

Controlling Costs

Getting the Best Deal

There are a lot of factors involved in making a city affordable for its residents and even more in making a city affordable for thousands of tradeshow attendees who might visit in the course of a year. A tradeshow organizer must consider not only the show costs, such as labor rates, but also the price of hotel rooms. And don't forget the cost of restaurant meals.

By **KERRI ZERLIN**

By examining the federal government's 2008 Domestic Per Diem Rates for meals and incidentals, Smith Travel Research's survey of domestic hotel rates and Tradeshow Week's 2008 Survey of U.S. and Canadian Labor Rates, TSW editors determined what could be the most affordable U.S. cities to hold tradeshow in. The top three destinations? Des Moines, Iowa; Columbus, Ohio; and Louisville, Ky.



■ The Iowa Events Center in Des Moines has the Wells Fargo Arena, Hy-Vee Hall and Veterans Memorial Auditorium.

#1 Des Moines, Iowa

"We are thrilled to death about (being the most affordable city to host a tradeshow)," said Greg Edwards, president and CEO of the Greater Des Moines Convention & Visitors Bureau. "We always knew that Des Moines was a very affordable city, but knowing that we are the most affordable even makes us feel better."

Edwards said he was surprised to find out how affordable Des Moines was, but he knew that costs in the city were very low. Des Moines' average regular hourly rate for general labor in 2008 was \$53.46, the average per diem meal and incidental cost was \$44 and the average hotel room rate was \$82.71.

Doug Fricke, director of tradeshow marketing for both the Natl. Pork Producers Council and the Iowa Pork Producers Assn., which hold the **World Pork Expo** and **Iowa Pork Congress**, respectively, in Des Moines, said he already knew how affordable the city was.

"It is probably another reason that we continue to look at Des Moines as a strong place for us to be," Fricke said. "When you compare it to some of the other larger cities in the Midwest, or just outside of the Midwest, we still hold those rates down for transportation and lodging."

He added that part of the reason the World Pork Expo and the Iowa Pork Congress remain in Des Moines is the city's central location for the pork industry and its members.

Fricke said the World Pork Expo, scheduled June 3-5 at the Iowa State Fairgrounds, will use nearly 300,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor exhibit space, including more than 100,000 sq. ft. in the Varied Industries Building exhibition hall and a 60,000 sq. ft. cattle barn to house its 500 exhibiting companies and 17,756 attendees.

The Iowa Pork Congress, to be held Jan. 28-29 at the Iowa Events Center's Hy-Vee Hall, will likely have 150,000 sq. ft., 300-plus exhibiting companies and almost 5,500 attendees, according to Fricke.

"Our customers were within a 250-mile radius of a large majority of our attendees," he added. "After you get outside of that radius, anywhere you're coming from, Des Moines is still an easily accessible venue."

Edwards said the city offers a number of facilities besides the fairgrounds, including the Iowa Events Center, which has four buildings, three of them connected: the 17,000-seat Wells Fargo Arena, 100,000 sq. ft. Hy-Vee Hall and the 200,000 sq. ft. Veterans Memorial Auditorium. Less than three blocks away is the 85,000 sq. ft. Polk County Convention Center.

He added that the city, which offers 1,500 downtown hotel rooms and 10,000 more throughout the metropolitan area, is accessible to the entire country.

"We're right in the center of the United States, accessible by both Interstate 80, from east and west, and Interstate 35, north and south," Edwards said.

Fricke attributed much of the city's affordability to the cost and ease of airline travel, and Edwards added, "Because we are not a hub for any of the major airlines, it's a very competitive (city) to get to and from."



■ The Greater Columbus Convention Center has more than 426,000 sq. ft. and a freeway exit leading to loading docks.

#2 Columbus, Ohio

Columbus, Ohio, is ranked as the second most affordable U.S. city to host a tradeshow, a surprise to Brian Ross, vice president of sales for Experience Columbus, the city's convention and visitors bureau.

