

Destination Comparison for Events

Part 1: Destination & DMO Comparison

Denver, CO and Orlando, FL are among the most popular destinations for meetings and events. They are two cities that I know very well, and so as an event planner I will examine these destinations and find out how they are good spots for an event.

Denver

Overview

Denver has a thriving event industry. The climate, the mountains, the recreation, all contribute to this western city being a top spot for conventions.

As attendees arrive to this city, a train takes them directly from Denver International Airport to downtown Denver. According to Visit Denver, at Union Station along the 16th street mall, they can get to the convention center quickly, or they can head to one of over 13,000 hotels that line the walking-mall in the center of downtown. There are plenty of great restaurants and bars in this vicinity, and the nightlife is quite lively. The Colorado Rockies stadium is right along the train's route, so attendees can take in a game if they so choose. If arts are on attendees' minds, they can visit the Denver Art Gallery or the Broadway theatre adjacent to the convention center (Visit Denver, n.d.).

The convention center has 577,000 square feet of exhibit space and over 60 meeting rooms. There are ballrooms and theatres inside the space. So there are plenty of options for organizations to use this space to their full imagination. The layout and capacity of this facility combined with the location are its key advantages (Colorado Convention Center, n.d.).

One concern highlighted by the Colorado Convention Center itself is around safety. Denver is home to a large transient population centering around downtown. The main concerns are theft, vandalism, aggressive behavior, health risks, and fire hazards (Colorado Convention Center, 2024).

Visit Denver, Destination Marketing Organization

Event planners and companies who are looking at Denver as a location can use the Visit Denver organization to get all their planning insights (Visit Denver, n.d.). Starting in 1908 after hosting the Democratic National Convention, this private, non-profit association highlights all that Denver provides (as well as acknowledges the concerns people might have). The DMO's about page states they are privately and public funded, the latter being through a voter-approved lodging tax. Only 3.75% comes from this tax. This organization works in tandem with many other local government, hospitality, and tourism. Denver is a highly inclusive city, and so this DMO works hard to highlight those aspects of the city, specifically welcoming anyone to their city. (Visit Denver, n.d.)

While the organization doesn't have jobs currently available, they do classify their jobs around their principles. Those principles include Customer Service, Integrity, Excellence, Creativity, and Teamwork.

Orlando

Situated between two beach-lined coasts, surrounded by theme parks and warmth most of the year, Orlando seems a perfect place to have a large gathering. Indeed, many people do. According to the City of Orlando's website, there are 1200 events that happen here (Visit Orlando, n.d.). With the major theme parks in the metro, the city has so many unique venues in which to hold an event. Organizations enjoy the magic of Disney's events, watching fireworks while sipping on drinks in a roped off space. They can even rent out entire parks. (Disney Meeting & Events, n.d.)

There are many convention centers in the surrounding areas. The City of Orlando has one. Walt Disney world has multiple. Orlando is set to expand their center to “. . . bring in man additional 44,00 sf of meeting space and a 100,000-sf ballroom to the North-South building.” (Swanson, 2025). And Disney has done that multiple times since it got into the events business.

Attendees can explore all that Orlando has to offer that are probably unique. Theme parks and nature are a short drive from wherever an event is taking place. Orlando has the power to draw people out of the dusty meeting rooms and get outside and explore a new theme park.

Hurricanes and other large weather events often can disrupt event operations here. According to the Trade Show News Network, many events were canceled in 2022 as Hurricane Ian ramped up its power (Trade Show News Network, n.d.). Of course, disruptive events could happen in any part of the United States, it is a major downside when this warm climate full of unique attractions is unavailable.

Other potential drawback is the reality of the politics of the state. According to a Fox35 report, in 2023, multiple groups canceled their event held in Florida due to the politics. One event planner said she's never seen pushback from the policies directed from Tallahassee as strong as it has been ” (Fox 35 Orlando, n.d),

Visit Orlando, Destination Marketing Organization

Billed as the place to “Discover everything you need in Orlando to create impactful and memorable meetings” (Visit Orlando, n.d), this DMO mostly gets its funds from Orange County's Tourism Development Tax dollars. A recent news article states that this organization gets 30% of the taxes, more than any other single organization. (The article cited here gives out those details but has a subject quite different.) They get some of their funding from private donations.

