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LONG LIVE THE QUEEN CITY

Charlotte has played host to a series of high-profile events in recent years. Here's why planners are putting this New South city high on their destination list.

By Michael J. Solender

EVEN BEFORE THE Republican National Convention was slated to come to Charlotte, the Queen City was more than coming into its own as a short-listed city for big event hosting. It has officially arrived.

The NBA thinks so highly of this amenity-rich New South city it held its 2019 All-Star Game here. So does the International Association of Fire Chiefs, which is bringing more than 10,000 fire and emergency leaders, exhibitors and industry pros here in July 2021.

The Queen City (named for Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz) has even caught the attention of the American Society of Association Executives, which recently announced Charlotte as the host city for its ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition in 2027. ASAE estimates 20% of the delegates who attend book their own conventions in the host city within five years.

Tom Murray, CEO of the Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority, notes that CRVA has an infrastructure in place to support large groups and allow for a singular point of contact to support and execute on deliverables for events.

"Our combined facilities, sales and marketing arms enable us to deliver on promises," says Murray. "CRVA runs the Charlotte Convention Center and group-friendly venues such as the NASCAR Hall of Fame and the back of the house at Spectrum Center, where we work closely with groups before, during and after their visit to Charlotte."

Murray notes Charlotte's accessibility is attractive to event planners, as Charlotte Douglas International Airport serves more than 700 flights daily, including nonstops to 178 domestic and international cities.

Here's what planners find upon arrival:

VENUES THAT SPARKLE

Charlotte Convention Center

Charlotte Convention Center is only 7 miles from

Charlotte Douglas International Airport, and nearly 6,000 hotel rooms are just steps from its doors. Last year, CCC embarked on a \$126.9 million expansion project, taking total flex space here to 600,000 square feet upon completion in late summer 2021. The expansion includes an exterior overstreet pedestrian walkway connecting to the 700-room Westin Charlotte, the city's largest hotel.

Spectrum Center

Home to Michael Jordan's NBA Charlotte Hornets, the "Hive" hosts more than 19,000 for games and can flex with additional floor space. Specialty space includes the soaring ceilinged main lobby (13,330 square feet), Crown Club (3,300 square feet), Front Court Club (7,900 square feet), and Craft Beer Garden and Terrace (3,500 square feet).

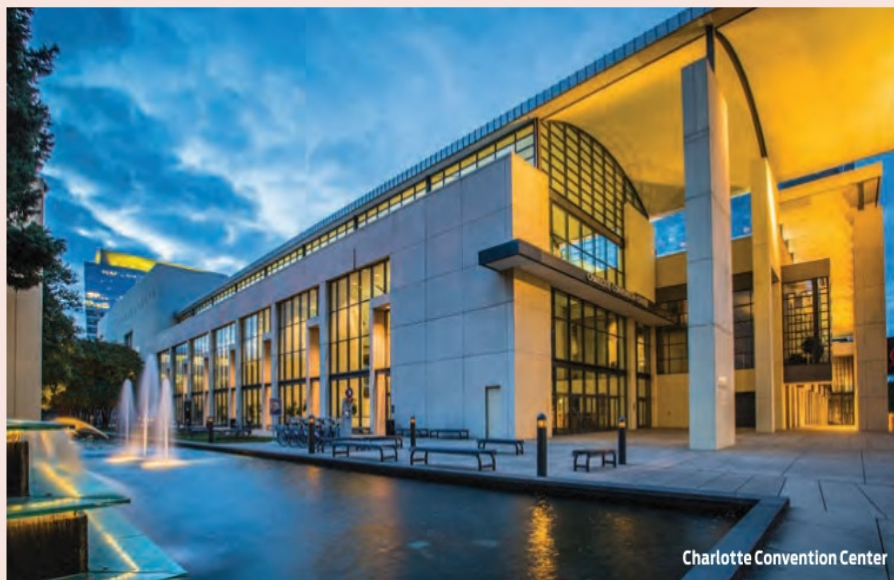
NASCAR Hall of Fame

Sharing a massive outdoor plaza with the Charlotte Convention Center, the "Hall" showcases NASCAR

greats then and now and is one of the city's most popular event venues. The circular Great Hall offers a flexible floor plan hosting up to 650 for receptions against the backdrop of the iconic Glory Road, featuring 18 iconic stock cars. The High Octane Theater hosts 278 stadium-style and includes the Theater Lobby for pre- and post-catering and breakouts.

AvidXchange Music Factory

This 5-acre site is made to host large-scale events. The Charlotte Metro Credit Union Amphitheatre (hosts up to 5,000) is one of the city's prized outdoor concert venues with premium box seats, VIP areas and elevated lawn seating. Fountain Plaza is an outdoor pavilion that hosts concerts and serves as a huge dance floor and mosh pit for giant gatherings. Hip clubs here like The Fillmore (2,000 for concerts or 420 for "sophisticated" seating) and VBGB Beer Hall & Garden are welcoming post-working-event venues.



Charlotte Convention Center



McNitch House



Kimpton Tryon Park



Spectrum Center



NASCAR Hall of Fame

Dine Around

An insatiable demand for the highest-quality dining has brought innovative tables to every corner of Queen City.

At **Angeline's**, contemporary-styled Northern Italian is on the menu at this uptown trattoria that's always buzzy, busy and humming. Try a specialty amaro cocktail before dinner at its sexy sister lounge, **Merchant & Trade** atop **Kimpton Tryon Park Hotel** and enjoy one of the best views of the city skyline.

Down the block at **The Asbury**, executive chef Mike Long's take on Southern cuisine emphasizes fresh modern twists, and his country ham and goat cheese sticky biscuits are gaining legendary status.

Over in South End, **Bardo** delivers a symphony of elegant small plates forming a dynamic ensemble at this top-rated eatery. Next-level simplicity takes dishes with modest monikers like Egg & Grain to dizzying heights.

Executive chef Sam Diminich knocks the socks off his guests with his award-winning lobster risotto at Asian-fusion stalwart **Upstream** in SouthPark.

Fine dining is showcased at **McNitch House Restaurant** where this elegant, Victorian-era Queen Anne home features nouvelle cuisine in a progression of beautifully crafted plates.

UPTOWN ACCOMMODATIONS

Visitors to Charlotte quickly learn the city's downtown area is referred to as Uptown, a holdover nickname from a '60s marketing campaign and the business district's slightly elevated topography. Uptown is home to more than two dozen hotels within the central business district. Surrounding Mecklenburg County's total room inventory nears 30,000 at 225 properties.

Several high-profile, new-to-the-city hotel brands—such as **Grand Bohemian Hotel Charlotte**, **Kimpton Tryon Park Hotel**, **JW Marriott**, **InterContinental** and **Moxy**—have planted their flags there recently.

Charlotte's growth as a business and tourist destination is so strong operators are making significant investments in existing properties with more than \$100 million spent citywide on hotel upgrades and improvements since 2015.

Uptown properties receiving renovations include \$28 million in improvements at **The Westin**, a complete room renovation for **The Ritz-Carlton**, room refreshes and upgrades at the historic **Dunhill Hotel**, and a major transformation (rooms, lobby and common areas) of **Charlotte Marriott City Center**.