The Space Needle overlooks downtown Seattle

Gorgeous Gatherings

Stunning settings for meetings and retreats abound in the Pacific Northwest.

BY LESLEY BALLA

Nothing compares to the grandeur of the Pacific Northwest. There's an abundance of beauty to enjoy: towering mountain peaks, rocky ocean shores, brooding forests, raging rivers, idyllic vineyards, fertile farmland, skyscraper-lined cities, and wide-open vistas. Perhaps like no other place on earth, the Pacific Northwest unveils dramatic vistas for participants at meetings and events of any sort.

Imagine your attendees experiencing the wild islands of British Columbia, Canada, the highest views in Seattle, Washington, or the rugged splendor of western Idaho. Want to wow and inspire a group with gorgeous surroundings? Consider these venues.

THE SPACE NEEDLE »

Seattle, Washington

An icon of the Pacific Northwest, the Space Needle is the most identifiable building in Seattle's skyline—and the best place from which to see the city. Located in the artsy Seattle Center along with some of the city's most popular sports and cultural attractions, the 605-foot structure recently received a $100-million facelift that brought more windows to the circular top, plus updated small and large meeting spaces.

Built for the Seattle World's Fair in 1962, the Space Needle offers unparalleled views of Elliott Bay, the San Juan Islands, and mountains in every direction. It's just one reason why local and national corporate groups—including technology firms, media companies, charitable organizations, and medical and legal associations—have held events here.

Perched above Seattle at 500 feet, The Loupe Lounge offers incredible vistas, but its hallmark—the world's first and only rotating glass floor—allows a spine-tingling panorama of the skyline and beyond. The two-story lounge can be used for evening receptions and cocktail events featuring showstopping mixology and Pacific Northwest seafood. A full buyout of both levels has space for up to 600 guests.

At a height of 100 feet, the Skyline level is a popular option for breakaway meals during a downtown conference. Guests can see Puget Sound, the Olympic and Cascade mountains, Elliott Bay, and the Queen Anne, Capitol Hill, and Seattle Center neighborhoods from varying vantage points. The entire level accommodates 300 for receptions and 250 for seated events. It can also be separated into three individual spaces: the Lake Union Room, Puget Sound Room, and smaller Seattle Room. The observation deck is also available for gatherings.

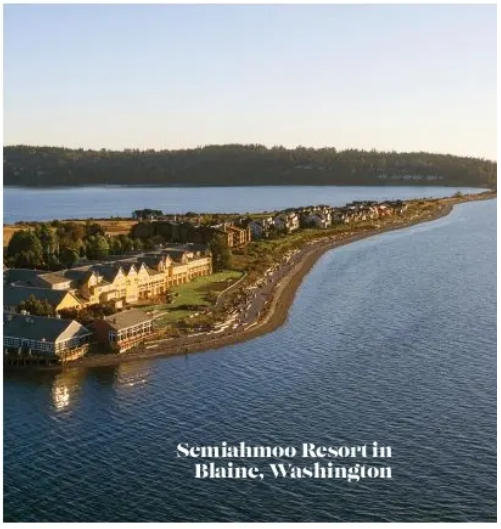
Groups of 1,500 to 5,000 can take over the Space Needle's courtyard, which neighbors the Chihuly Garden and Glass and the Museum of Pop Culture. When the International Trademark Association hosted its 140th meeting in Seattle, 4,000 attendees from around the globe gathered here for its closing-night block party. In addition to food stations, guests get private access to the venues, including reserving times to ride to the top of the Space Needle's observation deck. ***spaceneedle.com***

SEMIAHMOO RESORT »

Blaine, Washington

Just minutes from the Canadian border and two hours north of Seattle, the surrounding beauty of Semiahmoo Resort's idyllic location—set on the spit between Semiahmoo Bay and Drayton Harbor—is dazzling. With a gorgeous coastline, beautiful grounds, and loads of amenities, it's the kind of place that both fosters creativity and collaboration and offers respite from the rhythms of everyday life.

"We make sure each group is provided a curated experience that meets their needs, including delicious catering options, numerous meeting spaces with breathtaking views, and an exclusive outdoor space in the tent pavilion," says Nicolette Newnom, Semiahmoo's director of sales.



Semiahmoo Resort in Blaine, Washington

PHOTOS: (FROM LEFT) VISIT SEATTLE; SEMIAHMOO RESORT

One group Newnom worked with wanted a singular team-building opportunity, so she helped coordinate a cooking challenge in the Victoria Room, which holds up to 50 people. Attendees created dishes under the guidance of the property's lead chef, who then judged their fare to choose a winner. Afterward, the group met in the on-site restaurant, Packers, for a team dinner.

With more than 35,000 square feet of versatile meeting and event space, Semiahmoo can accommodate groups of all sizes, from five to 500. The largest rooms include a 7,200-square-foot hall and 6,500-square-foot ballroom, while the Seaview Lobby and the Sunset and Wine rooms offer stunning views for more intimate gatherings. For fresh air, the Tent Pavilion offers a covered outdoor area and space for up to 400 guests.

