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Virginia Beach Highlights Sustainable and Socially Responsible Offerings for Meeting Planners

(Virginia Beach, Va., 2011) – One of the nation’s most sought-after year-round destinations, Virginia Beach continues to elevate industry standards for environmentally sound and socially responsible practices through a growing portfolio of sustainability-based offerings and amenities available to meeting planners and organizations.

The resort city boasts the [first convention center in the country](#) to achieve LEED® Gold certification for Existing Buildings. The LEED Green Building Rating System™ is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high-performance green buildings, developed by the U.S. Green Building Council.

The Virginia Beach Convention Center captures the true essence of this coastal destination with its innovative design and boasts more than 500,000 square feet of space, including a 150,000 square foot, column-free exhibit hall and a 31,000 square foot state-of-the-art ballroom. Features of the facility are highlighted below.



- Renewable materials were incorporated throughout construction of the facility, such as use of Cumaru wood for flooring, meeting suite veneers and outdoor decks.
- An energy efficient glass system was integrated into building design to limit ultra violet light penetration and harness solar energy in the large pre-function spaces.
- State-of-the-art lighting and HVAC systems are highly regulated and are programmed based on event schedules to minimize energy usage during nonpeak times.

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- Sustainable landscape design allows the facility to minimize its impact on one of the area's most important resources – our local waterways. The 50-acre site boasts more than 2,000 strategically placed trees and shrubs to filter stormwater runoff, the automated irrigation system measures rain accumulation and regulates irrigation demand and stormwater is retained on site through use of eco-friendly impervious paving techniques.
- Green cleaning techniques are employed throughout the facility. The housekeeping staff uses environmentally friendly housekeeping products and hand towels, “Green Seal Certified” cleaners, vacuums and floor scrubbers.
- Restrooms are equipped with sensors for sinks and hand towels to conserve water and paper, and utilize a foam soap, which requires less water to remove.
- Convention center staff maintain an on-site garden, where fresh produce is grown and harvested for incorporation into dishes prepared for facility events.
- The convention center's exclusive food and beverage operator, Distinctive Gourmet, donates food overages to local homeless shelters, uses biodegradable and recyclable materials in their concession stands and maintains a composting program that diverted nearly 10 tons of food waste from the local landfill in 2010.
- The facility is located a quarter of a mile from local bus lines, and green transportation options are further encouraged by offering preferred parking for alternative-fuel vehicles.
- The Virginia Beach Convention Center is one of the few in the country to employ a full-time sustainability coordinator to meet industry demands for environmental stewardship.

Virginia Beach is the first destination in the Commonwealth to be certified by *Virginia Green*, the Commonwealth's campaign to promote environmentally friendly practices within the hospitality industry. *Virginia Green* now considers the city as a model for other destinations throughout Virginia. To date, 120 hospitality businesses located within the city are certified by *Virginia Green*, including restaurants, accommodations, events, and attractions; in fact, 35% of all hotel rooms in the city are certified as “green.”



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Beyond access to a world-class convention center, the resort city offers meeting planners a variety of off-site venues that also are sustainable and socially responsible options. Unique meeting spaces like the Sandler Center for the Performing Arts, the Contemporary Art Center of Virginia and the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center are also certified by *Virginia Green* for employing environmentally sound practices.

The Convention & Visitors Bureau enhances meetings, conventions and events by working with groups interested in giving back during their stay. Through the CVB's [Corporate Social Responsibility Program](#), meeting planners will find opportunities to incorporate customized approaches to help minimize an event's ecological footprint and maximize the group's contribution back to the local community.

Virginia Beach's green hospitality initiatives include an oceanfront recycling program, which diverted nearly 100 tons of waste from 2008 to 2010. Virginia Beach also maintains an active partnership with Hampton Roads Transit, wherein the city offers hybrid-electric buses as the oceanfront's seasonal shuttle service. In 2009, The Virginia Beach CVB became the first Platinum business member of the Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC) and joined the Convene Green Alliance (CGA), showcasing the city as a prime destination for green meetings, conventions and events.

"Virginia Beach is committed to offering eco-friendly opportunities for visitors looking for a green vacation, meeting or convention," said James B. Ricketts, Director of the Virginia Beach CVB. "Kayak at First Landing State Park, stay at a green hotel, eat sustainable seafood and produce at a favorite local restaurant and host an event at a green facility. The options are now available thanks to the support of the Virginia Beach hospitality community."

During down time, meeting attendees have access to a myriad of options among the 120 *Virginia Green*-certified businesses in the city. For a complete list of *Virginia Green*-certified businesses and partners, as well as green tips and activities that support maintaining the beauty of Virginia Beach, visit www.VisitVirginiaBeach.com/green. The following pages contain suggested eco-friendly activities to consider once the meetings are finished.

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- **Dine at your choice of [32 Virginia Green restaurants](#)**, all certified as being committed to eco-friendly practices like recycling, energy efficiency and water conservation. Check out [Croc's 19th Street Bistro](#), an "eco-bistro" serving up fresh coastal cuisine and Lebanese fare infused with sustainable, organic, local and seasonal ingredients. Groups can schedule an interactive cooking class or relax during Virginia Beach's monthly [Green Drinks](#) event.