"We definitely know that we are a wonderful value for what we provide," Ross said. "But, to know we are No. 2 is obviously very exciting, ... particularly with the times that we're going through right now from an economy standpoint."

Columbus' average regular hourly rate for general labor was \$53, its per diem cost was \$49 and its average hotel rate was \$86.06.

"We know that ... one of our strengths is the fact that we are a value-based destination, and we obviously share that with ... our clientele," Ross said. "If you look at our main markets that we are very successful in, it ... shows you that ... is a true evaluation, because we do a lot of ... primary markets."

One of those primary markets is **Ohio Florists' Assn. Short Course**, No. 185 on the 2008 TSW 200, and held annually in Columbus. Although OFA – An Assn. of Floricultural Professionals started in Columbus, it is a national organization, with no obligation to the city, according to OFA CEO John Holmes.

"We ... did choose to stay in Columbus a few years ago, when we went through our RFP process," he added. "That was essentially looking at what other potential destinations had to offer, the costs related to that and what we were able to negotiate here with the Columbus hospitality community, which has been really wonderful to work with."

Holmes said familiarity with the city and the "wonderful convention facility" were among the reasons OFA decided to keep its show in Columbus, but added: "At the end of the day, it's a business decision, and it came down to dollars and cents." He said his attendees come from various socio-economic backgrounds, but all are looking for value, which is something provided by Columbus hotels and the airlines that serve the city.

But for Holmes, the layout of the Greater Columbus Convention Center is what lures the OFA back year after year. The OFA – Short Course, last held July 13-15, with approximately 150,000 sq. ft., about 600 exhibitors and 10,000 attendees, has both exhibits

and educational sessions that can benefit from the convention center's design – one hallway with meeting rooms on one side and the exhibit hall on the other.

"It gives you constant back and forth between those two without winding your way through a maze of corridors that you might have in other facilities," Holmes added.

According to Ross, the city's facilities include the more than 426,000 sq. ft. Greater Columbus Convention Center; the 110,000 sq. ft. Franklin County Veterans Memorial; the 18,000-seat Nationwide Arena; and, just north of the city, the 1 million sq. ft.-plus Ohio Expo Center, home of the Ohio State Fair. He added that the convention center is at the intersection of Interstates 70 and 71, with a freeway exit that leads straight to the loading docks.

"Once the tradeshow, particularly (the) exhibitors, get here and see that, they're like, 'Wow!'" Ross said. "It is very functional."



■ The Kentucky Exposition Center offers 1.2 million sq. ft.

#3 Louisville, Ky.

Louisville, Ky., is ranked as the third most affordable city to host a tradeshow in 2008. In 2006, the last time TSW released this type of ranking, the city was No. 1.

"We work very hard to keep our prices (at) what we feel is competitive," said James T. Wood, president and CEO of the Greater Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Wood said he was not surprised at how high Louisville ranked in affordability since his bureau's strategy is to keep prices competitive and retain its existing customer base while still attracting new shows and events.

Louisville has two facilities for tradeshows: the 400,000 sq. ft. Kentucky Intl. Convention Center and the 1.2 million sq. ft. Kentucky Exposition Center. The average regular hourly rate in the city for general labor was \$45.67, meals and incidentals cost \$49 and the average hotel room rate was \$94.24.

"(The affordability is) definitely one of the reasons that we have chosen to stay in Louisville as long as we have," said Melissa Magestro, show manager for the biennial **Intl. Construction & Utility Equipment Exposition – The Demo Expo**, held at the Kentucky Exposition Center.

Magestro added that ICUEE, ranked No. 2 on the 2008 TSW 200, was able to offer low space rates to its exhibitors because the city and convention center put such an affordable package together.

For Louisville, it is a combination of the facilities and the location that brings in large shows. The city hosted five shows in the most recent TSW 200. Wood said one of the biggest draws is the 19,000-car parking lot at the Exposition Center.



