ON SITE

Too Short A Time in Long Beach

AS I GOT OFF OF MY JETBLUE FLIGHT IN Long Beach in late September, I had the feeling that I'd just landed at an off-the-beaten path resort. **The Long Beach Airport** feels like a throwback to the past, with its 1940s-era terminal, open-air walkways, and outdoor baggage claim — you know, when travel was glamorous.

But off the beaten path? Hardly. A 10-minute drive later, we arrived at my host hotel, the 374-room **Renaissance Long Beach**, in the midst of this thriving waterfront city.

I had a little over an hour to settle in before dinner. I spent much of it gazing out my room window across the other side of East Ocean Boulevard — at the beach, the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center, a fabulous Art Deco building, and all the people strolling and riding their bikes in the SoCal sunshine. Right around the corner on Pine Avenue, several grand 1930s banks are enjoying a second life as stylish restaurants. At **L'Opera**, I tucked into scrumptious homemade pasta bunches filled with butternut squash and ricotta, and watched the lights start to twinkle on throughout the city.

The next morning, over Chef Javier's Special Egg White Omelet at the Grill at the 469-room **Westin Long Beach**, I learned about the hotel's \$10-million renovation.

We crossed Ocean Boulevard for a tour of the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center, which includes the **Long Beach Arena** and Long Beach Performing Arts Center. A round building covered by the world's largest mural — "Planet Ocean," by renowned environmental artist Wyland — the arena is often mistaken by visitors for the Aquarium of the Pacific. In 2009, Wyland painted a second mural on top of the arena in celebration of Earth Day — the largest painting of the planet — in 24 hours. I got a bird's-eye view of that roof mural, and a panoramic view of the city and



OUT AND ABOUT IN LONG BEACH:

Clockwise from top —
A rendering of Long
Beach Airport, Renaissance Long Beach,
Westin Long Beach,
Aquarium of the
Pacific, and
L'Opera.





**FROM THE AIR, AT SEA,
AND ON THE GROUND:**
*From top to bottom —
A bird's-eye view of the
murals atop and
around the Long Beach
Arena, the Queen Mary,
Hotel Maya, and Long
Beach Marriott.*

curving coastline, while enjoying a delicious lunch inside a tent on the roof of the 528-room Hyatt Regency Long Beach.

After a quick tour of the Hyatt, I sat down with Mayor Bob Foster, who talked about the "dire straits" the city was in when the U.S. Navy pulled out of Long Beach and tens of thousands of aerospace jobs left the area during the 1990s. The city was forced to "build a different economic base," he said, focused on international trade — Long Beach is the second-busiest U.S. port and a leading gateway for trade between the United States and Asia — as well as tourism and the medical market. "It is a credit to Long Beach's political and business leaders that they used redevelopment funds wisely," Foster said. "Today, Long Beach is a diverse city. ... It has a small-town feel with all of the amenities of a major city."

I next took a behind-the-scenes tour of one of those amenities — **the Aquarium of the Pacific**. All around me, kids squealed with delight at seeing seals, otters, and all kinds of marine life up close in 50 exhibits.

Back at home base, I explored more of the Renaissance and enjoyed a signature cocktail in the sleek, inviting lobby bar. We headed off for a quick drive to the **Hotel Maya**, a Double-Tree by Hilton hotel that sits on 11 lush acres, with 197 guest rooms in five buildings offering views of the Long Beach waterfront. Groups that meet there have a variety of options to choose from among the property's 20,000 square feet of flexible meeting space.

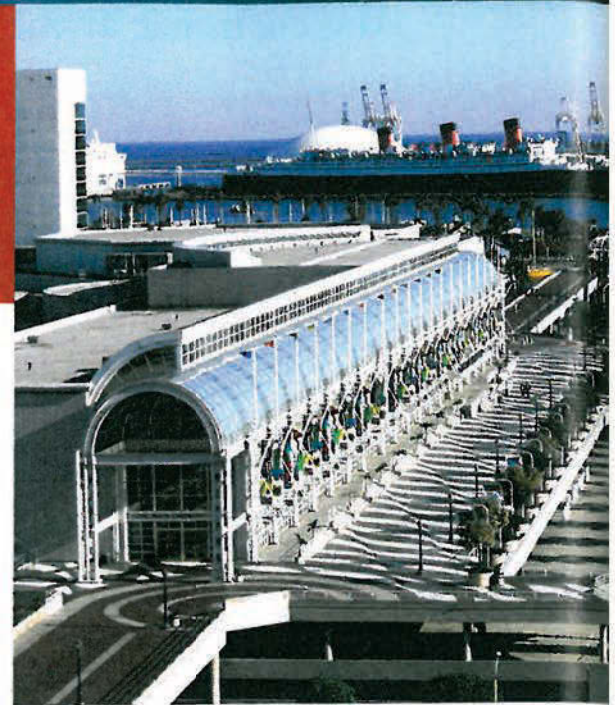
From there, a quick drive brought us to a bygone era — the **Queen Mary**, a combination floating historical hotel, special-event venue, and dining attraction. After a delightful tour of this luxury ocean liner, rich in history and architectural detail, we sat down to dinner onboard at Sir Winston's, where I enjoyed vegetable Wellington, one of the restaurant's classic offerings.

