




State of the Art

Cities across Michigan have myriad new, attractive offerings for meeting planners.

By Dianna Stampfler



WHEN THE PANDEMIC HIT and halted most in-person events, it created downtime for many destinations to begin, continue, or wrap up renovation projects and full-blown new builds. Now that corporate and leisure functions are returning to Michigan, event planners and their attendees will see fresh meeting spaces, off-premise activities, guest rooms, and restaurants.

Across the state, new venues sprouted, including Pontiac's M1 Concourse Event Center, the Haworth Hotel and Conference Center in Holland, the Esther Williams Swimming Pool area at the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, and The Graduate-East Lansing on the campus of Michigan State University. Whether you're looking for space for a 1,000 plus person convention or an upscale boardroom, you are bound to find what you are looking for in our overview of what's new in Michigan.

ANN ARBOR MARRIOTT YPSILANTI
AT EAGLE CREST

BAVARIAN INN LODGE, FRANKENMUTH;
BELOW: HART PLAZA, DETROIT



FRANKENMUTH

The Bavarian Inn Restaurant & Lodge added a unique venue to its portfolio with ResidenZ—a grand 1910 estate once owned by the Zehnder and Weiss families, now available as a private rental for groups. The German-style property sits on a well-manicured lot next to the inn and the city's well-known covered bridge. It can accommodate 16 guests in five bedrooms and features five full bathrooms, laundry facilities, air conditioning, and complimentary Wi-Fi.

GRAND RAPIDS

The Sheraton Grand Rapids Airport Hotel & Conference Center recently underwent a \$14 million renovation; it is one of the first properties in the country to feature the new branding geared toward meetings, corporate groups, and leisure travelers alike. Among the offerings are The Studios (informal spaces for small group gatherings or private dining) and The Booths—private soundproof rooms with video call capabilities.

The Amway Grand Plaza wrapped up a \$40 million facelift to its exterior, guest rooms, and the top-of-tower MDRD (pronounced “Madrid”). The latest unveilings are Woodrows DuckPin Bowling and Taco Alley, located in the former GP Sports, and new rooftop pickleball courts. Across the street at the JW Marriott, an expanded spa, Seraphina, recently opened, focusing on natural, thoughtful, and holistic guest services in a modern setting.

ANN ARBOR/YPSILANTI

Washtenaw County's largest hotel and conference facility, the Ann Arbor Marriott Ypsilanti at Eagle Crest completed its 4,800-square-foot Garden Marquee venue—which overlooks both a golf course and Ford Lake. The resort offers 34,000 square feet for events with 30 breakout rooms and a larger space for up to 1,200 guests.

Homewood Suites by Hilton opened a 107-room hotel just south of the University of Michigan campus in fall 2021. Highlights include a vegetated roof with a stormwater system, an outdoor patio with fire pits, indoor pool, indoor bicycle parking, and electric vehicle charging stations powered by rooftop solar panels.

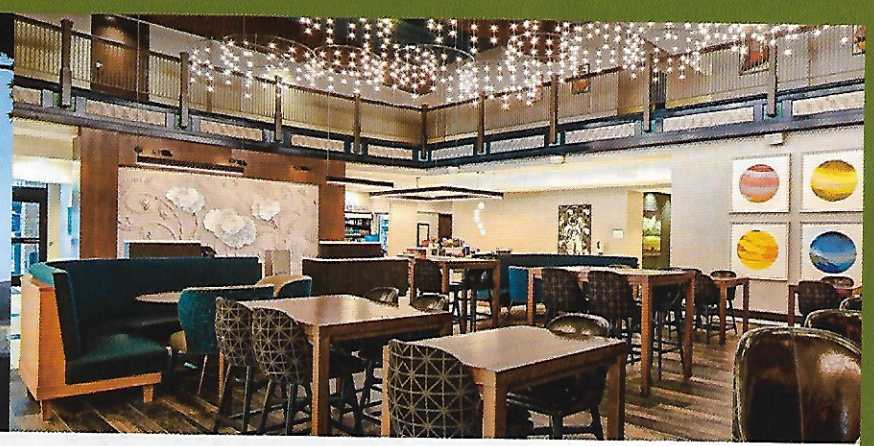
DETROIT AREA

Last fall, the M1 Concourse Event Center opened at the 1.5-mile Champion Motor Speedway in Pontiac, about 35 miles from Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport. This 87-acre complex is an auto enthusiast's dream with both indoor and outdoor spaces. The 40,000-square-foot outdoor plaza accommodates 2,000 people while also displaying vehicles. The two-story Grand Concourse ballroom hosts up to 500 and can be divided into three distinct salons. The most exhilarating part of the M1 Concourse is the option for guests to ride shotgun around the track with a professional driver at 100 mph.

