

Q&A: Mark Vaughan

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Executive Vice President and Chief Sales Officer, Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau

Why is Atlanta's a standout convention center? What are some of its more unusual and enticing features?

Throughout the first half of 2013, the Georgia World Congress Center is investing \$1.5 million to update fiber optic cables and increase bandwidth at the convention center. The GWCC amenities and facilities are top-notch, but it's location in the heart of our convention corridor with 10,000 walkable hotel rooms and more than 300 restaurants puts it over the top as a standout convention center.

What are the main meetings hotels within walking distance of the convention center?

Atlanta has 10,000 hotels within walking distance of the convention center, including six main downtown hotels that have meeting space in-house: Marriott Marquis, Hilton Atlanta Downtown, The Westin Peachtree Plaza, Sheraton Atlanta, Hyatt Regency and Omni CNN Center. In 2012, the Westin completed a \$45 million renovation, while the Hyatt completed a \$65 million overhaul of its facility.

What are some stellar off-site event venues within walking distance of the center?

In the heart of the convention corridor just steps away from the Georgia World Congress Center is Georgia Aquarium and the World of Coca-Cola. Each has engaging event space that caters to different size crowds. At Georgia Aquarium you can watch the beluga whales while in the ballroom, or host a dinner in the atrium with access to all exhibits. The tasting room at The World of Coca-Cola has 60 stations of various Coca-Cola products and is one of

several event spaces at the attraction. In the Luckie Marietta District, you'll find rooftop venues at Ventana's as well as the SkyLounge and The Glenn Hotel. We're looking forward to the 2014 opening of new event spaces including the National Center for Civil and Human Rights and College Football Hall of Fame, which will have a 45-yard football field that can accommodate up to 1,200 people.

What group activities can attendees easily access from downtown?

In Atlanta, there is something for everyone. Your group could check out the attractions surrounding Centennial Olympic Park, including the Georgia Aquarium, World of Coca-Cola, Children's Museum and Inside CNN Studio Tours. In 2014, attendees will also be able to visit the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, as well as the College Football Hall of Fame. Atlanta has a great sports scene. Your group could help us cheer on the Atlanta Hawks, Falcons or Braves, all downtown.

Is there anything new in the city that meeting planners should know about?

Over the next three years the city of Atlanta will see more than \$1.4 billion in development. This includes the National Center for Civil and Human Rights and the College Football Hall of Fame, as well as the Atlanta Streetcar, which will begin operation in late 2013. The Atlanta Streetcar will connect the downtown convention and tourism district to the Martin Luther King Historic Site and vibrant neighborhoods east of downtown.

Why, in general, is Atlanta a good place to hold a meeting downtown? Is there anything about it that tends to surprise people who meet there?

Atlanta is the perfect meeting spot. First off, getting here is easy. More than 80 percent of the U.S. population is within a two-hour flight of the city, and our new international terminal provides service to more than 55 countries and 150 international destinations. Once you're here, getting around is easy. People are generally surprised by how walkable our convention corridor has become. We have 10,000 hotel rooms within walking distance of the Georgia World Congress Center, as well as more than 300 restaurants and six world-class attractions. When meeting planners choose Atlanta, our collaborative hospitality community will work to make that meeting a walk in the park.