

By Phyllis Schumann **CITY SOURCING**

So Near & Yet So ... Affordable



New Jersey – a small state with a very large population – lies with most of its populace and land mass between the far-reaching metropolitan areas of New York City and Philadelphia. Transient and meetings travel is a natural to New Jersey; 24 of the Fortune 500 companies are within its boundaries. Many are part of the healthcare industry, with names like Johnson & Johnson, Merck, Wyeth, Hoffman-LaRoche, Becton Dickinson and Schering-Plough.

Alternatives have served corporate travel programs well since the inception of managed travel. Their degree of use and importance has often been linked to the economy but, it's always been about cost savings. Arranging for a visit or meeting in the NYC area presents a multitude of alternatives — New Jersey is a given. Mindful planning will capitalize on the value proposition in choosing the appropriate venue.

NYC Revisited

New York City set an all-time record with an estimated 47 million visitors in 2008. A projected 9.8 million international visitors preserved the City's ranking as the number one US destination for overseas travelers — that's 32.4 percent of market share. That #1 position also took form in US tourism spending, with \$30 billion spent last year.

When BTE last sourced New York City (December 2008), the reported 2007 Occupancy Rate was 86.5 percent with an ADR of \$304.50. Calendar year 2008 performance represents similar figures with an 85.3 percent occupancy rate and a cor-

responding ADR of \$312, according to PKF Consulting. January-through-April 2009 stats paint a different, economy-tainted picture with an overall occupancy rate of 71.65 percent and an ADR of \$220.25.

January and February are traditionally slow, however, and April's data shows a leap in occupancy to 85.4 percent. ADR — still playing catch up — was \$224. Despite the slow start and a 28 percent drop in ADR from the 2008 average, expectations remain high: "We're only anticipating about a 5 percent drop this year, and we believe we're still doing better than most of the country" says Christopher Heywood, vice president of travel and tourism public relations with NYC & Company, the city's marketing, tourism and partnership organization.

The city's hospitality industry is competing hard to meet those expectations, often by appealing to those who might have been priced out of the market in prior years. "NYC is offering unprecedented value and opportunity in 2009 — it's an ideal time to give the destination a second look if you've overlooked it in the

past," says Heywood. In addition, NYC & Company is encouraging more short-term bookings. Currently, bookings made through NYC & Company are offering meeting planners 20 percent-off deals on equipment rentals, car services, printing, photography and more. In addition, attendees benefit from exclusive offers that include half-price tickets to Broadway shows, and other great deals on shopping, dining, arts, and entertainment.

Segue To New Jersey

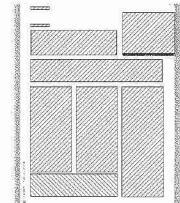
Despite the pull of its famed shopping districts, theaters and museums, first-time travelers to New York City may feel inhibited and geographically challenged. What with islands, rivers, boroughs, tunnels, bays and bridges, distinguishing north from south is often unclear to newcomers. What is clear are the travel and meeting alternatives available just five miles away in New Jersey.

Comparatively speaking, New Jersey's rates still appear markedly below New York's when you check the data from TravelGPA, a division of Prime Numbers Technology. (See Cost Comparison table). Its numbers come from live data feeds from large travel management companies in the US and Canada. The table also indicates the number of stays that form the basis for the comparisons.

Introducing The Meadowlands Liberty Community — an area that is actually closer to mid-town Manhattan

Cost Comparison: New York City vs. New Jersey		
Location	ADR Jan-May, 2008	ADR Jan-May, 2009
New York City	\$321.33 (18,886 stays)	\$250.79 (11,715 stays)
Newark, NJ	\$167.10 (8,237 stays)	\$149.16 (5,799 stays)
Secaucus, NJ	\$157.84 (59 stays)	\$134.81 (61 stays)

Source: Based on TravelGPA.com's data on more than 20,000 companies and \$4 billion in travel spend.





than Wall Street and has some interesting sights of its own. Some of the cities located within the Community include Secaucus, Rutherford, East Rutherford, South Hackensack, Teterboro, Weehawken and Jersey City. Though its natural beauty is relatively unknown, the Meadowlands has a bevy of beautiful parks with outstanding views of NYC. There's Liberty State Park in Jersey City, where the Manhattan skyline, Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island create an incredible backdrop. The park is home to the Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal, where many immigrants coming through Ellis Island began their trips to the American west; the park now serves as the terminal for ferry service to both monuments. The terminal is the site of many local festivals and events.

East Rutherford is home to the Meadowlands Sports Complex where the NFL, NBA, NCAA, and NHL play regularly scheduled games. The Complex is also host to collegiate games, horse racing and concerts. A new stadium is being built, part of the Xanadu Project, and will be used by both the Giants and Jets this coming season. And the Complex's games and events can impact area hotels' room availability.

"Because of the Sports Complex, many think of the Meadowlands as just a sports destination," says Judith Ross, director of the Meadowlands Liberty Convention and Visitors Bureau (MLCVB). "Although we are still a young destination, we are definitely a buyable destination." Ample meeting space is available throughout the area. The Meadowlands Exposition Center located in Secaucus, affords 61,000 sq ft of exhibit space, five meetings rooms with approximately 4,000 sq ft of additional space, and a banquet capacity of 5,000. There are

1,000 rooms within walking distance of the Expo Center. Additional meeting and convention space is made available through many Meadowlands area hotels and include:

- Hyatt Regency Jersey City, Jersey City: 20,000 sq ft of meeting space
- Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel & Conference Center, East Rutherford: 30,000 sq ft.
- Doubletree Club Suites, Jersey City: 1,300 sq ft.
- LaQuinta Meadowlands Suites, Secaucus: 10,000 sq ft.
- Crowne Plaza Meadowlands Hotel & Exhibition Center, Secaucus: 27,068 sq ft of meeting space plus 9,728 sq ft of exhibit space.
- Sheraton Lincoln Harbor Hotel (formerly Sheraton Suites on the Hudson), Weehawken: 14,000+ sq ft.
- Westin Jersey City Newport, Jersey City: 20,500 sq ft.

The average size of a corporate meeting held in the Meadowlands is 50-100 attendees. As across America, corporate meetings have declined here. And, annual conventions continue to be booked two to three years out.

It's All About Value

Special meeting promotions are being offered by the MLCVB and hoteliers deliver the value message. "We recognize that visitors are coming to the Metropolitan area for a visit to NYC, but many visitors do not realize we are only eight miles from Times Square, with hotels that are one-third less than what someone would pay in the City," states Ross. The occupancy rate and ADR in the Meadowlands, calculated by the MLCVB and premised on their defined convention hotels, was 59 percent and \$139 respectively for the first quarter of 2009.

Competition for the Meadowlands is twofold. "We compete with areas like ours that have adjoining destinations," says Ross. "Hotels adjacent to our region may be delivering us clientele for meetings, events and tourism, and while this is appreciated, our hotels would prefer they stay here as well."

Traveling to this area of New Jersey is easy with two nearby airports: Newark Liberty International Airport for scheduled airline service and Teterboro Jetport for private aviation. Once grounded, several modes of affordable, public transportation are available. Ferries, rapid transit, and

buses provide alternatives for traversing to and from New York City. If driving, the Holland Tunnel is a straight shot from Jersey City to Lower Manhattan; the Lincoln Tunnel takes motorists to midtown and the theater district.

Bottom line: dynamic destination, easily accessible, strong supply of meeting and exhibit space, available hotel rooms affordably priced. The Meadowlands Liberty Community — part of the value proposition. **BTE**