



Austin

Known as the “Live Music Capital of the World,” Austin is certainly not bluffing about its bustling music scene. The area has more than 250 live-music venues and is home to some of the most popular festivals in the country, such as Fun Fun Fun Fest, South by Southwest and Austin City Limits.

And it’s not only big music festivals that are attracted to the city. Austin’s Circuit of The Americas, a 1,600-acre sports and entertainment venue, will be the host of ESPN’s Summer X Games from 2014-17.

Smaller meetings fit in effortlessly in Austin. Janet Heimlich, president and executive director of the Child-Friendly Faith Project, hosted the interfaith group’s inaugural conference at St. David’s Episcopal Church in downtown Austin last November. She found the church after looking around Austin for “a place conducive to providing positive discussion,” she says. Attendees stayed at Crowne Plaza Austin and were bused to the church.

The church has more than 15,000 square feet of event space in nine rooms. Heimlich says about 50 people attended the event, some of whom watched through a live feed. She also says the church was “really accommodating and let us come in prior to the event and do tech rehearsals, which was critical.”

“They have great event planners at St. David’s,” she says. Because it was CFFP’s first conference, Heimlich says they needed extra planning assistance. “They were excellent at guiding us along,” she says.

For bigger events, the 900,000-sq.-ft. Austin Convention Center downtown has 54 meeting rooms and seven ballrooms that can combine to create two larger ballrooms, measuring 43,000 and 23,000 square feet each. The convention center has a digital bandwidth of 1 billion bits per second. It is also centrally located and within walking distance of several hotels, including Hilton Austin, Hampton Inn & Suites, Courtyard Austin Convention Center, Omni Austin Hotel Downtown and Hyatt Place Austin Downtown. Many more hotels are on the way. JW Marriott Austin will be the city’s largest hotel with 110,500 square feet of meeting space; and the 17-story Westin Austin Downtown will have 13,500 square feet of space. Both hotels are expected to open in 2015.

“I think Austin is a great place for interfaith events because it is very welcoming and open to all people’s beliefs. It’s a progressive city,” Heimlich says, adding that “people can go out and enjoy the time that they’re not at the conference. It’s not a sterile environment.” Austin is home to a number of family-friendly activities that are unique to the area. The musically inclined can join the Austin Ukulele Society the second Thursday of each month at Memorial United Methodist Church for a lesson and a show. Austin’s famous food truck scene provides a fun and inexpensive way to sample regional flavors and interact with local foodies and chefs.

> **Area guest rooms:** 30,000 > **Nearest airport:** Austin-Bergstrom International Airport > **Convention center:** Austin Convention Center
 > **Total meeting space:** 370,967 square feet > **Meeting rooms:** 54