



Essential

Accommodation Tips for an
Unforgettable Reunion

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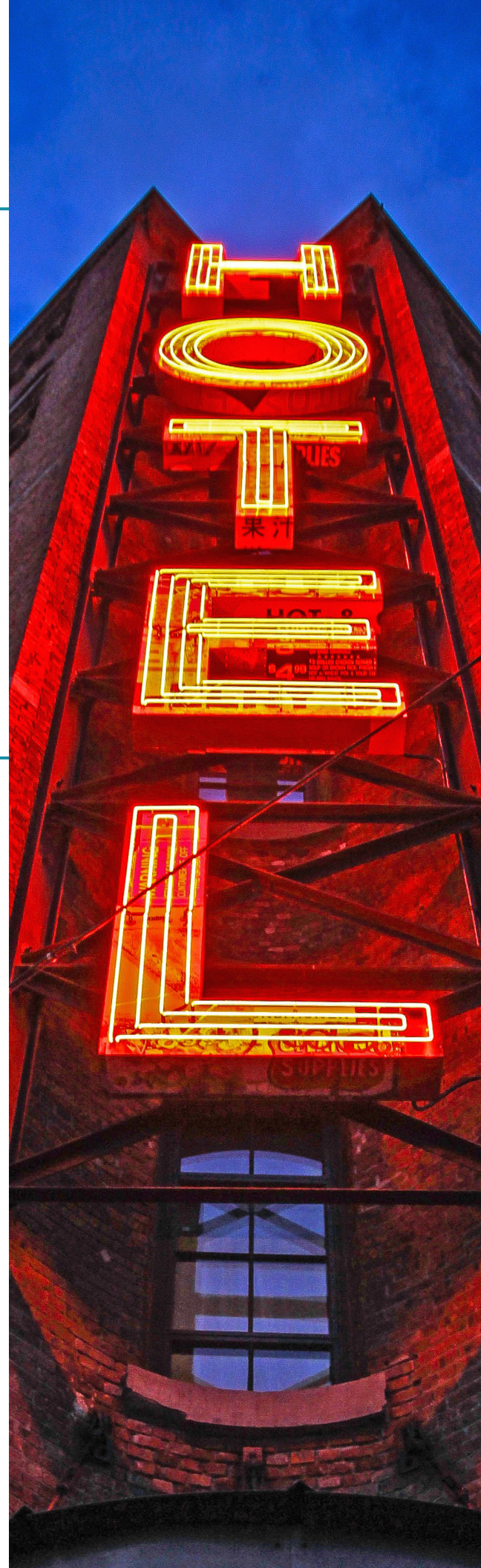
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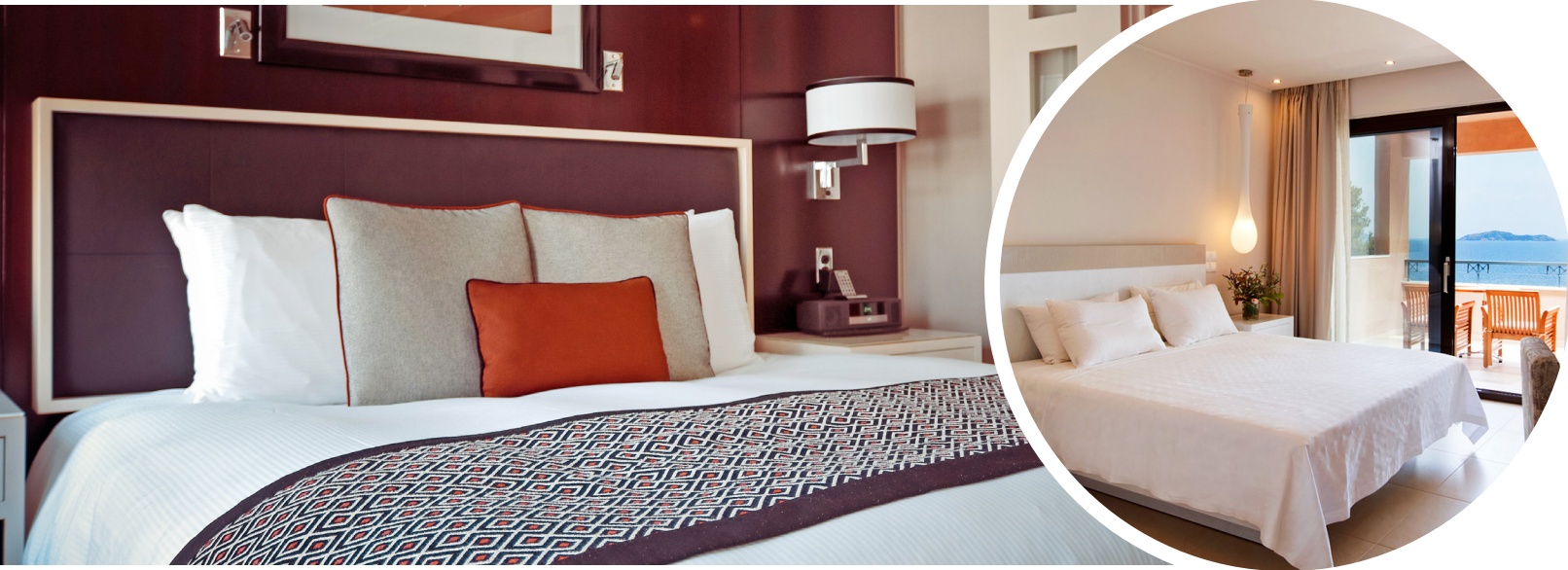
Summary

