

8 Great Escapes ... Unique Venues for Corporate Retreats & Great Getaways!

By Cheryl Justak

ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS

Combining balance sheets, birdies and bonding are several key elements for today's successful corporate retreat. Many businesses today are hosting company gatherings and realizing the substantial benefits from them. By creating an environment of fun, relaxation, camaraderie and "time away from the office" along with the primary mission of accomplishing business goals, company associates come back renewed and refreshed. The main benefit realized: Relationships improve and productivity soars as a result.

Speaking from past experience, as a senior manager for one of Chicago's top consulting firms, my 25-person event planning department was responsible for planning the company's hundreds of corporate meetings, conferences, celebrations, outings and retreats – both onsite and offsite. Each year, I would personally plan an annual offsite retreat at the close of the fiscal year to celebrate the past year's successes, introduce the new fiscal budget, our targets and strategies, and to take the time to build better relationships with my management team by having some fun and getting to know them on a deeper, more personal level.

As an avid golfer and someone who is passionate about the game, I had always believed that successful retreats had to have a golf game attached to them. After planning many events throughout the years, I found that the most memorable events were those that were creative in nature and well-planned to the last detail, were easy to travel to, had a good blend of business and pleasure, offered options for social activities (including golf for the golfers or a clinic for those wanting to learn), allowed for some private "down time", had great food, and accomplished the company's goals.

*If you've been asked to plan your company's retreat or golf outing this year and not sure where to start, don't panic. On the next several pages are eight "great escapes", offering unique venues to "stay and play" with lots of options for mixing business with pleasure. I also encourage you to visit our **Event Planning Section** for a "**Planning Guide**" to help you produce the best event, corporate retreat or golf outing.*

8 GREAT ESCAPES

(1) "THE SERIOUS GOLFER'S GETAWAY"

CHICAGO, IL

- ?? Hilton Chicago Hotel & Towers, Chicago
- ?? Harborside International Golf Center, Chicago
- ?? Biggs Mansion Restaurant, Chicago
- ?? Lost Marsh Golf Course, Hammond, IN
- ?? Jack Binion's Steak House at Horseshoe Casino
- ?? Horseshoe Casino, Hammond, IN

This Chicago getaway is perfect for busy executives who are serious about their golf and are used to the very best in accommodations, fine cuisine, and service. The **Hilton Chicago Hotel & Towers** on Michigan Avenue is steeped in luxury and tradition with service second to none. After business is finished, the premier links of **Harborside International's** two 18-hole championship courses are just 15 minutes away. After golf, relax at **Bigg's Mansion** with a wonderful steak or seafood, great cigars, and fine wines at their **Wine Cellar**. A second day will take you to **Lost Marsh of Hammond**, 20 minutes from the Loop and one of Chicagoland's newest and most complete golfing facilities. After 18 holes of championship golf, enjoy a fabulous meal at **Jack Binion's Steak House** at the **Horseshoe Casino Hammond**, overlooking Lake Michigan, located just up the street from Lost Marsh. After dinner, the serious golfer, who also takes pleasure in a good gamble, can enjoy the Horseshoe Casino's upscale facility and exceptional service.

(2) "WINDY CITY ALL-SPORTS ADVENTURE"

CHICAGO, IL

- ?? Palmer House Hilton Hotel & Towers, Chicago
- ?? The Green At Grant Park, Chicago
- ?? Windy City Fieldhouse, Chicago
- ?? The Big Downtown Restaurant
- ?? The French Quarter Restaurant

If team-building is your focus and you have a fairly energetic and athletic group, then this getaway is perfect. **The Palmer House Hilton** located in the heart of the Loop is one of Chicago's landmarks with many great gathering places inside, such as **The Big Downtown** or **The French Quarter**, featuring great food and atmosphere. When it's time to play, walk four short blocks over to **The Green At Grant Park**, an exciting, newly-opened in 2003, fully-landscaped, 18-hole putting course. Featuring true-golf-on-the-green, complete with varying contours, dramatic elevation changes, and sand traps, it's a challenge to par. Afterwards relax in the "tentable" outdoor patio, with seating up to 320, rain or shine. Catering and tournament packages can be fully customized to suit your special needs. If a variety of sports would be more appealing, then head over to **Windy City Fieldhouse** where "*Chicago's premier team building & entertainment company*" can customize a sporting event or competitive program for you. Whichever you choose, you'll have fun and a great workout!

