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GREAT LAKES GASTFREUNDSCHAFT

German flair permeates corporate
events in Frankenmuth (18)





The Bavarian Belle Riverboat paddles down the Cass River

Great Lakes Gastfreundschaft (Hospitality) in Frankenmuth

Michigan's "Little Bavaria" welcomes planners, attendees and tourists alike.

BY DIANNA STAMPFLER

» MOST OFTEN THOUGHT OF AS a leisure travel destination, Frankenmuth—with its distinctive German flair—is also one of the state's top locales for corporate events. Dubbed "Little Bavaria" in the early

1950s, this town is rich with tradition, culture, family heritage and plenty of unique spaces and activities for groups of all sizes.

Ideal for large groups, Bavarian Inn Lodge offers over 15,000 square feet of meeting

and convention space and is adaptable for trade shows, breakouts, and everything in between. In addition to flexible square footage, the lodge provides direct access to 360 European-themed guest rooms, two lounge

PHOTOS: STEPH CASTEIN; (OPPOSITE) FRANKENMUTH BREWERY



Frankenmuth Brewery offers spacious, airy settings for private events

areas, an arcade, nightly entertainment and the popular Bavarian Inn Restaurant. Dining facilities are available for groups of up to 350, with customized menu options in addition to the popular Frankenmuth-style chicken dinners and German specialties, many perfected by the company's matriarch, Dorothy Zehnder (see page 32).

Across the street, Zehnder's of Frankenmuth is known around the country for its all-you-can-eat, family-style chicken dinners that have been served up for groups since its founding in 1856. Similar to the Bavarian Inn Restaurant, banquet rooms at Zehnder's can accommodate up to 350 people, with a variety of nearby shopping options available before and after meals—including the bakery and sweet shop. Last

year, the James Beard Foundation even presented Zehnder's with its "America's Classics Award," given to locally owned restaurants with "timeless appeal" and a menu that reflects the character of its community. Zehnder's is one of over 100 restaurants nationwide to earn the recognition since the category was introduced in 1998.

Other longtime institutions have their roots in Frankenmuth as well. Regarded as Michigan's oldest operating brewery (circa 1862), Frankenmuth Brewery holds groups of up to 275 in "The River View" overlooking the Cass River. The space can be separated into two parts, each offering built-in A/V equipment. The "Hops Room" is enclosed, but with windows that open to create a covered patio ideal for receptions or social

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gatherings. With an on-site restaurant and brewery, the food and beverage elements are covered (including treats like a pie bar, ice cream bar, cheesecake bar and gourmet s'mores bar). Brewery tours can also be coordinated as an add-on for groups.

Although Frankenmuth has plenty of veteran establishments to meet in, one of Frankenmuth's newest event spaces is Warenhaus Studio, located just steps from downtown. The 2,000-square-foot rustic industrial-style setting features a full catering kitchen and more.

Fischer Hall, named after the city's original Fischer Hotel, is an historic site inside the Frankenmuth Historical Museum for events like concerts, receptions and more. Those looking for an outdoor venue might enjoy the Frankenmuth Farmers Market, with its modern farmhouse-style barn for 85 people, a pavilion area to accommodate large tents and a small conference room for groups of up to 12.

A variety of activities for groups can also be found in this German-influenced city, including pretzel rolling at the Bavarian Inn Restaurant or sausage making at Willi's Sausage Co., the PedAle Trolley and rides aboard the paddlewheel-style Bavarian Belle Riverboat down the Cass River.

However, a visit to Frankenmuth isn't complete without a stop at Bronner's Christmas Wonderland, one of the top tourist attractions in Michigan, welcoming more than 2 million guests a year. This 320,000-square-foot building (approximately 5.5 football fields) is dubbed the "World's Largest Christmas Store" and features thousands of personalized ornaments, gifts, nativity scenes, collectibles, Christmas accessories and so much more, 361 days a year. **m•e**