

# FOREVER Olden

SACRAMENTO, BORN OF THE GOLD RUSH, BUFFS UP FOR THE 21ST CENTURY.

BY JANET FULLWOOD

Not so long ago, Sacramento was perceived as an overlooked stepchild of a California city, its image sleepy and agricultural, its visitor appeal couched in dusty doses of frontier history. ● But something happened on the way to the 21st century: Sacramento woke up. ● The economic boom of the 1990s not only transformed the skyline, it inspired scores of young, energetic entrepreneurs to make "the Grid," as the downtown/Midtown area affectionately is known, a hip and happening place. The arrival of celebrity governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2003 refocused the media spotlight in a highly positive way. And now a celebrity mayor, former NBA star Kevin Johnson, is making headlines of a new kind as he attempts to kick-start several major projects, including a new arena for the Sacramento Kings and redevelopment of the historic Union Pacific railyards, that have been sputtering for years at the political level. ● Two major construction projects now underway—expansion of the Crocker Art Museum and construction of a new terminal at Sacramento International Airport—promise to add to the city's appeal as a cultural and business destination. And existing attractions, including an extensive historic district commemorating Sacramento's roles as nucleus of the 1849 Gold Rush, pillar of the Pony Express and western terminus of the first trans-continental railroad, continue to fascinate visitors. ● Add to that a full menu of destination-management services provided by the Sacramento Convention & Visitors Bureau (SCVB), and what you get is a capital-city destination with wide-ranging appeal. ● Among the more unusual groups to convene here recently was the Society for the Preservation and Advancement of the Harmonica (SPAH), which booked 890 room nights at the Radisson Sacramento for its 2009 convention. SPAH president Tom Stryker credits the SCVB, and specifically Convention Sales Manager Betsy Kennedy, for making the event a success. "She really rolled out the red carpet for us," he said. "Without her it would not have worked out as well as it did...Would we come back? You bet!"