When it's time to unwind, the golf course, wellness and recreation center, spa, and myriad group activities—pickleball, movie nights in the on-site theater, wine-tasting dinners, and whale-watching excursions—are great diversions. ***semiahmoo.com***

SALISH LODGE & SPA »

Snoqualmie, Washington

With the dramatic Snoqualmie Falls as a backdrop, the Salish Lodge & Spa is one of Washington's most picturesque getaways. Only 30 minutes east of downtown Seattle and within 40 minutes from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, it's an accessible escape for conferences, team retreats, and smaller breakout meetings.

Surrounded by the Cascade Mountains, the lodge features Pacific Northwest charm with loads of natural light, fireplaces at every turn, and chic outdoorsy décor. With more than 10,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space, venues vary from intimate (like a wine cave or chef's corner) to more expansive—like the ballroom, which seats 125 guests.

Salish Lodge & Spa in Snoqualmie, Washington

Most spaces, like the lobby-level Atrium Room and Cliffside Room, feature picture windows and wood-burning fireplaces.

One Seattle-based technology firm returns to the lodge every year for a company retreat, holding meetings in the Salish Ballroom during the day and hosting meals on the Falls Terrace that overlooks the rushing water below. After daily meetings, activities include team-building excursions with Compass Outdoor Adventures; entertainment at the Snoqualmie Casino, less than 10 minutes from the lodge; and downtime at the spa or one of two golf courses nearby.

The lodge's in-house team organized a wine tasting with Pearl & Stone Wine Co. for one group looking to nurture relationships and foster team building. Another organization visited the property's apiary to learn about the honeybee population and enjoy dishes and drinks made with the lodge's famed honey.

"We thrive on the thoughtful details that go into the guest experience," says Salish Lodge Director of Sales Faith Eadson, "whether it's the constant improvement of the lodge itself, the expansion of cutting-edge amenity services and activities, or the ability to customize an event flawlessly." ***salishlodge.com***

ISLANDWOOD »

Bainbridge Island, Washington

Going off-grid, or at least feeling like it, doesn't take much effort in the Pacific Northwest. A short, lovely ferry ride from downtown Seattle, IslandWood on Bainbridge Island is the kind of all-in-one retreat that celebrates the best of the outdoors without sacrificing comfort and amenities. Driven by an altruistic mission—proceeds from events and meetings help fund environmental education programs for students, educators, and other community members—the resort attracts organizations like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Children's Miracle Network Hospitals, along with tech

PHOTOS: SALISH LODGE; (OPPOSITE) PAUL SANDERS PHOTOGRAPHY

companies, organizational development companies like Performance Thinking Network, and health care and education associations from around the country.

The 250-acre campus features four sleeping lodges, an art studio, garden, treehouses, a suspension bridge, and miles of trails. With well-equipped meeting spaces and large indoor and outdoor venues for seated events or receptions, it's a natural fit for creating connections.

Larger group retreats often begin in the Great Hall or Bluebill Cove, indoor spaces that hold up to 175 and 95 guests, respectively. Many guests at IslandWood favor Bluebill for yoga, meditation, and workshops. For breakout sessions, smaller groups meet in spaces like the Ichthyology Lodge Great Room, art studio, private dining room, and learning studios. For more informal gatherings, the Friendship Circle, a covered outdoor space with a fire pit and Wi-Fi, brings attendees close to nature.

Team building is big at IslandWood, with activities ranging from garden explorations and cooking classes to climbing the canopy tower or working the ropes course. To close out a session, a reception or evening gathering might take place around the fire pit, which fits up to 175 people, or in the property's lush Creaky Tree Meadow. Craft cocktails, appetizers, and all meals are made with local, sustainably grown ingredients—just one way IslandWood works to be good stewards of the land and region around it. ***islandwood.org***

THE ALLISON INN & SPA »

Newberg, Oregon

Located in Newberg, the gateway to the Willamette Valley, The Allison Inn is an Oregon Wine Country gem. Set on 35 acres of lush gardens and vineyards, it's a picturesque spot to gather for work or respite. The resort features 25,000 square feet of meeting space, a farm-to-table restaurant, eye-catching outdoor spaces, and a full-service spa.

While all meeting rooms are equipped with the latest technology to make any size gathering a breeze, floor-to-ceiling windows and outdoor terraces add a special touch. The outdoor areas around the property are perfect for meeting breaks, team-building bocce, or catered dinners.

The Great Hall at IslandWood

From the intimate and lush Meadow Garden to the manicured Estate Garden, there are lovely vistas at every turn.

The balance of business and pleasure makes a working retreat successful. One Oregon-based health care company held morning meetings in the ballroom and, later in the day, team-building sessions in the vineyards.