Hotels have long been an accommodation of choice for reunions thanks to their convenience, consistency and amenities. However, in the last few years, other lodging options have emerged, chipping away at the hotel market share. Reunion planners can now select from traditional lodging like hotels, resorts, and bed and breakfasts, or something less conventional like a ranch, RVs, glamping, or home rentals. These alternative accommodations offer reunions plenty of similar benefits that a hotel does, but with a different environment in which to spend time with each other.

Along with this increase in reunion accommodation choices comes a new problem: picking the best one. Each option has its advantages and disadvantages. Most decisions are based on key drivers like location, cost and amenities, and with the variety of options out there, it's tough to sift through the crowd. By weighing the pros and cons of these accommodations, this whitepaper aims to assist reunion organizers in the planning process and help them select the best home base for their vacation.



Overview of Accommodation Options



An important part of a reunion is the accommodations. Groups will not only spend a good portion of their downtime in these locations, but also a lot of bonding time with family and friends. It's also a major expenditure for reunion planners (or any kind of traveler). According to the U.S. Travel Association, 21% of leisure traveler spending (domestic and international) in the United States in 2018 was on lodging, reaching \$232 billion.

Accommodation Planning Concerns

The amount of time spent in these accommodations combined with the cost and other determining factors emphasizes their importance. Finding accommodations that offer a convenient location to nearby attractions, shopping, and restaurants is essential, but also picking something that has all the amenities people desire on their vacation is key. At the same time, it must be within budget and provide a level of trustworthiness. It's a balancing act, no question about it.

Luckily, there are dozens of lodging options for reunions, allowing planners to choose from a variety of places. But with that comes the task of studying each accommodation and deciding what will work best for them. Before diving into the strengths and weaknesses, let's first investigate the types of accommodations reunion organizers can (and should) consider in their planning process.

Types of Accommodations

Hotels

Traditional hotels dominate the travel accommodation field. The U.S. hotel industry has grown steadily over the last decade, with the trend expected to continue. In June 2019, STR and Tourism Economics forecasted the industry would see overall performance growth of 2% for 2019 and 1.9% for 2020. The forecast shows a 2.2% lift in average daily rate (ADR) to \$135.17 in 2020. However, projections also indicate a slight drop in occupancy in the coming year, falling 0.2% to 66.1% in 2020. This would be the first year-over-year decline in the U.S. occupancy since 2009. Industry experts believe the upcycle is coming to an end, and demand for traditional hotels may soften in the new decade.



Traditional hotels still dominate the lodging industry with over 200,000 new hotel rooms being built in 2019.



There could be many contributing factors to the decrease. While hotel supply has ramped up over the last 10 years, ADR has also risen, meaning the cost of an average hotel night may be above budget for many travelers. In addition,



construction costs have inflated, making it more expensive to build or improve hotels. The need for enhancements combined with higher costs could be driving consumers to alternative accommodations, especially larger groups like reunions that may require specific space and amenities.