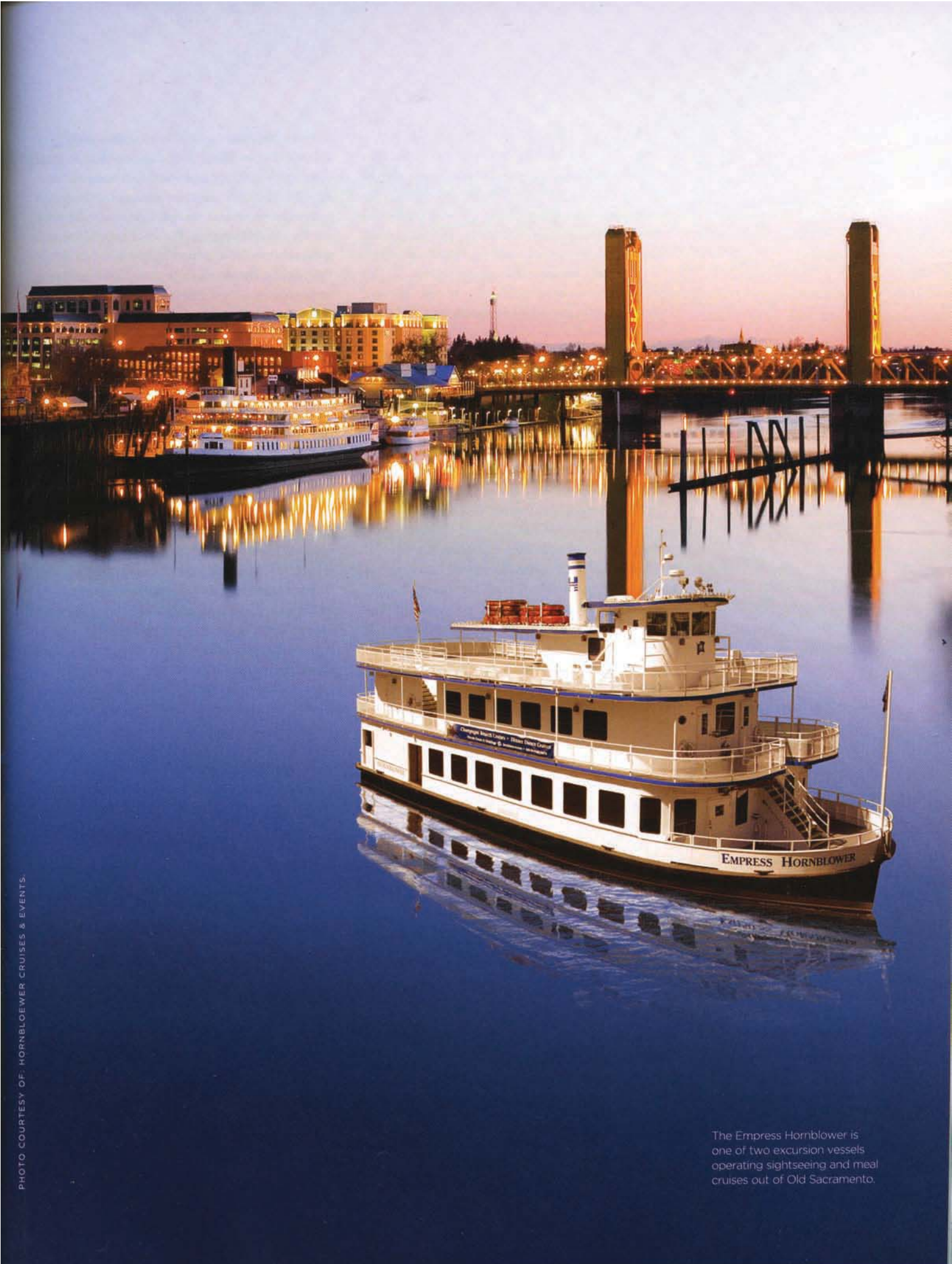


PHOTO COURTESY OF: HORNBLOEWER CRUISES & EVENTS.

The Empress Hornblower is one of two excursion vessels operating sightseeing and meal cruises out of Old Sacramento.

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## DOWNTOWN VENUES

They city's core meeting facility is the Sacramento Convention Center, whose 134,000 square feet of exhibit space, including a 24,000-square-foot ballroom and 31 break-out rooms, are centrally located within walking distance of downtown hotels, office towers and the vibrant Midtown dining and shopping district. In-house Classique Catering, named best catering company in town for 11 years straight, is renowned for wowing event attendees with fresh, inspired cuisine. A pair of auxiliary facilities, the historic Memorial Auditorium and 2,452-seat Community Theater, round out convention facilities.

Three major downtown hotels service the convention market. The Hyatt Regency, directly across from the Capitol, is a home-away-from-home for many state politicians, including Gov. Schwarzenegger. It recently completed a \$15 million, top-to-bottom renovation that saw adoption of a new color scheme, "urban contemporary" décor and enough "green" features to earn the hotel two-palm, leadership-level status in the California Green Lodging Program.

A plus for Hyatt guests: "Nearly all rooms have a view of the park or the Capitol," says Sales Manager Michael J. Gonsalves. "Nothing is looking out on a parking lot, nothing looks out on a wall. Not many hotels can say that."

Some of the best panoramas in town can be had from the Hyatt's 15th-floor Capitol View room, which opens onto four distinct high-rise patio spaces.

Just a block away, the Sheraton Grand occupies a landmark building, formerly a public market, designed in 1923 by renowned California architect Julia Morgan. The structure's elegant architectural bones are showcased to spectacular advantage by a three-story atrium set off with a colorful ceramic wall mural and four other locally created art installations. The Sheraton's three-part ballroom (10,500 square feet in all) is augmented with a dozen smaller meeting rooms on a mezzanine level overlooking the atrium. A new, 28-story tower houses 503 guest rooms and suites.

The Holiday Inn Capitol Plaza, while a bit of a hike from the Convention Center, occupies a choice location between the Westfield Downtown Plaza Shopping Mall and the Old Sacramento Historic District. Its 2,300-square-foot, 16th-floor ballroom, with a wall of windows overlooking the Sacramento River, is a showstopper of a venue. The 8,700-square-foot Grand Ballroom is on the first floor.

New on the downtown scene is The Citizen Hotel, which opened in late 2008 under the Joie de Vivre management umbrella and became an instant hit with the type of guest who gravitates toward stylish, boutique properties. With 198 guest rooms, 11,000 square feet of meeting space and a tented rooftop terrace, The Citizen attracts movers and shakers and already has played host to some of the city's most high-profile events. Its chic ground-floor restaurant, Grange, is one of the city's top dining spots.

## AROUND TOWN

THERE'S MUCH MORE TO SACRAMENTO than its vibrant downtown. A secondary destination for meeting groups is the area around Cal Expo, the 350-acre home to the California State Fair and many other large exhibitions.

Seeking to maximize their visibility in a competitive market, five hotels in the immediate vicinity have banded together to market themselves as Sacramento Point West Marketplace.

