

WHERE NATURE *Inspires*

THE EASTERN REGION OF TEXAS IS A NATURAL PARADISE
THAT WILL TAKE GROUPS OFF THE BEATEN PATH

BY GRETCHEN HESER

*Clockwise from
above: Hyatt
Regency Conroe
& Convention
Center; Longview
Arboretum and
Nature Center; Tyler
Rose Garden; Maude
Cobb Convention
Center in Longview*

People familiar with Texas are always taken aback—in a “Wow!” sort of way—when they visit the state’s Piney Woods region. Encompassing the far eastern reaches of the state, this spectacular area is awash in natural wonders, from woodlands packed with pine and oak trees to glittering lakes and rushing rivers.

“When conferences get out where it’s less populated, attendees get a different experience,” says Diann Bayes, president of Visit Tyler. “There’s a natural beauty that people are missing in the larger cities.” With several cities and towns to choose from—including Tyler, Longview, Nacogdoches, and The Woodlands—the Piney Woods region offers no shortage of convenient venue options for planners. Attendees have access to activities and entertainment that keeps them busy between meetings, along with a taste of small-town Texas hospitality. Many gathering here might want to take advantage of the Piney Woods’ spectacular natural attractions, whether interwoven into official team-building sessions or by tacking on an extra day or two in the area.

“After spending all day in a meeting room, there’s something rejuvenating about stepping out and having easy access to nature,” says Josie Lewis, director of sales at Visit The Woodlands. “It really enhances attendees’ ability to focus and engage with others, and it provides unique opportunities that create impactful memories.”

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT): Hyatt Regency, Conroe & Convention Center, City of Longview, Visit Tyler, City of Longview

SO MUCH FOR PLANNERS

As one of the biggest cities in the Piney Woods, Tyler has plenty to offer meeting planners, and its W.T. Brookshire Conference Center opened last April. With 60,000 square feet of meeting space, a built-in stage, well-equipped kitchen, and modern design, the Brookshire facility is well-suited for a variety of gatherings. But as beautiful as the indoor spaces are, what really makes Brookshire shine is its adjacency to greenspaces. The center is next door to Tyler's beloved municipal rose garden, the largest public collection of roses in the U.S. "We're so thrilled to have the conference facility so close to other attractions that people can enjoy when they're not in meetings," says Bayes.

The city offers plenty of hotels, including the Holiday Inn Tyler Conference Center, which boasts 11,000 square feet of meeting space. Theater seating capable of accommodating 500, banquet-style seating suitable for up to 500, and breakout rooms make the hotel a versatile venue for meetings of all sizes.

"When planners are looking for meeting spaces, they have a variety of different options in Tyler," Bayes says. For planners interested in modern architecture and a retreat-like atmosphere, Tyler's One Realtor Center offers 4,300 square feet of flexible meeting space, including the Grand Foyer, which has two-story windows for plenty of Texas sunshine indoors. Cascades Country Club has 15,000 square feet of space perfect for golfers in your group, Bayes says. The historic Mayfair Building, scheduled to open for events early next year, has a beautiful stage that accommodates performers or keynoters.



CITY AMENITIES WITHOUT THE TRAFFIC

Longview is the kind of place travelers like to visit when they're looking to escape the crowds, says CJ Clayton, tourism manager for the city. "People come here to get away from traffic and big-city craziness," she says. Longview has "a slower pace of life" that meeting-goers love to soak up when they visit, Clayton adds.

Planners might want to consider the Longview Convention Complex for their event. The 40,000-square-foot complex is made up of several gathering spaces, including an exhibit hall, the Maude Cobb Main Hall, and smaller rental spaces. Longview is also home to several hotels with varying amounts of space, including the Holiday Inn Longview-North hotel, home to the Infinity Event Center, 121 guest rooms, and meeting space for 650 attendees. For something a little different, planners might consider the Longview Arboretum and Nature Center. In addition to numerous indoor meeting rooms, the facility offers an outdoor stage, a meditation garden, and hilltop pavilion—each of which can accommodate small groups in a spectacular setting.

A potential excursion for attendees outside of the day's agenda is Longview's historic downtown, which has undergone a transformation in recent years, with many buildings being renovated into new spaces housing restaurants and museums. "Our downtown has grown exponentially," says Clayton. "It has really changed, and it's a great place to visit and hang out." Many works of public art decorate the downtown area, and nearby wineries and antiquing opportunities make Longview a special place to visit.

Nacogdoches complements its small size with its outsized creativity when it comes to hosting events. "We offer something planners can't get anywhere else," says Ashley Morgan, interim director for the Nacogdoches Convention



and Visitors Bureau. "Meeting planners can take advantage of plentiful space at Stephen F. Austin State University. Others have opted to hold events outside at the town's covered amphitheater at Pecan Acres Park."

Morgan says the city offers plenty of hotel space. The recently renovated midcentury modern Fredonia Hotel and Convention Center in the city's historic downtown offers 20,000 square feet of meeting space. The historic building combines the modern amenities of a large hotel but with a boutique atmosphere.