Resorts

Resorts often fall into the same category as hotels in terms of industry performance, predictions and market share. However, resorts differ greatly from an everyday hotel as far as size and space, amenities, and atmosphere. Resorts have higher guest capacity and are often equipped with several on-site features, such as restaurants, spas, pools, and more. Resorts are generally found in prime locations (i.e. oceanfront), providing guests a more upscale, luxurious environment. In addition, the on-site amenities—and potentially all-inclusive packages—make it easy for reunions to get everything they need in one place.

Bed and Breakfasts

Bed and breakfasts—also known as B&Bs—are usually privately or family owned establishments offering guests a more intimate lodging experience. While once considered old-fashioned, B&Bs today have evolved into more luxurious accommodations offering customized services and a genuine environment. While they may be smaller and lack some amenities of traditional hotels, B&Bs provide reunions with a slightly different atmosphere at a potentially more palatable price point.

Vacation Rentals

It's no secret that the vacation rental industry has taken off in recent years. While the concept of timeshares and vacation home rentals has been around for decades, the market remained small—and relatively unknown to most consumers. It wasn't until the emergence of online booking sites like HomeAway in 2006 and Airbnb in 2008 that the industry exploded, with the latter arguably being the largest player in the field. As of December 2019, Airbnb had over 150 million users, listings in over 191 countries, and more than 6 million listings around the world. The sheer volume of options allows vacation rental companies to easily compete with the mega hotel giants like Hyatt, Marriott and Hilton. And with supply as high as it is, there are a range of price points to fit every budget.

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Over the last decade, apartment and home rental sites like Airbnb and VRBO have opened up a new level of clever choices never thought possible.

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Alternative Lodging

In today's travel market, several alternative accommodations are available to reunion groups that want to get away from the traditional four walls of a hotel room or vacation rental.

Recreational Vehicles (RVs)

The recent popularity of van living has made recreational vehicles a top lodging option for travelers. Renting RVs allows a reunion group to bring its accommodations along for the journey, making it easy to stop anywhere along the route. "There's a lot of flexibility with an RV," says Kevin Broom, director of media relations for the RV Industry Association. "You can have a lot of different experiences for different kinds of people." An RV is also a cost-effective alternative to traditional vacation accommodations.

Camping/Glamping

Reunions can embrace the outdoors with a group camping adventure. There are several national parks and wilderness areas equipped with camping grounds that accommodate any size group. Those seeking the camping lifestyle, but with modern luxuries, can opt for glamping, a blend of the words glamorous and camping. This trend, which has become more common in the last few years, provides guests with an upscale camping experience that includes amenities not usually associated with traditional camping. Glamping accommodations range from yurts and teepees

to tree houses and trailers, and offer luxuries like king-size beds, spacious porches, gas stoves, and even power outlets (for those who don't really want to unplug).

Dude Ranches

Another place to gather a reunion group around the fire is at a dude ranch. A dude ranch provides great activities, dining, and comfortable lodging in one place, letting members of a reunion stay close while maintaining a sense of seclusion and privacy when they want it.



Enliven your next reunion by exploring more unconventional travel accommodations to enrich your excursion. Although these alternatives may not include a continental breakfast, you will find they encourage more time spent with your group and yield memories you'll treasure for years to come.



What to Look for in Reunion Accommodations



Now that we've broken down some of the key players in the reunion accommodation field, it's time to look at what features are the most important when considering which one to choose for a reunion.

Location

A main driver in lodging decisions is location. One of the first questions reunions planners should ask is: Where is this place in relation to the activities or attractions my group is interested in? A good follow-up question is: How easy is it to reach? Some of the most exotic lodging options are often the hardest to reach and the most remote, which may not be what an organizer is looking for. Other accommodations are smack-dab in the middle of a metropolitan area, providing little peace and quiet. What you choose depends entirely on what kind of reunion you want.

Space/Size

Every accommodation option varies in size and space. The number of people in your reunion group is ultimately going to determine how much space you need, and what kind of accommodation will work best. In addition, reunion organizers should consider the kind of getaway they want (outdoorsy vs. luxury) to see if something more spread out or consolidated will fit their needs.

Amenities

When it comes to planning a reunion, accommodation

amenities certainly come into play, especially if your group will be spending a lot of time at the facility. It's important to take into consideration what accommodations have a spa, pool, sport courts (tennis, squash, etc.), fitness center, restaurants, and more. These may not be important to some reunion groups but are essential to others.