"We're trying collectively as a group to position this region as a secondary destination within Sacramento," explains Janet Waldie, CMP, director of sales and marketing for the DoubleTree Hotel Sacramento. "It makes great sense for the meetings industry. We're right across the street from the region's largest mall, Arden Fair—which is 100 percent occupied, by the way. We have 65 stores and 35 restaurants within walking distance."

The five hotels collectively boast 90,000 square feet of event space and 1,000 committable rooms, Waldie adds.

Two of the West Point hotels, the DoubleTree and the

Radisson, are older properties sprawled over large campuses offering loads of outdoor space—and breathing room—for guests. The DoubleTree, with 448 guest rooms and three ballrooms (each on a separate floor), sits on 17 acres, while the 306-room Radisson occupies a 17-acre campus focused on a three-acre lake. Besides a ballroom able to accommodate up to 2,000, the Radisson boasts an outdoor concert area and a separate Conference Plaza with 11 meeting rooms ranging in size from 700 to 2,000 square feet. Both properties have completed recent renovations.

Nearby, the 333-room Hilton Sacramento Arden West has just changed its look with a \$5 million revamp of public areas and guest rooms. Sales Manager Robert Bondanza describes the updated look as "sleek and urban."

A 152-room Courtyard by Marriott, and 74-room Fairfield Inn also are included in the Point West Marketplace group.

—Janet Fullwood

But Sacramento's downtown meeting venues are hardly limited to hotels. The historic Crest Theatre, with its iconic neon marquis, is a popular lecture-circuit and small-concert venue, while the Elks Tower Ballroom, with its Italian Renaissance-inspired architecture, has been hosting gala events since the 1920s. For smaller gatherings and corporate events or retreats, the purpose-built Vizcaya Pavilion & Mansion provides an elegant setting connected to an eight-room bed-and-breakfast inn.

Nothing says "sense of place" like a historic setting, and you can't get more historic than Sutter's Fort State Historic Park, the reconstructed stronghold of city founder John Sutter, whose mill 30 miles east of town was the site of the discovery that set off the California Gold Rush. Events held in the walled adobe courtyard are very memorable, indeed.

Newer to the capital is the California Museum, pet project of California First Lady Maria Shriver, who established a Hall of Fame gallery to honor Californians embodying the state's innovative spirit. Convenient to the Convention Center and downtown hotels, the museum can host sit-down dinners for 250 or stand-up events for 1,000 amid an ever-changing array of exhibits.

The most anticipated event space in Sacramento won't be unveiled until October, when the wraps come off a \$100 million, 125,000-square-foot expansion of a proud cultural institution, the Crocker Art Museum. Built in 1872 by a contemporary of the "Big Four" trans-continental railroad tycoons, the original Crocker, a Victorian-Italianate mansion, was presented to the city in 1885 as the first public art museum west of the Mississippi. The contemporary addition, quadrupling existing exhibit space and designed with group business in mind, presents an architectural juxtaposition that calls to mind I.M. Pei's pyramid at the Louvre in Paris. One of the integrating features is a sweeping, two-story reception area in the new structure that frames the Victorian landmark next door in a wall of windows.

"Earned revenue is a really important part of our business model," Director of Marketing Communications LeAnne Ruzzamenti says of the museum's coming ability to host receptions, dinners and other events for groups as large as 1,500. The museum is taking event reservations now and will begin hosting in March 2011.

## SLIDE INTO HISTORY

If strolling into Old Sacramento, adjacent to downtown along the Sacramento River, feels like walking into a movie set, perhaps that's because the 28-acre

# What Makes Sacramento An Ideal Meeting Destination?

STEVE HAMMOND, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE SACRAMENTO CVB, SOUNDS OFF. BY JANET FULLWOOD

As president and CEO of the Sacramento Convention & Visitors Bureau, Steve Hammond leads a staff of sales and marketing professionals dedicated to stimulating economic development in the state capital. NCM+E asked him to expound on what makes this capital city an ideal destination for meetings and events.

### Q: What are Sacramento's primary assets as a meeting destination?

> Sacramento is perfectly situated in the heart of Northern California, an easy two-hour drive from San Francisco and Lake Tahoe and just an hour from Napa/Sonoma, Sierra foothill wineries and the quaint towns in historic Gold Country.

### Q: What about access?

> Sacramento International Airport offers nonstop service to 30 U.S. cities, plus convenient direct and one-stop service to many other destinations. The new Central Terminal B is a \$1.27 billion project under construction. Due to open in October 2011, it will offer three times the space of the existing terminals. It has been designed to accommodate 10 million passengers annually. The No. 1 priority of the expansion is to provide the highest possible level of customer service and convenience. Cab service from the airport to downtown convention hotels is a short 10- to 15-minute ride.