The next morning, I headed back to the Long Beach Airport, first stopping for breakfast, served al fresco on the new patio at the 308-room **Long Beach Marriott**. With its lush landscaping and views of the Skylinks Golf Course, it feels like you're in a tropical oasis. You would never know that you're minutes away from the Long Beach Airport, where my whirlwind trip all began. ■

— Michelle Russell

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Read more about Long Beach's meetings offerings on p. 86.

LONG BEACH



WHAT'S NEW IN LONG BEACH? Plenty, and the changes are apparent from the moment you land at Long Beach Airport, which is undergoing a \$136-million renovation and modernization project. Once you're in downtown Long Beach — a quick 10-minute drive from the airport — you'll find a city that continually reinvents itself, making an ideal meetings destination in the process.

You could say that Long Beach has long been going places. The introduction of the Pacific Electric Trolley at the turn of the last century led to Long Beach's growth as both a resort and a commercial center, making it America's fastest-growing city. Now California's seventh-largest city, Long Beach — just 20 miles south of Los Angeles — still embraces its resort and commercial roots. It's a mix of charming seaside ambiance and sophisticated urban vibe. You'll find diverse and trendy neighborhoods, a lively shopping and dining scene — 100-plus restaurants in eight blocks — and cultural and recreational attractions that capitalize on the city's oceanfront location and the fact that it owes its name to its five-and-a-half-mile sandy coastline.

Here's a look at what Long Beach offers for meetings, with a focus on what's new.

Getting There and Getting Around

Long Beach Airport (www.lgb.org) — serviced by JetBlue, Delta, US Airways, Alaska/Horizon Air, and Frontier — offers direct flights to major cities, including New York City; Washington, D.C.; Dallas; Seattle; Boston; and Chicago. The airport's extensive modernization project — on course to be completed in 2013 — includes a new parking structure (completed early and under budget), ramp improvements, gates, and a concourse with a central garden. A rooftop solar array in the new passenger concourse and energy-efficient lighting and water-conservation measures throughout the facility are among the initiatives that will put the airport in a LEED-qualifying position. Upgrades to its 1941 terminal building, a registered historic landmark, will pay homage to its Streamline Moderne architecture and ensure that the airport will lose none of its character — or any of its appeal as a manageable, convenient, and low-stress place to arrive at and depart from. And you can add reasonable to that list: According to cheapflights.com, Long Beach Airport is the most affordable U.S. airport.

With Los Angeles and Orange County airports a short 25-minute drive from downtown, Long Beach is just plain easy to get to.

As far as getting around town, attendees need look no farther than their own two feet. Not only will they want to walk around outside to enjoy Long Beach's 345 days of sunshine a year, but the city is compact and pedestrian-friendly, confirmed by its high ranking on WalkScore.com's list of the nation's most walkable large cities. Friendly downtown guides dressed in blue "Long Beach" shirts, blue caps, and khaki pants are stationed in a 40-block area to help visitors find restaurants, shops, and attractions.

Long Beach has also become one of the most bicycle-friendly U.S. cities, with more than 150 miles of bike paths now crisscrossing the city's 50 square miles. A new bike-share program will make bikes available for rent at solar-paneled locations (including most downtown hotels and attractions) at a nominal fee. The Bikestation at the First Street Transit Mall is the U.S.'s first full-service bike-transit facility.

For wheels of a different kind, the Passport local shuttle service offers complimentary transportation to all of downtown Long Beach's most popular attractions — including the Aquarium, the *Queen Mary*, Shoreline Village, and Pine Avenue.

The Long Beach Transit Gallery, which serves 20,000 commuters daily, recently underwent a \$5-million renovation, which included extensive soft lighting along the street and upgrades to bus shelters, landscaping, and kiosks.