Detroit's iconic David Whitney Building is rebranding as a Marriott Autograph Collection property (the first in the city). Twenty-four of the current apartments will be converted to one- and two-bedroom hotel suites, bringing the total number of guest rooms to 160. Upgrades to the hotel lobby bar, atrium lounge, and outdoor seating, as well as a new restaurant at the corner of Woodward and Park avenues, are also planned to be completed by late 2023.



M1 CONCOURSE EVENT CENTER,
PONTIAC



LEFT TO RIGHT: HOME2 SUITES, KALAMAZOO; HILTON GARDEN INN, KALAMAZOO

HOLLAND

There is a global feel to the Haworth Hotel and Conference Center on the campus of Hope College in downtown Holland. Redesigned by Milan-based Patricia Urquiola, this boutique property features 48 guest rooms (including one new suite), 14 conference spaces, and a ballroom with room for 350 guests. The focal point of the lobby is a modern spiral staircase reminiscent of the interior of New York's iconic Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. The hotel is a showcase for the Haworth's furniture design—providing a sleek, yet comfortable feel.

Just a few blocks away, the recently renovated Holland Civic Center Place is a multiuse facility for entertainment performances, association meetings, corporate banquets, and other gatherings. The Great Hall is its largest space, able to accommodate 500 people. Other spaces include Market View (200), Market Side (150), and The Atrium (100).

KALAMAZOO

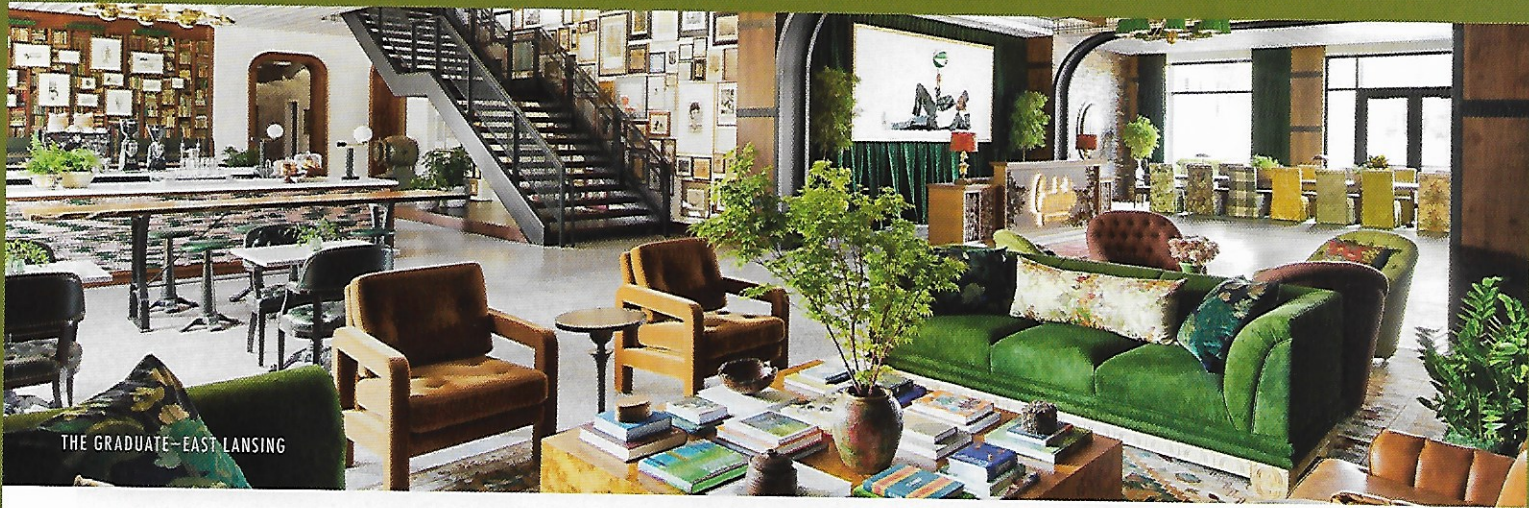
Kalamazoo's largest meeting venue, the 338-room Radisson Plaza Hotel & Suites, recently completed a multimillion-dollar renovation project. Guests will find a new look and feel from the lobby and lower-level meeting spaces to the top floor of guest rooms. Among the already finished updates is Brick and Brine restaurant, which opened in January 2022 with an open-air concept—the first of its kind downtown. This space offers three private event spaces, a main dining room, and lounge seating.

