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Wedding Market Rebound Positively Impacts Hotels, Even Golf Courses

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The recent royal nuptials in London were a “great economic boost for city’s economy,” according to Mark Ambler, economist with PricewaterhouseCoopers. He stressed that weddings of all sizes can provide a financial boost for the hospitality and recreation industry, and are especially significant in helping recover from recession.

More typical wedding settings, such as hotels and golf courses, have almost always benefitted from hosting such events. According to Jennifer Flohr, senior vice president of the California Hotel & Lodging Association, weddings are great group business for hotels and a chance for repeat business.

“When you have weddings, it utilizes a lot of the business, not only the meeting space,” Flohr said. “They’re using the hotel restaurants, using the guest rooms. Overall it’s great for hotel business. It keeps them up and running and gives staff work. Anytime a hotel can bring in a large group like that, it’s great for business.”

Hotels tend to measure the impact of weddings in terms of a percentage of group events booked. For certain hotels, weddings are a huge market, not only in food and beverage, but also in room stays. One popular wedding destination venue in Long Beach is Hotel Maya, located at 700 Queensway Dr. along Long Beach’s south waterfront.

The hotel, which re-opened after a complete renovation in 2009, has a variety of locations on-site for weddings – from the waterfront ballroom to the garden area with a wedding gazebo to an outdoor space with fire pits and a waterfall. According to Kristi Allen, general manager of Hotel Maya, the facility hosts well over 100 weddings a year.

“Recession or not, Hotel Maya is always



Hotel Maya, located 700 Queensway Dr., hosts well over 100 weddings a year. The premises includes various indoor and outdoor locations for hosting weddings and wedding receptions, such as this outdoor garden area. (Photograph courtesy of Hotel Maya)

a great wedding venue,” she said. “. . . As a matter of fact, we saw an increase year over year in weddings during the recession. . . .

Now that the recession is over, we continue to see the wedding market expand. . . . The wedding business is great busi-



Weddings today are all about customization, according to local event executives, even down to the dance floor. This is an example of using a custom logo with a design that matches the wedding theme to give a wedding reception dance floor some personality. (Photograph courtesy of Choura Events)

ness, especially in a corporate market [like Long Beach].”

Daryn Benton, senior catering sales executive for the Renaissance Long Beach Hotel, at 111 E. Ocean Blvd., agrees. “Regardless of the economy, people are still getting married and weddings still occur,” she said. “As with every group at our hotel, weddings are a significant part of our strategic makeup. The hotel excels at creating the vision of the bride and groom to complete the most memorable day of their new life together.” According to

Benton, however, the wedding segment of the Renaissance’s business is stagnant compared to last year in terms of volume.

One way the Hotel Maya is working to avoid that stagnation is through a partnership with The Queen Mary Hotel, The Reef Restaurant and The Residence Inn to form an all-inclusive wedding destination on that side of Queensway Bay. “Most destinations have a rehearsal dinner, the wedding, out-of-town guests and, normally, a brunch the day after,” Allen said. “We have about 700 hotel rooms on this side of the

water and about 10 food and beverage options between the four of us. . . . They could really do their whole wedding from start to finish over here without ever leaving the south waterfront.”

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Long Beach Harbor, businesses like the AVIA Long Beach Hotel at 285 Bay St. don’t have as much of an emphasis on weddings as on wedding receptions. According to General Manager Bob Haury, the AVIA works with local churches and the Wayfarer’s Chapel in Rancho Palos Verdes to provide a reception space and rooms for small wedding parties.

“We can do the whole compliment, the wedding and reception, but it has to be 90 people or fewer,” Haury said. “We probably do a dozen to 15 [receptions] a year, and it’s a profitable segment of what we categorize as meetings and events. . . . Small is what we do best, and we turn away so many inquiries because of the size of the group. But we do a really good job with a smaller wedding party.”

The Long Beach Marriott, located 4700 Airport Plaza Dr., just completed a \$6 million transformation of its ballroom and function space. Michael Robby, director of sales and marketing, said the technology upgrades in the ballroom – sound reinforcement, lighting and cutting edge event features – lines up the hotel competitively to host high-end events.