### Q: What services does the CVB provide for meetings and events?

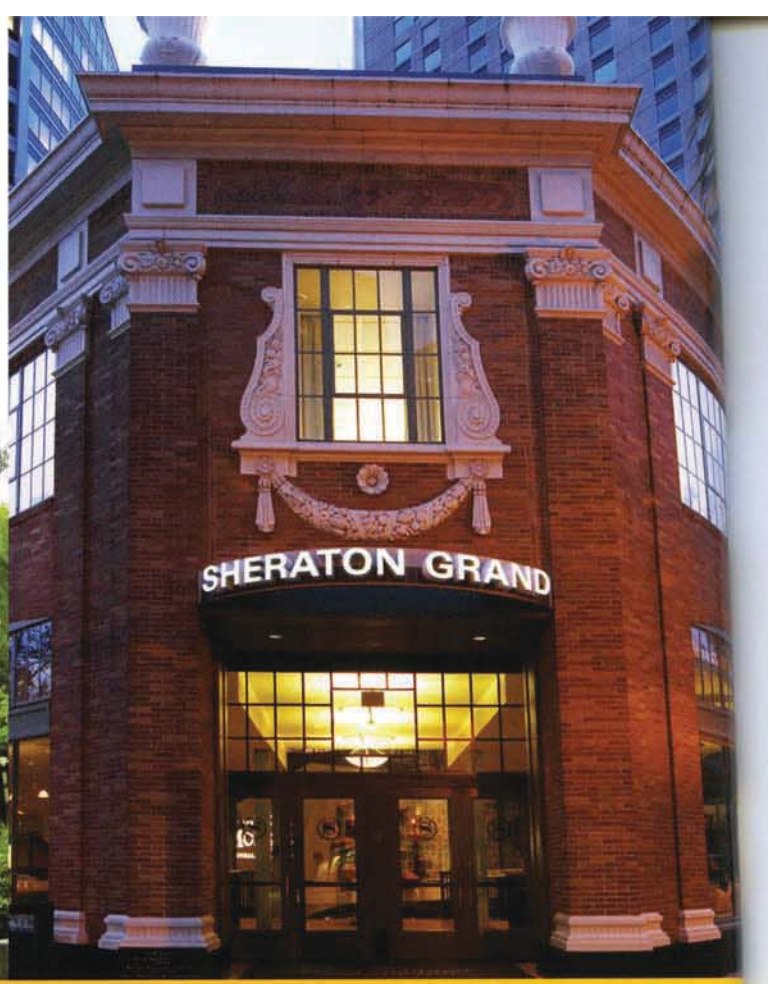
> We are committed to establishing the business relationships necessary to ensure that meeting planners' needs are met, and we think our convention package does exactly that. We match up well against competitive destinations in term of infrastructure: convenient and expansive convention space, large room blocks, meeting space, airport convenience and value. We also offer some things that the competition can't, like access to the state legislature and historic Gold Rush attractions. For the delegates, we've implemented the Sacramento Gold Card program ([www.discovergold.org/visitors/goldcard/](http://www.discovergold.org/visitors/goldcard/)), which provides savings at participating restaurants, attractions and retailers throughout the community.

### Q: Why choose Sacramento over a more high-profile Northern California city such as San Francisco or San Jose, especially in a down economy where pricing is very competitive?

> When groups book their meeting in Sacramento they'll receive special attention with welcome signs at the airport and street banners downtown...they are "big fish in a small pond."

### Q: What are some common misconceptions about Sacramento?

> Sacramento's image is changing rapidly as a result of the positive media coverage we've received in the past few years in the *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *VIA* and *Sunset* magazines. Sacramento is



Clockwise from top left: The Crocker Art Museum will expand this year from an 1872 mansion into a \$100 million contemporary wing; The Sheraton Grand Sacramento occupies a landmark 1920s building that once served as a public market. It's one of the city's three major convention hotels; The California state Capitol is surrounded by 40 acres of parks and gardens; The California State Railroad Museum, recognized as one of the premier repositories of railroad history in the nation, is also an impressive event venue.



state historic park so resembles one. It's all real, though, with wooden sidewalks, cobblestone streets and horse-drawn carriages adding an air of sanitized authenticity.