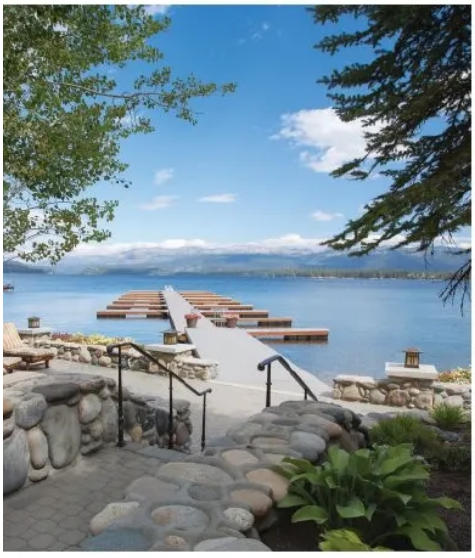
"We curated an experience with a local artist and winery for a wine-and-canvas event," says Nichole Cooper, director of sales for The Allison Inn. "At the end, they connected their individual paintings into one big mural."

With more than 500 pieces of original art from 100 local artists displayed around the property, creativity is paramount to The Allison. One national insurance group, with attendees from all over the country, wanted a true Pacific Northwest experience for a networking event. The inn staff organized a guided art walk of the grounds, including the sculpture garden. All art is for sale, and should a meeting attendee purchase art they wish to have shipped home, the staff will arrange it. ***theallison.com***

WICKANINNISH INN »

Tofino, British Columbia

A gorgeous retreat in every sense, this Relais & Châteaux property overlooks the Pacific Ocean from a rocky point on Vancouver Island's rugged west coast. While one of the more remote properties on this list, flights from Seattle, Washington, and Vancouver, British Columbia, lead to Tofino-Long Beach Airport, with Tofino being the principal town on this part of the island. It's also drivable from Vancouver International Airport, but ferry reservations are necessary. Once you see Wickaninnish Inn's stunning location, it's all worth it.



PHOTOS: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) QUICKSILVER PHOTOGRAPHY; CHRIS POUGET & DUNCAN BOOTH; SHORE LODGE; THE ALLISON INN & SPA

Clockwise from top left: Hitting the links at The Couer D'Alene Golf & Spa Resort; dinner on the beach at the Wickaninnish Inn; Shore Lodge's Payette Lake; The Allison Inn & Spa in Oregon Wine Country

With cedar, fir, driftwood, and stone in its design and jaw-dropping views from every window, the natural wonders of this part of British Columbia are on display in both the 75 guest rooms and the meeting spaces. The 720-square-foot Salal Room can accommodate workshops, seminars, and larger groups with the addition of the adjacent Shoreline Terrace. Anchored by a custom-made Douglas fir table that seats 10, the Swordfern Boardroom features a balcony and fireplace. For outdoor gatherings, Shell Beach is only accessible via a private driveway from The Wick, a perfect spot for a catered dinner featuring local and sustainable ingredients or fireside networking events.

Barb Issett, owner of Toronto-based IQ Business Events, has been coordinating company meetings and retreats at The Wick (as almost everyone calls the inn) for almost 20 years. For her, it's all about the details that the staff pay attention to.

For one group, local business owners who would be featured throughout the weekend attended the opening kickoff event, allowing guests to mingle with the community. Bikes with custom-branded license plates were available for attendees to explore the area on their own, and the final night wrapped with a beach bonfire, oyster shucking, and live entertainment.

"The executive team became part of The Wick's culinary team, donning aprons and chef hats," says Issett. "They had a blast serving their guests. It was magical." *wickinn.com*

THE COEUR D'ALENE GOLF & SPA RESORT »

Couer d'Alene, Idaho

With more than 32,000 square feet of conference, exhibit, and meeting space, there's something for every size group here. Companies and organizations from all over the U.S. have made this an annual destination for retreats.

The lake serves as a stunning backdrop for the venues, including the flagship Hagadone Event Center, which overlooks the water and golf course. Inside, there are floor-to-ceiling glass walls, fireplaces, studio-quality lighting systems, and an adjacent expansive garden.

Beyond providing a striking vista, the lake offers many opportunities for attendees to get out on the water, including utilizing the resort's five lake cruise boats that hold up to 350 people. Groups have held morning yoga on the upper deck of a boat with breakfast after and enjoyed a predinner cruise to the event center for the evening's main event. The resort organized a build-a-boat team-building exercise for one company. At the nearby full-service marina, attendees can rent paddleboards, pontoon boats, and other watercraft.

The resort is a 45-minute drive from the airport in Spokane, Washington, and offers shuttle service for guests. *cdaresort.com*

SHORE LODGE »

McCall, Idaho

About two hours from Boise, Shore Lodge has been a quintessential Pacific Northwest getaway since 1948. Overlooking pristine Payette Lake and surrounded by the Salmon River Mountains, this is a four-season getaway with breathtaking scenery, 14 meeting spaces, and modern amenities for small to large events.

Natural light floods the property. The Upper Pavilion has floor-to-ceiling windows and seats 300, with the Lower Pavilion accommodating up to 250 guests. For smaller meetings, the Mill Room is a state-of-the-art space for up to 37 patrons, while the private dining room and patio, with a fire pit for after-dinner mingling, can accommodate 18 guests. *shorelodge.com* m+e