“A lot of those end up being catered social functions, and a significant part of those are weddings or wedding receptions,” he said. As far as the wedding segment of the hotel’s business, Robby said 2008 was the start of a slight downturn in terms of overall spending. The hotel’s rental space was closed for three months earlier this year for the renovations, which he said also kept some business away, but that seems to be changing.

“When we look at [wedding] inquiries now and things that we actually have on the books, it’s quite a significant uptick from where we were if you compared it to the same time last year,” he said. “It probably has more to do with the fact that we have this sexy, renovated ballroom as opposed to general economic changes of that there are just a ton of people getting married.”

Local golf courses are also seeing more weddings on their books. According to Derek Duronsleg, regional sales manager for American Golf Corporation, two local

courses were receiving more short-term bookings for weddings in the past few years, but that's now changing. "We saw a lot of short-term bookings in the past few years, but now that's changing," he said. "People are a little bit more comfortable, have a little more optimism and as a result people are planning ahead again."

Weddings have always been a major source of revenue for golf courses, and it's no different in Long Beach. American Golf, which manages more than 90 private, resort and daily fee courses in the United States, manages Skylinks Golf Course, at 4800 E. Wardlow Rd., where weddings make up more than 65 percent of the facility's events and catering business, according to Duronsleg. American Golf also manages Recreation Park Golf Course 18, located at 5001 Deukmejian Dr. The number of weddings held at that course is well over 50 percent, just hovering over 60 percent, of its events and catering business.

"Over the past two to three years, the feeling in the wedding industry was that people were choosing alternative ideas for weddings," Duronsleg said. "People are coming back to the formal weddings and receptions and number of participants in the weddings." Each facility has catering specialists and in-house chefs and teams to fulfill wedding catering needs. On average, he said, both golf courses host about five to seven weddings per month.

Nonprofit Programs Supported By Wedding Revenues

Local nonprofit museums also host weddings, which can help support ongoing programs for the community. Being able to host weddings at Long Beach's Museum of Latin American Art is very important, according to facility rentals coordinator Christina Cruz. Half of the events hosted at the museum are weddings, she said, and "they definitely drop way more money than to put on a corporate affair."

"It's very profitable for us," she said. "The money helps fund exhibitions and overall operations of the museum. It's a multi-billion dollar industry, so if you can get it to come to your venue that's great. We remodeled the facility to have that." Since the museum renovation in 2007 added an event center to the property, the number of weddings and receptions hosted has continued to increase.

Long Beach Museum of Art has focused on developing its special events depart-



Hotel Maya, The Queen Mary, The Reef Restaurant and the Residence Inn have formed a partnership to become the ultimate all-inclusive wedding destination. Together, the foursome offers 10 food and beverage options and more than 700 available guest rooms to accommodate large wedding parties. (Photograph courtesy of Hotel Maya)

ment, which handles all on-site weddings, and is able to cater those wedding events through its restaurant, Claire's at the Museum. According to Megan Ellisor, director of operations, the nonprofit organization's funding sources have dwindled during the recession, so being able to host weddings not only supports the facilities and operations, but museum programs for visitors and tourists alike.

"When we provide campus tours to newly engaged couples, we often explain our children's programming, future exhibitions, and how their event can contribute to the mission of the Museum," Ellisor said. "The rewarding thing for us is having our newlyweds join the growing Museum family and continue to support the arts in the heart of the Long Beach community."

Meanwhile, a space that began to benefit from hosting weddings over the past few years is the Rancho Los Cerritos Historic Site. The nonprofit museum, owned and operated by the city, is funded through a separate foundation. In recent years, the city allowed the Rancho's foundation to start enhancing revenues through site use after significant budget cuts, according to Ellen Calomiris, executive director and historic sites officer for the Rancho.

"This is turning into a win-win situation for us: we raise funds to support this wonderful National Historic Landmark property, and the weddings serve the broader community by exposing new audiences to the site," she said. Charlene Farris, devel-

opment director for the Rancho, said wedding activity picked up last year and has "really kicked into gear" so far this year.

"Holding a wedding at the Rancho financially benefits the greater Long Beach community in numerous ways," Calomiris said. "The bride and groom typically employ local services including caterers, florists, equipment rental companies, musicians and event planners. Additionally, their out-of-town guests are likely to fly into the Long Beach Airport, stay in Long Beach hotels, and eat in Long Beach restaurants. Depending on their schedules, they may also tour other Long Beach attractions." ■