New to the downtown neighborhood are the Hilton Garden Inn and Home2 Suites by Hilton, both housed in the former Masonic Temple Building (also known as the Rose Street Market building). The Hilton Garden Inn features 114 rooms spread out over six floors, while the Home2 offers 106 spacious suites with kitchens. The Garden Grille & Bar provides room service to both properties. Within walking distance of all three hotels is The Xperience, a multiuse entertainment venue located inside the Kalamazoo City Centre Mall. With 3,200 square feet of space, this is a prime spot for corporate events with a raised stage and add-on options like signature cocktails.

HOLLAND CIVIC CENTER PLACE, HOLLAND



PHOTOS: DISCOVER KALAMAZOO, HOLLAND CIVIC CENTER PLACE



THE GRADUATE—EAST LANSING

LANSING/EAST LANSING

In the heart of the Stadium District, the Courtyard by Marriott on Michigan Avenue is within view of the State Capitol and walking distance to Jackson Field (home to the minor league Lansing Lugnuts, which is affiliated with the Chicago Cubs), several museums, Lansing Center, and Meijer’s Capital City Market. The property features a state-of-the-art lobby, nearly 1,800 square feet of event space, 122 guest rooms (including two suites), and The Bistro restaurant.

On the campus of Michigan State University, The Graduate—East Lansing is a refreshing new brand (another location opened in Ann Arbor in 2016). This 194-room property has a boutique feel in what the staff calls “Up North College” with an art deco flair. Overall, this property features 6,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event space, both indoors and out.

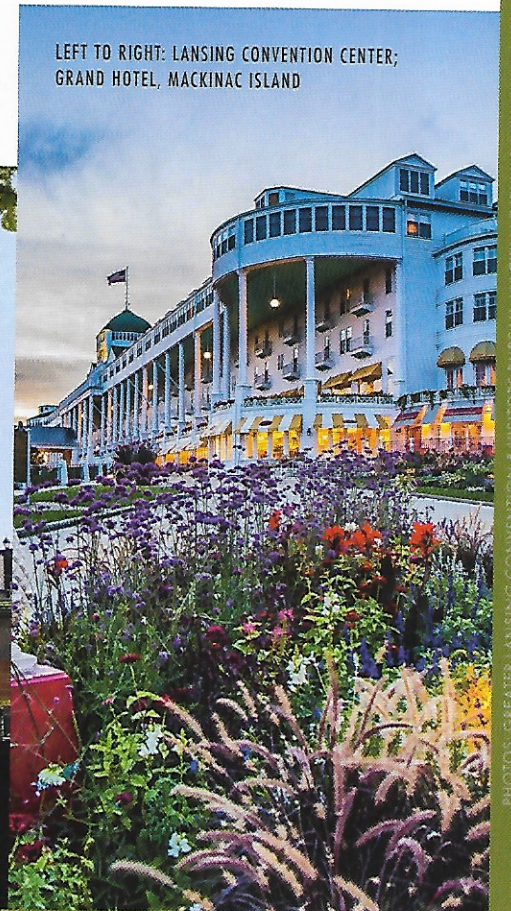
Also coming online this year is The Lansing Shuffleboard and Social Club, an indoor-outdoor 15,000-square-foot entertainment complex in the former Lansing City Market building. It will include seven restaurants, two full-service bars, five shuffleboard courts, and flexible event space next door to the Lansing Convention Center and the Grand River.

Red Cedar Development is building two hotels—a Hyatt House and AC Hotel by Marriott—as part of a mixed-use project on Michigan Avenue between downtown Lansing and the Michigan State University campus. Overlooking the Red Cedar River, the complex features Toscana Restaurant and Bar, student housing, an assisted senior facility, and market-rate living spaces, as well as a 20-acre public park and amphitheater connected to the Lansing River Trail.

MACKINAC ISLAND

One of the most exciting upgrades to the historic Grand Hotel was the renovation and expansion of the Esther Williams Swimming Pool area, including a fitness center and bathhouse. There is also an area dedicated to private events, and the second floor of the pool house offers meeting and event space. Among the added offerings are a zero-depth beach entry, a water jet play area, a water slide, 15 reservable cabanas, a large whirlpool, and a private, adults-only pool area with an infinity edge and unparalleled views of the island.

LEFT TO RIGHT: LANSING CONVENTION CENTER; GRAND HOTEL, MACKINAC ISLAND



MARQUETTE

A new meeting space opened in downtown Marquette called CoLAB that caters to remote and traveling professionals. Located in the renovated Kaufman Block at 101 West Washington, private office and meeting spaces are available for short- and long-term rentals, along with state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment for virtual meetings as well as high-speed internet, printing, private wellness spaces, and kitchenettes.