Meeting Venues

The Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center (www.longbeachcc.com) offers more than 400,000 square feet of meeting and exhibit space, two VIP lounges, a full-service concierge/restaurant reservation desk, hospitality catering, and an on-site AV supplier. The center has 34 meeting rooms, a Grand Ballroom, and three exhibition halls. Its facilities include the Long Beach Arena, Center Theater, and the Terrace Theater. Combined, that opens up a lot of opportunities for groups.

More than \$8 million has been poured into sprucing up the cen-



RIGHT OF WAY:
Approximately \$9 million is being spent within three blocks of the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center to provide walkable access to downtown visitors.

ter, which has more of a boutique-style feel than your traditional convention-center environment. Upgrades include new Steelcase furniture throughout the Promenade to create comfortable minipod conversation spots; new lounge-style seating in the center's SAVOR Café; new carpeting throughout; an upgraded Green Room; and comfortable new seating in the 3,000-seat Terrace Theatre.

The *Queen Mary* (www.queenmary.com), a 1930s transatlantic ocean liner permanently docked in Long Beach since 1967, is a one-of-a-kind floating 314-room hotel, attraction, dining, and event space. On board, there's more than 80,000 square feet of function space in 14 Art Deco salons and a tri-level exhibit hall with 45,000 square feet of versatile space. Recent upgrades have been made to its banquet space, public space, guest rooms, and three restaurants, whose menus embrace sustainable dining practices.

A spectacular underwater world of 11,000 animals in 50 exhibits makes for a memorable special-event backdrop at the Aquarium of the Pacific (www.aquariumofpacific.org). SAVOR catering (which also services the convention center) makes sure that events for groups from 20 to 10,000 are a feast for the palate as well as the senses.

Hotels

With more than 5,000 rooms citywide in the Long Beach area, groups can take their pick from a variety of properties, including luxury hotels, intimate bed-and-breakfasts, and boutique hotels at every price point, with many affording sweeping views of the beach and city. A recent LED-lighting project throughout the city makes views especially beautiful at night, from any vantage point.

A number of hotels have recently undergone or are in the midst of multi-million-dollar renovations. Chief among them are properties in walking distance of the Convention & Entertainment Center. They include the 469-room Westin Long Beach (www.westinlongbeachhotel.com), whose \$10-million renovation project includes

new lobby and restaurant carpeting and furniture, room renovations (starting this month), and upgrades to its 51,000 square feet of flexible meeting space and 25 meeting rooms, elevators, and pool deck.

Adjacent to the center, the Hyatt Regency Long Beach (<http://longbeach.hyatt.com>) is undergoing a more than \$21-million renovation project, which should be completed in the first quarter of 2012 and which involves overhauling all 528 guest rooms (each offering water views), suites, and corridors to install new carpeting, wall covering, case goods, window treatments, HVAC units, and completely new bathrooms. The Hyatt offers a total of 22,000 square feet of function space, including 9,625 square feet of prefunction space, 10,000 square feet of exhibit space, and three ballrooms.

One block from the center, the 374-room Renaissance Long Beach Hotel's (www.marriott.com/LongBeach) \$12-million makeover included a sophisticated lobby bar, chic outdoor dining space, and the addition of the Naples Ballroom. The hotel's meeting space totals 21,000 square feet and includes 18 meeting rooms, on-site exhibition space, and the 7,480-square-foot Renaissance Ballroom.

This past June, the Long Beach Marriott Hotel (www.longbeachmarriott.com) — near the Long Beach Airport and across from the SkyLinks Golf Course — wrapped up a \$10-million project and debuted its new 6,000-square-foot Grand Ballroom, six newly enhanced meeting salons, and a brand-new 1,800-square-foot courtyard. In addition to the new meeting space (which brings its total to 10,000 square feet and 14 meeting rooms), all 308 guest rooms and two suites were renovated last year.

And there you have it: a city that keeps getting better for groups. ■

AT A GLANCE

► **Convention facilities:** The Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center offers more than 400,000 square feet of meeting and exhibit space.

► **Hotel rooms:** 5,000-plus citywide

► **Attractions:** *Queen Mary*, Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific, picturesque Rainbow Harbor, Alamitos Bay dining and entertainment area, Gondola Getaway in Naples Island, and the historic parks of Los Alamitos and Rancho Los Cerritos, as well as water recreation, whale-watching, and much more

For more information: Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, 301 E. Ocean Blvd., Suite 1900, Long Beach, CA 90802; info@longbeachcvb.org; (800) 452-7829; www.visitlongbeach.com