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Museums for Meetings

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By Heather Larson

Up the wow factor by holding your next event in one of the colorful, inspiring and engaging museums of the Northwest. No matter what

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the occasion or what type of exhibits are displayed, you have ready-made décor and a profound change of scenery from a business office. You'll give attendees an experience they'll not soon forget.

Many of the museums mentioned here offer after-hours or backstage tours to meeting or event guests, either self-guided or conducted by docents. In some cases, holding a meeting or event amid the collections is impressive enough without any narration.

These venues were built so the public can enjoy their displays and meetings may have to be scheduled outside the hours the museum is open to the public. That may give you less than optimal time to set up and/or tear down. You'll need to weigh the advantages of these engaging environments against the few restrictions they may impose on the event you're planning.

Here are some of our favorite museums with meeting space:

THE REACH MUSEUM

Richland, Washington

Perched on a bluff overlooking the Columbia River in Eastern Washington, the Hanford Reach Interpretive Center, also known as the Reach, opened its doors for the first time in mid-2014. Since then, this natural history museum has hosted wealth management receptions, proms, company meetings, trainings, holiday parties, award ceremonies and numerous educational events. Those functions were held by schools, agricultural companies, real estate companies, special interest groups, art associations and others.

"This space appeals to planners because of the beauty of the building, the vast view of the Columbia River and the flexibility of the event staff," says Laurie Church, operations manager and volunteer coordinator. "Planners also like to use our 500-square-foot patio and our amphitheater with a covered stage, which can accommodate more than 500 guests."

Besides the outdoor spaces, the multi-purpose room seats as many as 60. It comes equipped with a screen, projector, a wireless mouse for guests, speakers and a wireless microphone.

Open hours for the museum run from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Depending on the size of the group, smaller events can be scheduled during that

time. Facility rentals are also offered outside those hours.

If requested, expert docents provide educational tours of the two largest exhibits – Fish and Wildlife and the Manhattan Project. Most events also have access to another popular exhibit, McBones. It showcases the discovery of a Columbian Mammoth in Richland's own backyard. On view are bones, soil and other natural materials from the dig, says Church.

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OREGON MUSEUM OF SCIENCE & INDUSTRY (OMSI)

Portland, Oregon

“Planners like that OMSI offers a convenient location, ample complimentary parking, comprehensive audio-visual services and onsite attractions, such as a submarine and planetarium,” says Megan Strong, event sales manager. “Attendees at daytime meetings, when the museum is open to the public, can purchase reduced-rate tickets at the front desk for OMSI exhibits and attractions or these tickets can be included as part of the rental package. Evening receptions have exclusive access to the museum and planners love the built-in entertainment.”

You can book spaces as small as the courtyard to as large as the entire museum and a variety of areas in between. You're sure to find what you need. Strong says the most unique event space is the Empirical Theater. It's a state-of-the-art 305-seat theater with a 60-foot screen and a Dolby Atmos surround-sound system. You can schedule the Theater at any time, but public shows must be canceled to accommodate a private event, which OMSI is happy to do.

“Attendees not only see the presentation, but they feel it, too,” says Strong.

Next in line for a distinctive meeting place, Strong recommends Theory, a restaurant inside the museum. An open, airy floor plan, custom furnishings, a fireplace, lounge area and patio adjacent to the waterfront make the eatery ideal for dinners and receptions.

No matter which space you opt for, Strong says guests are always treated to a fun interactive evening (daytime, too) with delicious food and drinks.

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MUSEUM OF GLASS

Tacoma, Washington

The cone-shaped building that travelers point to from the interstate has created an architectural landmark like no other. Although the exterior is visually striking, once you enter through the glass doors, the art, the view and the ambience take your breath away.

“The Museum of Glass is unlike any other venue in Tacoma,” says Jana Marcelia, director of communications. “We have four outdoor plaza areas that offer stunning views of the artwork, the Thea Foss Waterway and the cityscape.”

Whether guests are attending a meeting, reunion or corporate event they can easily circulate from any of the plazas to the interior of the museum and enjoy the galleries, Hot Shop, theatre and Education Studio, Marcelia says. Inside, the Grand Hall, an inviting 6,900-square-foot space, easily converts from an entryway for museum-goers during the day to almost any kind of space you want for your event.

When it comes to a matchless setting, the Hot Shop delivers. It’s a working glass studio inside the 90-foot-tall cone-shaped building. You can watch teams of artists create art from molten glass. Or better yet, your event attendees can make their own glass pieces under the careful supervision of a professional artist. Two people per hour can complete a project so you might want to make this a special perk for the meeting or event.

In the theater, 180 people can view films, listen to lectures or take part in meetings or training programs. All guests have direct access to the galleries and outdoor art installations. They can also schedule special tours with their event, if they elect to do so.

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TACOMA ART MUSEUM (TAM)

Tacoma, Washington

The newly expanded Tacoma Art Museum offers world class art in a modern, award-winning building in downtown Tacoma. TAM's more than 4,500 works of art range from European Impressionist paintings and Northwest art to Japanese woodblock prints and Dale Chihuly glass creations. The diverse art collection serves as a backdrop to set the mood, whether it is a business meeting or a large gala affair.

The museum can accommodate an intimate gathering of 25 or a large event for 500 in a variety of spaces. For a spectacular event, groups can rent the entire 11,250 square-foot facility. The variety of spaces allows planners to create multiple seating options and even have separate VIP sections.