Services

A big part of vacation is getting away from everyday chores and tasks. If a reunion group is looking to be pampered, it's important to weigh accommodations that have services like housekeeping, a concierge, or transportation options to and from the venue. Like amenities, these may be a decision driver for some groups but not others.



Finding accommodations that offer a convenient location to nearby attractions, shopping and restaurants is essential, but also picking something that has all the amenities people desire during their reunion is key.





Atmosphere

Accommodation ambiance or character may be a small part of the reunion planning equation, but is still something to consider as planners look at lodging options. A rustic resort could be more appealing than a beachy one for some groups, while others appreciate a laid-back coastal vibe compared to a pastoral mountain retreat.

Cost

Next to location, price is probably the most important factor when selecting lodging for a reunion. Organizers need to be conscious of everyone's budget, making sure not to select something out of a person's price range. At the same time, selecting the most inexpensive place may mean sacrificing other important elements people expect during the vacation. There are several options that can accomplish a balance between reasonability and high quality.

Ease of Booking

The next step after selecting accommodations is booking. But putting pen to paper is not always as easy as it should be. Reunion groups are a special case for many lodging properties and take some extra coordination to make sure rooms are located near each other or there are enough spots for everyone. If the process to book is convoluted and stressful, it may not be worth the hassle to stay at that facility. Before making that final decision, reunion planners should do some research into how easy it is to make their reservation and get what they want.

Pro Tip: Ask for group rates at a hotel to help all attendees save; you might get savings of up to 50% or more for a large block of rooms. But don't just stop there. Ask for complimentary rooms per every 10 rooms booked. Ask for a free breakfast and/or free parking if they're not already included.

Pro Tip: Wherever your reunion will be held, reach out to the local Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), Chamber of Commerce (CoC) or Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) to see if your group could get any discounts on lodging, tours or activities to see more of the destination.

Weighing the Pros and Cons



Now that we've laid out many of the important decision drivers, it's time to compare them for each accommodation option. Before diving in, it's important to note that each reunion group is different, and a few items may not be as relevant to some groups as others. Take these pros and cons with a grain of salt and be sure to rank them based on your unique reunion group.

Traditional Lodging

Hotels

No matter where groups plan to spend their reunion, hotels of all kinds are generally located in the very best areas of a region or city. They are strategically placed close to main attractions, dining areas, shopping, and more, making it easy to access fun activities for the whole group.

Most hotels are equipped with hundreds of rooms, perfect for large reunions. In addition, some hotels provide guests with hospitality rooms, where they can gather and store items like snacks and drinks. While hotels tend to have plenty of room, some groups may be seeking out more intimate space that lets them spend more time together.

Most hotels provide guests with amenities such as a fitness center, on-site dining, complimentary WiFi, housekeeping and room service. In addition, several hotel chains in major cities offer complimentary shuttle service. These shuttles can pick up and drop off guests at the airport,

as well as at nearby attractions, upon request. Not all hotels have a concierge on staff, but employees at the reservation desks are knowledgeable about the area and can provide directions and recommendations. However, they likely won't be able to help with booking tours, dinner reservations or other activities.

Hotels tend to keep their look simple and clean, which can lead to a very commercial feel. This is especially true when it comes to the rooms, where many chains include minimal décor. Over the last few years, hotels have put in more effort to make their rooms and communal areas stand out as far as atmosphere, but they aren't on the same level as a boutique bed & breakfast or even some vacation rentals.



Group hotel rates, off-season travel, and large vacation homes could all help defray costs, while alternatives like camping (or glamping) or dude ranches can be fun ways to travel and save.





As previously mentioned, the average daily rate (ADR) in 2020 for hotels is forecasted to grow 2.2% year-over-year to \$135.17. This indicates that costs are expected to rise for consumers. However, with the amount of inventory, groups can easily find a hotel within their price range, but they may have to sacrifice when it comes to location or amenities. In addition, reunion groups should be able to secure a discounted group rate when they reserve a room block. Planners will need to work with a group coordinator to retain the rooms. Another thing to keep in mind is that it is highly unlikely that everyone's room will be close together, as hotels cannot guarantee proximity for any group.

Resorts

Resort locations vary by destination. Some can be found close to a city, near most of the action. Others are found in more remote areas of a destination, like a secluded beach or up in the mountains. For the most part, however, resorts are like hotels in that they tend to have convenient locations that let groups explore a destination with relative ease. And for those interested in a quieter vacation, there are plenty resorts that meet that criteria.