This DMO is here to market and sell the Orlando destination to potential events. Their site and mission highlights how all the possibilities. They bring in members to support the organization. The org connects local businesses and events together, and the members are supported through education, networking, and championing.

Now they are looking for sales people. As I learn about this group I see the connection between what positions are available and their mission.

Comparative Insight

Visit Orlando is much more planner focused. They are here to support people bringing their business to the state. They offer memberships with added benefits such as networking so that those planners will bring all their business to this state.

Visit Orlando really centers their work around the conventions and the meeting spaces as brands. They work hard to ‘sell’ the location to a prospective event, pointing out all the unique and wonderful things to do.

Part 2: Event Planning Scenario & Destination Evaluation

Comparison Chart

	Denver	Orlando
Transportation		
Airport(s): name(s) and proximity to downtown/convention center	Denver International Airport, 23-27 miles	McCoy Airforce Base, 10-15 miles from convention centers
Ground transportation options	Light Rail, Car	Car
How will attendees move between airport, hotels, and venues?	Event spaces and hotels are close by so attendees can walk, take a shuttle	Car or venue transportation. Walking
Convention Center		
Name and total square footage	Colorado Convention Center; 2,200,000 sq. ft.	Orange County Convention Center, 7 million sq. ft.
Types of facilities available (meeting rooms, exhibit halls, ballrooms)	Meeting rooms, exhibit spaces, ballrooms, theatre	Meetings, exhibits space, Ballrooms, Theatre, Lecture Hall
Proximity to airport and major hotels	23-27 miles to airport. 13,000 hotel rooms within walking distance https://denverconvention.com/	9 miles from MCO, Hotels are within 3 miles. https://www.occc.net/about-us
Hotels		
Total number of hotel rooms citywide	55,000 rooms in the city	126,500 rooms (as of 2022)
Number of hotels within a 1–2 mile radius of the convention center suitable for a room block	10 or more hotels	179
List hotels within 1–2 mile radius (include name + distance)	Less than a mile: • Sentral Union Station • The Curtis Denver • ViB hotel • The Brown Palace Hotel and Spa	Less than a mile • Hilton Grand Vacations Club • Hyatt Regency Orlando • Hampton Inn Orlando International Drive Convention Center

	Denver	Orlando
	- Embassy Suites - Hampton Inn & Suites - Tru by Hilton Denver Downtown Convention Center	- SpringHill Suites by Marriott Orlando Convention Center - Residence In Orlando Convention Center
Average Daily Rate (ADR) for September (per hotel)	- Sentral Union Station: \$379 - The Curtis Denver: \$277 - ViB hotel: \$195 - The Brown Palace Hotel and Spa: \$403 - Embassy Suites: 303 - Hampton Inn & Suites: \$316 - Tru by Hilton Denver Downtown Convention Center: \$367	- Hilton Grand Vacations Club: \$186 - Hyatt Regency Orlando: \$321 - Hampton Inn Orlando International Drive Convention Center: \$101 - SpringHill Suites by Marriott Orlando Convention Center: \$169 - Residence In Orlando Convention Center: \$152
Source of pricing (hotel website or booking platform)	Booking.com	Booking.com
Event Venues – Opening Night Reception (5,000 attendees)		
Venue Option 1	Red Rocks	Coronado Springs, Walt Disney World
Why it is a good fit	In September the views are spectacular, the weather is amazing, and the venue is breathtaking	This space has a capacity of 5700. It is a Disney resort so some of that magic comes into play.
Venue Option 2	Colorado Convention Center	
Why it is a good fit	This space is at the convention center. It allows for folks who are arriving late to not have to travel another 40 minutes to get to the reception.	
Event Venues – Closing Night Concert (5,000 attendees)		
Venue Option 1	Denver Convention Center	Coronado Springs, Walt Disney World
Why it is a good fit	This space is at the convention center. It is close to the attendees' hotels and to transportation to get folks back to the airport that very day. It holds 5,000 people.	This space has a capacity of 5700. It is a Disney resort so some of that magic comes into play.
Venue Option 2		
Why it is a good fit		
Attendee Experience		
Attractions and sightseeing	The Rocky Mountains, Denver Rockies Baseball, Small Amusement parks,	10 major theme parks, the Gulf and Atlantic coasts
Dining options	Downtown	No formal or trendy location.
Nightlife	Downtown	Some centered around the convention.
Culture (museums, arts, music, etc.)	Denver Performing Arts Center, Denver Art Museum	Local theatres
Unique/local experiences	The Mountains	