Try [Hot Tuna Seafood Grill](#) on Shore Drive, ranked by *Southern Living Magazine* as a top "Place to Visit." Delight in delectable dishes such as Parmesan Seared Tuna, Sam Adams Beer Battered Shrimp, Black Angus Steaks and homemade pasta. Make a healthy stop at [Heritage Natural Foods Café & Organic Juice Bar](#), the most popular natural foods eatery in Virginia Beach. Or enjoy a dinner with a magnificent view of the Chesapeake Bay at the [Lynnhaven Fish House](#), which offers the largest selection of fresh fish in the region.

- **Enjoy fresh, locally grown produce from the Farmers Market.** Produce from local fields is not only fresh and delicious; it causes less transportation-related damage to the environment. The [Old Beach Farmers Market](#), located in the Croc's 19th Street Bistro parking lot, is open seasonally from mid-May through the end of September, and re-opens as a holiday market the Saturdays prior to Thanksgiving and Christmas.



- **Visit some of Virginia Beach's best "Green" Attractions.** For a truly unique glimpse at Virginia Beach's marine life, dive into an undersea world of adventure at the *Virginia Green*-certified [Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center](#), the state's largest and one of the most-visited aquariums in the nation. Featuring more than over 800,000 gallons of aquariums, 300 interactive exhibits and an IMAX® 3D theater, visitors can explore and learn about the wildlife that calls Virginia Beach home.



This "green" attraction and unique meeting venue offers education and outreach on issues of conservation and sustainability, including the [Sensible Seafood](#) program, which aims to help consumers make sustainable seafood choices. The program actively promotes seafood species properly harvested from Virginia and the Mid-Atlantic region and works closely with restaurants and other industry partners throughout Virginia Beach.

For a cultural experience, visit the *Virginia Green*-certified [Sandler Center for the Performing Arts](#), a local attraction and popular unique meeting venue featuring performances by world-renowned artists. Or tour the *Virginia Green*-certified [Contemporary Art Center of Virginia](#), another unique meeting venue and area attraction showcasing a variety of exhibitions.

- **Race to good health and a greener tomorrow.** Events like the Yuengling Shamrock Marathon, Half Marathon and 8K Run, held each March, and the annual Rock ‘n’ Roll Half Marathon in September feature eco-friendly practices like paperless registration, e-coupons and recycling programs.
- **Immerse yourself in Virginia Beach’s great outdoors.** Explore the area by [kayak](#) or on designated [nature trails](#) to experience firsthand why it’s worth preserving. More than 18,600 acres of state parks and wildlife refuges, over 121 navigable miles of waterways and 35 miles of ocean and bay beaches give visitors a variety of landscapes for exploring the great outdoors.
- **Take advantage of our famed, [three-mile Boardwalk](#).** Named by *Travel + Leisure* as one of “America’s Best Beach Boardwalks,” this Virginia Beach favorite attraction allows you to reduce your environmental footprint with every step while exploring the resort area. The city’s famous three-mile oceanfront boardwalk – perfect for rollerblading and walking and featuring a separate bike path – is a great place to expend some energy. Bike, rollerblade and surrey rentals are available in several locations along the boardwalk.
- **Hitch a ride on public transportation – it’s a hybrid!** In partnership with Hampton Roads Transit, the VB Wave’s new [state-of-the-art hybrid-electric buses](#) provide eco-friendly shuttle service at the Oceanfront.
- **Visit [Grommet Island Beach Park & Playground for Everybody](#).** The first of its kind in the country, this new oceanfront attraction is 100% handicapped-accessible and offers beach-goers with disabilities the chance to enjoy the sand, sun and surf with ease. The park features soft play structures, special wheelchairs for the sand, handicapped-accessible play areas, Braille panels, sensory walls, shaded seating and more. It was conceived by a local businessman and named after his son, Josh Thompson, and avid surfer who was diagnosed with ALS/Lou Gehrig’s Disease. For groups interested in giving back during their stay, Grommet Island serves as a fundraising option with proceeds going toward the purchase of new equipment and playground expansion.
- **Stay green.** More than 35 percent of [Virginia Beach’s hotel rooms](#) are certified as “green” through the *Virginia Green* campaign. This means that the accommodations meet the Commonwealth’s stringent standards for reducing environmental impact.



The Virginia Beach CVB invites meeting planners to “Bring it to the Beach!” Virginia Beach is four hours southeast of Washington, D.C. by car and within a day’s drive or less from two-thirds of the U.S. population. For the latest information on Virginia Beach Meetings & Conventions, visit www.VisitVirginiaBeach.com/conventioncenter and the Bring it to the Beach Blog at www.VisitVirginiaBeach.com/conventioncenter/blog. Media information and digital images are available at www.VisitVirginiaBeach.com/pressroom.

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