Nacogdoches is billed as the oldest city in Texas. While Indigenous people had been in the area for millennia, Spanish explorers established permanent settlements in the early 18th century. Attendees can stroll the antiques and specialty shops downtown, and history buffs will want to check out the numerous historic landmarks in the area.

PINEY WOODS SMALL TOWNS TO CONSIDER

East Texas is dotted with welcoming small towns perfect for close-knit meetings or retreats. Palestine oozes charm, with more than 1,800 historic homes and buildings, including The Redlands Hotel, a converted mixed-use space with meeting rooms, hotel suites, dining options, and shopping all in one historic building. The Lakeview Conference Center can accommodate 1,200 people and offers full-service facilities in a rustic setting. Schedule a meeting in springtime and attendees can enjoy the Dogwood Trails celebration, when the native trees burst into spectacular bloom.

Smaller groups might want to visit the town of Jefferson, the "Bed and Breakfast Capital of East Texas," where there's also a "Gone with the Wind" museum. The City of Jefferson Convention and Visitors Center can accommodate up to 350 attendees. In Kilgore, a small town that has numerous oil derricks downtown, attendees can learn more about the area at the East Texas Oil Museum. The Comfort

"After spending all day in a meeting room, there's something rejuvenating about stepping out and having easy access to nature."

-JOSIE LEWIS DIRECTOR OF SALES, VISIT THE WOODLANDS

Suites Kilgore has two flexible meeting spaces and an on-site restaurant. And don't forget lovely Lufkin, a small town that hosts the Texas Forestry Museum all about the Piney Woods region. The Courtyard by Marriott Lufkin can host up to 145 in flexible meeting space.

Conroe is less than an hour drive north of Houston but, bordered by two forests and the 22,000-acre Lake Conroe, it feels miles away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Attendees can relax after the day's events with a brew at The Corner Pub or snag tickets to a play at one of the live theaters in the historic downtown district. The 250-room Hyatt Regency Conroe & Convention Center offers 27,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including a 14,000-square-foot ballroom. If scheduling a meeting in Conroe in the fall, reserve rooms early. The Texas Renaissance Festival lasts for seven weeks each year in the small town.

HIT THE LINKS

For a spectacular view of the sunset over Lake Conroe, reserve a block of rooms and meeting space at Margaritaville Lake Resort, Lake Conroe-Houston. Attendees can enjoy the 18-hole golf course and putting green for some team bonding on the property's 186 lakefront acres, in the waterfront cottages or luxury suites, aboard the boat rentals, and at the on-site water park.

Planners looking to host golf events will find plenty of stunning courses in the Piney Woods. About halfway between Tyler and Palestine, Pine Dunes Resort in Frankston is a popular course reminiscent of Pinehurst in North Carolina. And for attendees staying in Longview, Tempest is known for its breathtaking scenery and challenging play.

North of Houston at the very edge of the Piney Woods is the aptly named town, The Woodlands. Two golf courses are available to attendees at The Woodlands Resort, Curio Collection by Hilton. The North Course borders Lake Harrison on one side of the manicured greens, and the West Course showcases 20 acres of wildflower-covered prairie. For planners, the resort boasts 402 rooms and 73,000 square feet of indoor-outdoor space. Attendees can enjoy the lazy river, tennis courts, and multiple on-site restaurants during their downtime. "The Woodlands has all of the incredible shopping, dining, and group experiences that you will find in a larger city, set in a curated, upscale, and natural environment," says Josie Lewis, director of sales at Visit The Woodlands. "This is a very safe and walkable destination, and we have a free trolley system that makes it easy for guests to explore." When it comes to natural beauty and meeting amenities, the Piney Woods is not to be missed. [m+e](#)

[visitconroe.com](https://www.visitconroe.com)

[visitjeffersonontexas.com](https://www.visitjeffersonontexas.com)

[visitkilgore.com](https://www.visitkilgore.com)

[visitlongviewtexas.com](https://www.visitlongviewtexas.com)

[visitlufkin.com](https://www.visitlufkin.com)

[visitnacogdoches.org](https://www.visitnacogdoches.org)

[visitpalestine.com](https://www.visitpalestine.com)

[visittyler.com](https://www.visittyler.com)

[visitthewoodlands.com](https://www.visitthewoodlands.com)



Clockwise from left: Downtown Main Street in Nacogdoches; Boone Mansion, Palestine; Front desk at The Resort at The Woodlands; Waterside pools at Margaritaville Lake Resort; Hyatt Regency Conroe & Convention Center lobby; Hyatt Regency Conroe & Convention Center exterior



plus! CONFERENCE & CONVENTION CENTERS:

TEXAS-SIZE VENUES FOR YOUR EVENT

texas

meetings + events

MEETINGSMAGS.COM // WINTER 2024



A VIEW

FROM THE TOP

ROOFTOP VENUES TAKE MEETINGS TO NEW HEIGHTS

**Flavorful
Variety**

FOOD TRUCKS
OFFER MYRIAD
DINING OPTIONS