Final Comparison & Recommendation

After considering the venue possibilities and the makeup of this conference, I would recommend Denver. Though Denver is smaller overall and has less venue space for a group this large, there is a wealth of unique experiences to do after the conference. I would reiterate how providing this kind of experience is motivating and rewarding for attendees. The amenities, lodging, and activities are all centrally located. Denver is a high-tech city, inclusive and welcoming, so a tech conference would fit right in.

For events 11,000 and up, I would not suggest Denver. With only 55,000 rooms in the city, an event this large would take up 1/5 of the city.

Orlando is still growing, so it has the potential for the greatest scaling. They currently have one of the largest convention centers, and they are expanding starting in 2026 (Orange County Convention Center, 2025). There is still land to be developed, theme parks to refresh attractions, and waters to visit.

References

- City of Orlando. (n.d.). *Special events guide*. <https://www.orlando.gov/Our-Government/Departments-Offices/Transportation/Special-Events/Special-Events-Guide>
- ClickOrlando. (2025, July 29). *Audit reveals Visit Orlando misclassified tourist tax dollars as private funds spent on non-tourism items*. <https://www.clickorlando.com/news/local/2025/07/29/audit-reveals-visit-orlando-misclassified-tourist-tax-dollars-as-private-funds-spent-on-non-tourism-items/>
- Colorado Convention Center. (n.d.). *Colorado Convention Center*. <https://denverconvention.com/>
- Colorado Convention Center. (n.d.). *Our story*. <https://denverconvention.com/about-us/our-story>
- Colorado Convention Center. (2024). *Transient safety* (Sect. 10). <https://denverconvention.com/media/general/SECT-10-2024-Tranient-Safety.pdf>
- Fox 35 Orlando. (n.d.). *More organizations cancel conventions in Orlando*. <https://www.fox35orlando.com/news/more-organizations-cancel-conventions-in-orlando>
- Meeting Magazines. (2025). *Orlando 2025 meeting planner destination update*. <https://www.themeetingmagazines.com/acf/orlando-2025-meeting-planner-destination-update/>
- Orange County Convention Center. (2025, March 27). Orange County Convention Center's Grand Concourse Expansion to begin construction in 2026 [Press release]. <https://www.occc.net/About-Us-Media-Relations-Press-Releases/ArticleID/1001/OCCCs%20Grand%20Concourse%20Expansion%20to%20Begin%20Construction%20in%202026>
- Orlando Meeting. (n.d.). *Orlando meeting*. <https://www.orlandomeeting.com/>
- Swanson, D. (2025, May 21). *Why it remains America's top-ranked meeting destination*. *The Meeting Magazines*. <https://www.themeetingmagazines.com/acf/orlando-2025-meeting-planner-destination-update/>
- The Walt Disney Company. (n.d.). *Corporate events overview*. Disney Meetings & Events. <https://www.disneymeetingsandevents.com/corporate-events/>
- Trade Show News Network. (n.d.). *Major trade shows and events cancel as Hurricane Ian impacts Florida*. <https://www.tsnn.com/event-management/major-trade-shows-and-events-cancel-as-hurricane-ian-impacts-florida>
- Visit Denver. (n.d.). *About Visit Denver*. <https://visitdenver.com/about-visit-denver/>
- Visit Denver. (n.d.). *About Visit Denver*. <https://visitdenver.com/meetings/contact-us/about-visit-denver/>

Visit Denver. (n.d.). *Careers*. <https://visitdenver.com/careers/>

Visit Denver. (n.d.). *Meetings*. <https://visitdenver.com/meetings/>

Visit Orlando. (n.d.). *Members*. <https://www.visitorlando.org/members/>