The city is home to multiple hotels, including Hampton Inn Marquette/Waterfront, Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott, Landmark Inn, and the Ramada of Marquette. The Hampton, the Landmark, and the Ramada all have various spaces for group meetings and gatherings.

MOUNT PLEASANT

Visitors to Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort will find new dining options in the coming years. Ruth's Chris Steak House will open its fourth Michigan location here in late 2022, serving up mouthwatering USDA prime steaks, seafood, and decadent desserts, and offering an extensive premium wine list. The property's existing Aurora Buffet will soon be replaced by a celebrity-focused food court, which will include a Chicken Guy restaurant owned by charismatic TV chef Guy Fieri.

MUSKEGON

In April 2021, the city of Muskegon unveiled its new convention center, renovated hotel, and sports arena in the heart of downtown. With a \$21 million price tag, the VanDyk Mortgage Convention Center boasts 37,700 square feet of meeting space, including a 16,550-square-foot column-free ballroom and 13 breakout rooms. This impressive venue is attached to a 200-room Delta Hotel by Marriott featuring the 200-seat Walker's—An American Brasserie, as well as the 3,000-seat multipurpose Mercy Health Arena (home to the Muskegon Lumberjacks hockey team). These properties sit within one of two active county-designated Social Districts (the other being the Muskegon Lakeside area, with additional districts in Whitehall and Montague in the works to the north) and are licensed public areas where the public can stroll with alcoholic beverages purchased from local bars or restaurants.

VANDYK MORTGAGE CONVENTION CENTER, MUSKEGON



PETOSKEY AREA

Along the shores of Little Traverse Bay and just steps from the Great Lakes Center for the Arts in Bay Harbor, the Northern Blue Penthouse offers an elegant new retreat option. Encompassing two levels—not to mention the entire fourth floor—this space is accessible by a private elevator and is divided into 29 rooms, including eight bedrooms and baths, a spacious kitchen, workout area, a laundry room, a fireplace, numerous balconies, and more.

The former Bay Harbor Equestrian Center on U.S. Highway 31 has been transformed into a 40,000-square-foot multiuse activity center named Gypsy Farms. Sitting on 22 acres, this complex features a distillery and tasting room, golf swing suites, an arcade, duckpin bowling, and a beer garden. The horse paddocks will host farmers' markets, holiday events, and more. The first phase, which included the distillery and tasting room, was completed in June 2022.

PORT HURON

The long-anticipated CityFlatsHotel is finally open, with 18 uniquely designed guest rooms, two eateries, and a 300-person ballroom set inside the original 1927 bank vault (the hotel occupies the former Michigan National Bank building). Restaurants include the simply named The Kitchen and The Bar inside, and the Fair Weather Grill and CityFloats bar outside along the Black River (which flows into the St. Clair River and, ultimately, into Lake Huron).

Also downtown, McMorran Place Sports & Entertainment Center is a large outdoor social space with a beer garden, free live entertainment stage, splash pad, fire pits, comfortable seating, and more. The plaza sits inside the city's Social District, which stretches along Military Street and Huron Avenue between Court and Glenwood. A second such district is planned along the Thomas Edison Parkway boardwalk near the Blue Water Convention Center.

STAFFORD'S BAY VIEW INN, PETOSKEY;
BELOW: BLUE WATER CONVENTION
CENTER, PORT HURON



PHOTOS: STAFFORD'S BAY VIEW INN, BLUE WATER AREA CONVENTION AND VISITOR BUREAU

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ST. JOSEPH

A complimentary water taxi offers rides between key sites on the St. Joseph River, along St. Joseph's Maritime Heritage Trail. The canopy-covered boat seats six passengers and runs throughout the weekend in the summer months (weather permitting), providing access to the historic Silver Beach Amusement Park and downtown, the Margaret B. Upton Arboretum, and Harbor Shores Resort—host of the 2022 KitchenAid Senior PGA golf championship. Another option to get out on the water is the Harbor Hopper, a southwest Michigan cycle boat, which operates out of Harbor Shores Resort.

TRAVERSE CITY AREA

Those looking to explore the beaches and waters in the Traverse City area will find several tour operators with unique excursion options. LyfMotiv Adventures was founded in 2020 and offers sailing, biking, and hiking trips. Spend a day sailing to and hiking on North Manitou Island, exploring Power Island, or riding e-bikes through wine country. Sleeping Bear Adventure Co. has put together a full day of activities including kayaking along Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, biking the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail, and paddleboarding in Little Glen Lake—all capped off with a stop at the popular Hop Lot Brewing Co. in Suttons Bay. 🍷

GET CONNECTED

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MACKINAC ISLAND TOURISM BUREAU

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