■ ICUEE, scheduled Oct. 6-8, 2009, is expected to use 1.22 million sq. ft. at the Kentucky Exposition Center.

ICUEE, scheduled Oct. 6-8, 2009, is expected to have 1.22 million sq. ft., 950 exhibitors and approximately 20,000 exhibiting personnel and attendees. Magestro said the show has been unable to find another city that has the large amount of space needed, enough to demonstrate all the equipment that is on display, and is as affordable as Louisville is.

"For those conventions that need that outdoor demo space, there's no facility in America that offers what the Kentucky Expo Center offers," Wood said. He added that the affordability of

"Instead of paying \$35 for parking during the day," he added, "you might be paying five bucks."

The location of the airport in relation to the facilities also is a plus. Wood said the airport, served by 12 airlines with about 100 daily flights, is next to the Exposition Center.

"Attendees can literally fly in, attend the show and depart the same day," he added. The abundance of hotel rooms – 4,300 downtown, 4,000 surrounding the Exposition Center and a total of 18,000 in the metropolitan area – is another benefit.

the city, and the fact that Six Flags Kentucky Kingdom is on the grounds of the Exposition Center, makes it a good place for attendees to combine a business trip with a family vacation.

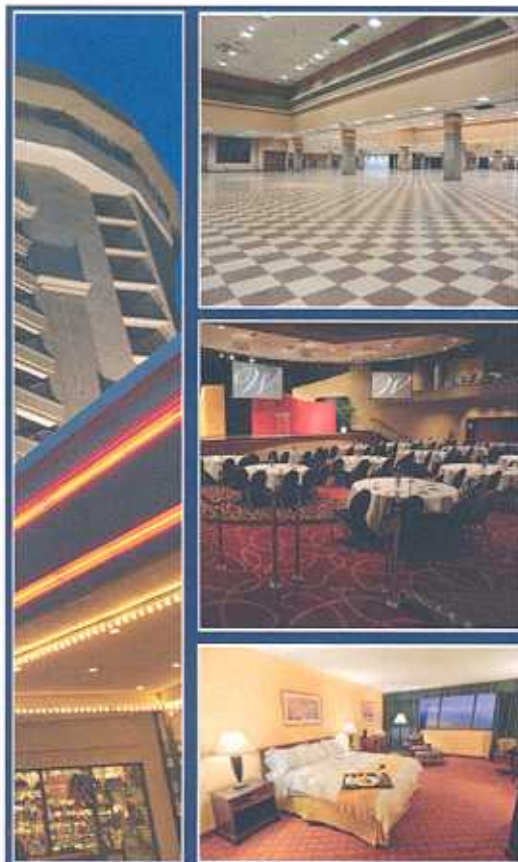
"They're (at Six Flags) all day; Drop them off (at) 9 in the morning; pick them up at 5 in the afternoon," Wood said. "By the way, those are the same hours that most tradeshows operate, so all you have to do is leave the front door of the Kentucky Expo Center, ... cross a large parking lot and you're right at the front gates of Six Flags." TSW

How the Rankings Were Compiled

To determine the most affordable U.S. city in which to have a tradeshow in 2008, Tradeshow Week editors used information collected from the federal government's 2008 Domestic Per Diem Rates, Smith Travel Research's survey of domestic hotel rates and the 2008 Tradeshow Week Survey of U.S. and Canadian Labor Rates for each city. The labor rates published are those charged to exhibitors, not the wages paid to workers. Only cities that responded to TSW's labor rates survey and supplied additional information to TSW were considered.

	PER DIEM RATES	DOMESTIC HOTEL RATES	LABOR RATES
■ Des Moines, Iowa	\$44	\$82.71	\$53.46
■ Columbus, Ohio	\$49	\$86.06	\$53.00
■ Louisville, Ky.	\$49	\$94.24	\$45.67

—Kerri Zerlin



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