Whether there's an event going on (Jazz Jubilee over Memorial Day weekend and Gold Rush Days over Labor Day weekend are the biggest), Old Sacramento is a pedestrian-friendly "must-see" for every out-of-town visitor. Its buildings house an eclectic collection of shops, restaurants and museums, including the California State Railroad Museum, considered the premier venues of its kind in the country. The Pony Express statue on the corner of 2nd and J streets is a popular place for a photo-op—especially this year, as the city marks the 150th anniversary of the short-lived frontier mail service. A bonus for visitors who'd like to stretch their legs: Old Sacramento is on the 32-mile American River Bike Trail, which hugs the river all the way to Folsom Lake.

Just across the street from the historic district, facing onto a riverside promenade and adjacent to the iconic Tower Bridge, Embassy Suites Sacramento, with 242 guest rooms and meeting space for 350, is a relative newcomer and one of just three waterfront lodging properties in a city founded at the confluence of the American and Sacramento rivers.

A landmark in Old Town proper is the Delta King, a renovated and charmingly quirky 1920s paddlewheeler (sister to the Delta Queen of Mississippi River fame) permanently moored at the waterfront and offering 44 guest rooms along with meeting space for as many as 180 guests. Dining or taking a cocktail on deck while watching river traffic whiz by is a signature Sacramento experience.

Another waterfront lodging choice lies about five miles south of downtown, just off Interstate 5. Le Rivage Hotel & Spa is a 101-room, Tuscan-themed property in a leafy riverside setting. Facilities include a full-service spa, 25-slip marina, riverfront lawn and terrace, meeting and event space for up to 200 and a restaurant, Scott's Seafood, offering outdoor dining in a dramatic setting. Playing up its popularity with visiting sports teams, the hotel offers several rooms with extra-long beds.

A new presence on the Sacramento River is Hornblower Cruises & Events, which last year based two vessels in Old Sacramento for scheduled and charter cruises with brunch and dinner service. A highlight: the city's signature Tower Bridge is raised and lowered to let the vessels pass through.

Hornblower's in-house event planners can customize cruises and meals for any size group. 

no longer the sleepy government town of 20 years ago, but a lively, cosmopolitan city with a vibrant arts community, world-class restaurants and accommodations.

**Q: "Eco-friendliness" is of increasing importance to meeting planners.**

**What has Sacramento done to make itself green?**

> Conventions and exhibitions held at the Sacramento Convention Center are certified "green" and can use the nationally recognized "Green-e" symbol in their electronic and print collateral. In addition, planners can estimate emissions and learn how to become a green meeting leader with CarbonNeutral Events. When the airport expansion is completed in October 2011, it will be the only silver-level LEED certified airport in the United States.

**Q: How can visitors get a quick sense of the city's historic legacy and character?**

> The Old Sacramento Historic District provides a great glimpse into the city's colorful history. Horse-drawn carriages, wooden sidewalks and cobblestone streets evoke the California's Gold Rush era. Some 50 buildings have been restored or reconstructed to the 1850s-1870s period and now house 125 boutiques, restaurants and museums. Don't miss the California State Railroad Museum, the most visited interpretive railroad museum in North America—and an interesting and inviting venue.

**Q: Moving beyond Old Sacramento, where can visitors go to experience the city's "hip and happening" side?**

> Downtown and Midtown are definitely "hip and happening," with cutting-edge clubs and restaurants like Grange, Ella, Mulvaney's, Cosmo Café, MIX Downtown and Lounge on 20. On the second Saturday of each month, Sacramento's art galleries open for an event known as Second Saturday, in which people are encouraged to walk from gallery to gallery. Residents and visitors discover treasures and meet the artists who created them. The close proximity of venues, pedestrian-friendly streets, unique shops and thriving restaurants contribute to an extremely vibrant local arts community.

**Q: What impact has Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger had on upping the city's visibility and image?**

> He brought considerable national and international media attention to Sacramento when he first came into office and remains a tremendous salesperson for California's travel industry. Sacramento's new mayor, former NBA star Kevin Johnson, brings much visibility on a national level as well, and he has met with President Barack Obama on a number of occasions to talk about federal programs that are available to enhance Sacramento's growing tourism infrastructure.

**Q: What is the largest convention ever booked in Sacramento?**

> The Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses has contracted with the convention center for eight weekends in 2010 for a total of 20,018 room-nights spread among 13 area hotels with an economic impact of \$15 million. Anticipated attendance at each convention is 6,800 delegates. We are holding seven to eight weekends in 2011-2014 for a five-year commitment. This is the largest booking ever for the SCVB and represents nearly \$75 million of economic impact over the life of the contract.