Resorts have higher guest capacity than regular hotels, which means large groups should have no problem securing rooms. But just like hotels, planners will need to work with a coordinator to book what they need, and rooms are not guaranteed to be next to each other.

Resorts offer the standard amenities guests have come to expect from hotels, but they are also equipped with several on-site features, such as restaurants, spas, gift shops, athletic facilities, and indoor and outdoor pools. Resorts usually have a concierge to book massages, dinner reservations or off-site excursions.

The price of a resort is usually higher than a standard hotel. However, with that cost comes more inclusions. Groups have much more at their disposal than if they were to pick a regular chain hotel. In fact, resorts can sometimes provide better value because of all the extras.

Bed and Breakfasts

Traditional bed and breakfasts are not as common as they once were, due in large part to the increase in the home rental market. As a result, B&Bs may be harder to find in prime locations. However, there are still a few that have established themselves in major areas near popular attractions, dining, and shopping.

Bed and breakfasts are small compared to hotels and resorts. In fact, B&Bs usually consist of fewer than 20 rooms. Small reunions may find the quiet, intimate atmosphere of a B&B perfect, but larger parties should look elsewhere for accommodations. In addition to the cozy environment, B&Bs tout a much lower price tag, giving reunions on a budget a nice lodging option.



Due to their size, B&Bs still lack several of the common amenities found at hotels and resorts. There is usually a cleaning service and complimentary breakfast, but rarely will groups find perks like a pool, hot tub, spa or room service. In addition, since size is a factor, planners will need to contact a B&B well in advance to secure all the rooms they need for the reunion.

Vacation Rentals

The sheer volume of vacation rentals (Airbnb has over 6 million listings around the world) gives reunions a nearly endless selection of places to stay. And these properties are sprinkled everywhere—in the heart of the city, out in the suburbs, on a beach, or deep in the mountains. This makes it easy to find accommodations in the exact spot reunions want.

While convenient locations are on their side, space is not. It's difficult to find homes that accommodate more than 20 people. And if a group decides to split up into multiple houses, there is no way to guarantee the properties will be close to each other at the time of the scheduled reunion.

Reunions will find a different set of amenities at a rental property, the most important being a kitchen. This is incredibly important for groups with young kids. According to data from iPropertyManagement, 71% of travelers with children said access to cooking their own meals was a big reason they chose a vacation rental.

For a long time, hotels and resorts were able to provide services rental properties couldn't. But the industry has shifted to better compete with traditional accommodations. More and more vacation rentals are taking a page from the hotels and offering customized amenities. Guests can enjoy services like daily house cleaning, linen changes, airport transportation, and luggage holds. Some properties even provide luxuries like grocery delivery, at-home chefs, massage therapists, and on-demand car hire. The downside is that some of these amenities may come at a cost, so organizers need to be aware of what's included in the overall price and what isn't.

The good news is that the price of vacation rentals tends to be less expensive than hotels and resorts, especially in some major cities. Third party booking sites, such as VRBO and Airbnb, make it easy to reserve a property online, without the need to call or work with a group coordinator. While booking may be easy, reunion planners still need to be aware that these are peer-to-peer reservation platforms, and they won't be working with a brand name hotel or trained employees. The websites offer some peace of mind by listing the property owners, how long they've been renting the home, their ratings and reviews, and their contact information. Another factor to keep in mind is the check-in process. Many property owners do not live in the same city and use lock boxes or keypads for entry, which can lead to problems with access. In addition, groups may need to meet the owner to get into the home, and



communication may not always be reliable.

Alternative Lodging

Recreational Vehicles (RVs)

Recreational vehicles are incredibly convenient for reunions. Location is never an issue when accommodations can go wherever a group goes. “There’s a lot of flexibility with an RV,” said Kevin Broom, director of media relations for the RV Industry Association. RVs can be parked all over, the beach, the mountains, amusement parks, campgrounds, parks, and even university campuses.

With RVs, “you can have a lot of different experiences for different kinds of people,” said Broom. While space inside an RV is limited, it’s easy to rent multiple vehicles to house everyone and utilize the outdoors for socializing. “Some people can stay in the RV, some people can tent camp, some people might want to stay in the camping cabins that a campground has on site,” said Broom. “And then get together to do the various activities they want to do.” As far as cost, a study from CBRE Hotels Advisory Group, commissioned by the RV Industry Association, found that RV vacations cost much less than other types of vacation travel.