(3) **“CONFERENCE, SPA AND GOLF RESORT”**
ITASCA, IL

- ?? Doral Eaglewood Conference Resort & Spa, Itasca
- ?? Doral Eaglewood Golf Course, Itasca
- ?? Burnham’s, Ogden’s or Prairie River Restaurants
- ?? Shula’s Restaurant, Wyndham Hotel, Itasca
- ?? Woodfield Shopping Mall, Woodfield

“Where Things Just Naturally Come Together” is how you will feel when staying at the **Doral Eaglewood Conference Resort & Spa** in Itasca, Illinois. This first-class, only IACC-approved facility in Illinois, has not missed a single beat to make any event or getaway a memorable experience. For golfers, the newly-renovated, 18-hole championship golf course, nick-named “*The Little Green Menace*” is waiting for you. Only 35 minutes from Chicago and 21 minutes west of O’Hare Airport, this secluded 106-acre property is the perfect destination for business and leisure. Choose from on-site bowling, luxurious spa treatments, and great dining options such as **Burnham’s**, or just relax at the pool. If you prefer to dine offsite, **Shula’s** restaurant, a short drive away, is located in the **Wyndham Hotel**. Or make a day of shopping at the fabulous **Woodfield Mall**. Your options are endless!

(4) **“GOLF, THEATRE & SHOP ‘TIL YOU DROP”**
TINLEY PARK, IL

- ?? Odyssey Country Club, Tinley Park
- ?? Tweeter Center, Tinley Park
- ?? Orland Shopping Center, Orland Park

If you’d prefer city surroundings, but want a feel of the country, then this Chicagoland getaway is perfect. Overnight accommodations are abundant with Hampton Inn, Holiday Inn Convention Center and many other conveniently-located hotels minutes from the fabulous **Odyssey Country Club**. The Odyssey Country Club’s magnificent “country club” atmosphere, with recently completed renovations of their clubhouse areas, is the perfect location for your golf event, business meeting or social gathering. Odyssey’s magnificent 18-hole championship course will challenge all levels of golfers. After golf, the **Tweeter Center**, (formerly the World Music Theatre) a fabulous sprawling outdoor theatre with top name entertainment is located right next door to the course – just a wedge shot away. Or visit **Orland Park** minutes away for a myriad of shops, restaurants and other social activities.

(5) **“BUSINESS, ENTERTAINMENT & GREAT GOLF”**

MERRILLVILLE, IN

- ?? Radisson Hotel At Star Plaza, Merrillville
- ?? 30 great courses, 30 minutes or less
- ?? Star Plaza Theatre/Adjacent to the Radisson
- ?? Wisecrackers Comedy Club/Radisson
- ?? Café Venezia or Venezia Bar & Grille, Merrillville
- ?? Stones' Bones, Merrillville and Munster locations
- ?? Balagio Ristorante, Merrillville (Frankfort & Homewood also)
- ?? Zuni's, Crown Point
- ?? Paradise Golf (nearby year-round range, pro shop, and individual or group golf instruction)

Combining business with pleasure is what the **Radisson Hotel At Star Plaza** does best – for a large group or the individual guest. Awaiting you at the hotel is a tropical atrium of swimming pools and spas, 347 spacious, beautifully-appointed guest rooms and suites, 5 different on-site restaurants, **Wisecrackers Comedy Club**, and the adjoining **Star Plaza Theatre**. Just a short drive of 35 miles from Chicago, it's the perfect spot for your getaway. Centrally located to more than 30 great courses, 30 minutes away or less, there are several championship courses 10-15 minutes away, tops. After business or golf, across the street are miles of great dining venues such as **Café Venezia, Venezia Bar & Grille, Stones' Bones, Zuni's --** and **Balagio's** new location in Merrillville, to name a few. Enjoy the many nearby area attractions including Lake Michigan casinos, **Splashdown Water Park**, and nearby **Westfield Mall**.