Individual spaces, such as the Murray Family Event Center with a capacity of 120 are suitable for lectures, corporate meetings and musical performances. With a sweeping view of downtown Tacoma, the Ben G. Cheney Classroom holds 70 and is perfect for an all-day meeting. While some venue choices are only available after the museum closes at 5 p.m., the museum also has spaces that are available during the day. With easy access from I-5 and a beautiful building with spectacular views, any event held at TAM will be a special occasion.

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MUSEUM OF HISTORY & INDUSTRY (MOHAI)

Seattle, Washington

Those attending galas, banquets or receptions at MOHAI are surrounded by large, iconic Seattle artifacts. The relics include the Slo-Mo hydroplane, the original 12-foot tall Rainier Beer "R" and the giant

pink Lincoln Towing “toe” truck. Suspended overhead, you can’t miss the original Boeing B-1 mail carrier.

In 2012, MOHAI moved from Seattle’s Montlake neighborhood to Lake Union Park. Now meeting areas like the glass-walled Microsoft Lakefront Pavilion offer views of Lake Union and the historic vessels moored there. The Pavilion has the capacity for 145 guests.

Another area that is available to rent, the Boeing Community Terrace, open from May to September, faces Lake Union Park and also affords a view of downtown and the Space Needle. Gatherings of up to 205 work in this space.

MOHAI’s largest rental space, the Faye G. Allen Grand Atrium, also serves as a public gallery. At 12,491 square feet, the Atrium can be configured in a variety of ways, including a transformation into a reception area or a theatre-style room.

Museum visitors have top priority so meetings or events with more than 100 in attendance must be held after public viewing hours (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.). Planners with groups of less than 100 who rent the facility during museum hours have access to all galleries at no additional charge.

“If groups wish to view the exhibits during after-hour events, they will incur a gallery access charge in addition to the facility rental rate,” says Carrie Veals, events assistant for MOHAI. “Galleries are normally self-guided, but ‘highlight’ tours can be specially arranged.”

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MUSEUM OF CLEAN

Pocatello, Idaho

Don Aslett, a well-known expert on cleaning and decluttering and author of 40 books, started this museum to educate visitors about everything clean. Clean air, clean water, clean language, clean health, clean floors, clean jokes and clean teeth – the museum covers it all. From what’s arguably the world’s largest collection of vacuums

(almost 1,000) to an array of toilet models, the exhibits spur interest and intrigue.

Four different areas on the property are available for private events. The 7,600-square-foot Event Center is a separate building, yet still attached to the museum. It can be completely sequestered from the museum activity because it has its own entrances and restrooms. The Event Center is available both inside and outside of museum hours.

Every kind of event you can imagine has been held in the 10,000 square foot Event Center. Those include banquets, meetings, training sessions, antique swap meets, reunions, police preparedness fairs, book drives, seminars and more.

“Our Event Center is appealing because of the space, ample parking, the lack of noise ordinances, late night access, ease of loading in and out through the big bay door and ease of cleaning (concrete floors),” says Brad Kisling, museum director. “We allow a day of preparation prior to the event and a day after to tear down, so often rental is for an entire weekend.”

The other available spaces, all inside the museum, include a performing theater, a video theater and a meeting room. The performing theater houses a small stage and seats 100 people, while the video theater has seating for 30 but an additional 10 chairs can be added. The meeting room easily accommodates 50 people.

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EVERGREEN AVIATION & SPACE MUSEUM

McMinnville, Oregon

Home of the famous Spruce Goose, the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum also attracts trade shows, small dinners, a Wine and Food Festival and much more. Many event goers like to take a look at the Spruce Goose, a gigantic airplane made entirely from wood and built to move troops and materials across the Atlantic Ocean during World War II. In addition to the Spruce Goose, other displays incorporate 200 historic aircraft and spacecraft.

The original Aviation Museum opened in 1991. In 2008 the Space Museum made its debut, and in 2011 Evergreen Wings & Waves Waterpark was added. The mission of all three venues is to promote and preserve aviation and space history and to honor the service of our veterans. Many of those veterans volunteer as docents and offer guided tours to the public and for private events.

Access to museum exhibits or guided tours can be factored into any event or meeting. If you like, you can rent a space that overlooks the museum's interior giving lunch and dinner guests an aerial view of the collections.

"We have done everything from a group of 10 to more than 800 people for various events," says Melissa Grace, director of marketing and public relations. "There are so many options and so many different spaces that something is sure to spark a planner's interest."

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YELLOWSTONE ART MUSEUM (YAM)

Billings, Montana

Founded in 1964, YAM exhibits, interprets and preserves art with an emphasis on Montana and its surrounding regions. In the beginning, one employee ran the show. Now the museum boasts 18 full-time staff and a budget of \$1.8 million annually. Throughout the years, several expansions occurred. The most notable was the addition of the Visible Vault.

With tall ceilings, polished concrete floors and a proliferation of exceptional art, the Visible Vault makes a beautiful backdrop for events. The space works well for 125 in a reception setting or 60 at a seated dinner. "Clear glass encases all our artwork that's not on display in other parts of the museum. Little extra decoration is needed in the Visible Vault," says Ken Haak, facilities rental manager.

On the first floor, 200 guests can gather in the areas outside the galleries. They can spill over into the courtyard, which is located inside the museum proper, but is an open, outdoor, landscaped space available during good weather. The second floor accommodates 75 people seated or 120 standing. You can also opt for renting the entire

museum and have a function for 400 guests. Tours and exhibit access can be arranged.

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