While RV amenities are lacking in comparison to a house or hotel, there are a few comforts to enjoy including a

small bathroom, kitchen, and comfortable beds. Luckily, RVs can easily be parked near pools, spas, restaurants and retail areas, allowing groups similar experiences to a hotel or resort. With hundreds of rental companies around the world, RVs are easy to reserve. Reunions with a lot of people will need to book far in advance to make sure they can secure the desired number of RVs for the trip.

Camping/Glamping

One of the best ways to connect with family and friends is around a campfire. There are thousands of campsites around the world, providing reunions with a wealth of destinations to enjoy. And with Mother Nature as the hotel, there is plenty of space for large groups. Reunions will need to be aware of campground boundaries, and make sure they secure enough spaces to fit everyone without encroaching on other sites or spilling outside of the camping confines. Even though no amenities come with traditional camping, there’s also little to no cost, except for a reservation fee (if reunions select a spot that must be booked in advance). As far as reserving campsites, many national parks offer online booking that allows groups to pick which area of the park they want to stay in. There are also many third-party websites and smartphone apps that have popped up over the years to help people find and book campsites. For groups that don’t want to pay a reservation fee, they can try their luck at finding dispersed



camping areas. It's a gamble to go that route, especially when reunions need more than one or two spots to accommodate the group.

Those seeking the camping lifestyle without the feel of camping can opt for glamping. Many glamping sites offer a unique atmosphere, with perks like king-size beds, firepits, bathrooms, electricity, and WiFi. Glamping locations are limited and can often be very remote. They are also limited on space, and large reunions would need to book several sites to accommodate everyone. In addition, glamping can be expensive, especially the luxury properties. However, reunions can find modest glamping sites, like yurts or teepees, that fit their needs without stretching their budgets.

Dude Ranches

Dude ranches can span hundreds of acres, which usually means they are found well outside major metropolitan areas. Reunions hoping to walk to nearby attractions or restaurants will not want to stay on a dude ranch, as they tend to be more secluded. While some locations may be remote, most dude ranches provide everything a group will need on-site. With everything at your fingertips, there's less planning and stress around transportation and activity needs.

As mentioned, dude ranches are large, which means size and space aren't much of a concern. The type of lodging

provided, however, is something to consider. Some dude ranches offer small bunkhouses or tents, which may only fit 2-4 people. But these tend to be located next to each other, so a group can still spend time together, while having a quiet place to escape to, if necessary.

As far as amenities, some dude ranches keep it simple, with standard housing and on-site dining. Others may offer high-end luxury cabins, pools, and restaurants, providing more of a resort atmosphere. Reunions can usually enjoy activities like horseback riding and nightly cookouts. Depending on the type of dude ranch a reunion selects, and the amenities that come with it, the cost will fluctuate, but there is usually something for every price range.

Reunion organizers have a lot to consider when it comes to choosing accommodations: Where the home base should be, what size they need, how many rooms, what kind of amenities they want, and how much money it will cost. It feels like nothing could possibly be a perfect fit. But with all the lodging options out there, perfection may be closer than they think. Each one has its upsides and downsides, but ultimately one will work for each group's needs. It takes some time and research to determine what's best for a reunion. Hopefully this breakdown provided some insight and direction to lead reunion planners down the right path as they seek to find their ideal accommodations.

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The best things in life aren't things—they're the people we call family and the memories we make with them. With an estimated quarter-million reunions held in the United States annually, more and more families understand the importance of reconnecting.

For over 20 years, *Destination Reunions* (formerly Reunions Workbook) has been working diligently to make reuniting easier. With inside looks at more than 20 reunion-ready destinations, advice from event industry experts and inspirational features, this year's newly rebranded *Destination Reunions* is our most comprehensive guide to date.

To download the most recent edition of *Destination Reunions* along with countless other resources, visit DestinationReunions.com.

Site InSpecions

Site InSpecions are a unique destination profile that offers an inside look at reunion-ready locations and accommodations. Each SI features recommendations for activities, attractions, dining and more in the respective destination.

Planning Advice

Destination Reunions' knowledgeable contributors have provided a solid foundation for you to start your planning. The print and digital guide covers everything from budget advice to entertainment ideas and features advice columns from event industry experts.

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