(6) **“COUNTRY INN CHARM & PREMIER GOLF”**

VALPARAISO, IN

- ?? Inn at Aberdeen, Valparaiso
- ?? The Course at Aberdeen, Valparaiso
- ?? Aberdeen Brewing Co./Thistle Lounge, Valparaiso
- ?? Aberdeen Manor, Valparaiso (banquet facility)
- ?? Talltree Arboretum, Valparaiso

Tucked away off the beaten path is an incredibly-charming and quaint Chicagoland community called “Aberdeen”, located in Valparaiso, Indiana. Travel back in time to the late 1800's, but relax in Queen Anne Splendor in your own spacious suite at **The Inn at Aberdeen**. The Inn's **Executive Conference Center** and its own chef satisfy your culinary desires for that special event or weekend retreat. Lease the entire Inn, if you like, so that you have the privacy and comfort for your group. The private **Gazebo in the Dunrobin Gardens** is a delightful setting for a reception, dinner or cookout. **The Course At Aberdeen**, a championship 18-hole course that winds through the **Aberdeen Village** homes is walking distance from the Inn. Their accommodating staff of PGA professionals will customize any type of golf event for your group. Also, across the street from The Inn is the **Aberdeen Brewing Co.** Watch how ale is made right before your very eyes in this Scottish style pub and eatery, or visit the pub's **Thistle Lounge** for weekend entertainment.

(7) "LINKS OF THE INDIANA DUNES ESCAPE"

CHESTERTON, IN

- ?? Hilton Garden Inn, Chesterton
- ?? The Brassie Golf Club, Chesterton
- ?? Blackthorn Golf Club, South Bend
- ?? Valparaiso University, Valparaiso
- ?? Notre Dame University, South Bend
- ?? Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore
- ?? Lighthouse Place Premium Outlets

Conveniently located to the Indiana Toll Road and Interstate 80/94 (also 14 miles from the Porter Country Airport and one hour's drive from Chicago's Midway Airport), the **Hilton Garden Inn in Chesterton**, is the perfect venue to stay for a relaxed, quiet weekend getaway near the Indiana Dunes and the 18-hole championship golf course, **The Brassie Golf Club**, "*The Links of the Indiana Dunes*" The Inn's 120 spacious guest rooms (12 suites) are full of thoughtful amenities and the full-service **Great American Grille** offers breakfast, lunch and dinner. When mixing business with pleasure, the Hilton Garden Inn offers a complimentary 24-hour business center, high-speed Internet access, large work desk area, and 4,000 sq. ft. of onsite meeting space. Also for your convenience are an indoor pool/spa/whirlpool, fitness center, valet and local shuttle service. Conveniently-located near **Valparaiso University**, **Notre Dame University**, and "*one of the top championship golf courses in Indiana*", the awesome **Blackthorn Golf Club**, in South Bend, Indiana.

(8) "HARBOR COUNTRY BEACH & GOLF RETREAT"

NEW BUFFALO, MI

- ?? The Harbor Grand (Waterfront Inn)
- ?? O'Brien's Inn (Golf Course Inn)
- ?? Whittaker Woods Golf Community, New Buffalo
- ?? Hannah's, Casey's or O'Brien's Restaurants
- ?? Tabor Hill Winery & Restaurant, Buchanan, MI
- ?? Lake Michigan Beachfront & Warren Dunes
- ?? Blue Chip Casino, Michigan City, IN

One of the absolute best places for a weekend getaway or corporate retreat is the New Buffalo, Michigan area. It has everything possible for a great retreat – business or pleasure. For the waterfront or easy beach access is the Harbor Grand Inn, or if you want to be near one of the "*top ten courses in Michigan*", **Whittaker Woods**, you can stay at **O'Brien's Comfort Inn** – which is just down the street. The golf course, clubhouse and surrounding **Whittaker Woods Golf Community** are owned by the well-known O'Brien family of Chicago. **O'Brien's of Chicago** and **O'Brien's at Whittaker Woods** are run by folks who definitely know the food and beverage business. The clubhouse offers so much you won't believe it until you see it. Just 72 miles from Chicago, you are minutes from the quaint town of New Buffalo featuring many wonderful restaurants, shops, the beachfront & more.