

Smart Sites

The Newbie

In Texas, Austin has carved a niche for itself as the site of all things hip. So it's fitting that one of the trendiest hotel chains in the country—Starwood's W brand—has taken root in the happening metropolis. Even more fitting: The **W Austin**, debuting Dec. 9, promises a plethora of chic features.

Shopaholic groups can peruse duds from fashionable local designers in the hotel's retail center, while the 6,500-square-foot spa comes equipped with a unique detox and refuel drink station. And since nothing says *au courant* more than sustainability, the property has hired a dedicated forager to cull local ingredients for the hotel restaurant.

Arguably the hippest part of the property, though, is its prime location adjacent to *Austin City Limits Live*, the PBS show that features unplugged performances from the biggest and (yes) coolest names in the music biz. When not



W Austin

hosting tuneful shows, the ACL venue can accommodate groups of up to 600. And since the hotel has its own 10,500 sq. ft. of stylish meeting space, the proximity of that venue is just the icing on the meeting planner's cake.

As swank as the W Austin is, it also still gets the basics right, with top-rate service and panoramic views of the city and Lady Bird Lake from its 251 guest rooms and suites. In other words, the en vogue will surely love it—but you don't have to be trendy to. whotels.com

The Veteran

In event-mecca Florida, **Innisbrook - a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort** has stood out for years—40 years, to be exact. That's the milestone birthday the Tampa-area property will ring in this month. But rather than looking backward, the Innisbrook has moved forward, with a recently completed, \$26-million renovation.

Among the changes: a brand-new fitness center, guest reception center and 20,000-square-foot spa, as well as improvements to its clubhouses, restaurants, golf courses and meeting space.

These changes have built upon a strong foundation that has lured groups for decades. In sheer scope, the property impresses, with 608 guest



Innisbrook - a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort

accommodations and 75,000 sq. ft. of indoor and outdoor meeting space—not to mention 11 tennis courts, six swimming pools, water slides and picturesque walking trails. Another distinguishing factor is the resort's collection of four championship golf courses, which come with serious pedigree: The greens have earned Innisbrook placement on *Golf Digest's* Top 75 Golf Resorts in America and *Golf Magazine's* Top 100 Courses You Can Play lists.

But the real clincher for the resort's lengthy success has been its stunning beauty. Set amid 900 acres of lush rolling hills and 70 acres of pristine blue lakes, it is truly striking. And that's a feature that will never go out of style. innisbrookgolfresort.com

Quick Quips

Shop Chicago

When life hands you shopping bags, fill them up! That's the philosophy of Bonnie Kaplan, executive producer of **Shop Party**, a company that organizes high-end shopping tours of Chicago. With a background in producing national talk shows such as *Geraldo*, Kaplan sure does know how to make things sizzle—both on-screen and off. Which is one of the first things you'll notice on any Shop Party, each of which highlights local designers and unique-to-Chicago stores. "I'm not a stylist, I'm an executive producer. [Shop Party] is like a TV show, and I produce a spine-tingling experience," she says. Bottom line: "I'm your shopping thrill ride." Who doesn't like the sound of that?

For meeting planners with groups in the city, this means you can sit back and relax—well, at least for one activity during your meeting. "It helps when you have eight-million details for a meeting if someone can take a chunk of that and execute it," Kaplan says of the service she provides. "I will make you look great, and everyone will be talking about your event."

Her spine-tingling experiences include features such as a customized tour for attendees' spouses,

fashion via room service (you guessed it, champagne and vendors brought to your room or VIP suite!), or a reception where vendors are set up. "When a convention is looking to do an activity for spouses, I can take them to do something outstanding with one to 50 people. I am also working on an event coming up where I align a group of vendors. It's like a reception where you eat, drink and shop," Kaplan says.

For smaller groups, Kaplan is known for her tours that pick people up at The Peninsula Chicago downtown (her partner hotel—but you don't have to be staying there to take advantage). She'll meet your group in a town car or a van, and have your trip organized down to the smallest detail. "It's a real interesting challenge. I try to make [the Shop Party] fast paced so you see multiple parts of the city, but travel fast 'cause you want to shop." Shop, in this case, used broadly, as you can choose to hunt for whatever you desire, including clothes, jewelry or books—virtually anything under the sun. "I do my homework. I pre-interview for an hour and I know exactly what you want," she says. This ensures that each party, which typically lasts between



three and eight hours, is individually customized.

But if you have a larger group in the area, she can handle that, too. "The number inside a ballroom could be huge. I bring in the vendors, and meeting planners tell me exactly what they are looking for. I'm not going to put a limit on the number. I'd work with them to make sure it's right for them," she says.

The main goal Kaplan strives for is to make each person's Shop Party an experience they can't find anywhere else. "[Attendees] can go to Michigan Avenue and that's great, but I want them to go home with a head turner. I want people to say, 'Where did you get that?' and they say 'Bonnie Kaplan, Shop Party.'" shopparty.tv