

OCALA/MARION COUNTY, FLORIDA Top Destination for Horse and Youth Sports Events

Known as the "Horse Capital of the World[®]," Ocala/Marion County in central Florida has become one of the state's top sports destinations.

Welcome to the Horse Capital of the World[®]

An international equestrian epicenter and one of only four major thoroughbred centers in the world, Ocala/Marion County has the most horses in the country. While almost every horse breed can be found in the county — including the American Quarter Horse, Paso Fino, Arabian, Warmblood and Clydesdale — there are more than 35,000 thoroughbreds on over 700 thoroughbred farms.

These farms are a powerhouse in the racing community, having produced 52 national champions, seven Kentucky Derby winners, 28 Breeders' Cup

equestrian, western, dressage, eventing and hunter/jumper; as well as a variety of other events, such as basketball and volleyball tournaments, canine shows, conventions and trade shows, weddings and more.

In-Demand Destination for Youth Sports

With venues for baseball, softball, basketball, football, soccer, golf and tennis, Ocala/Marion County is a sought-after destination for regional and national competitions at both the professional and amateur level, particularly for youth sports.

"We have a large presence in the youth sport market, the tra-



ditional stick and ball sports like baseball, softball and soccer," said Corry Locke, Group Sales Supervisor for the Ocala/Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau (VCB). "Tournaments for these sports help support our summer calendar, while the fall, winter and spring calendars are influenced mostly by horse events."

champions and six Horses of the Year. The area's most famous equines are the 1978 Triple Crown champion, Affirmed; and the 2015 Triple Crown winner, American Pharoah. Both trained in the county, while Affirmed was also bred and born in the area.

World-class horse facilities support the local horse industry, including the World Equestrian Center, a brand new state-of-the-art complex with more than one million square feet of indoor competition space. The country's largest equestrian center opened in January and hosts all types of horse events, such as

limited by a membership structure so every overnight accommodation in the county has the opportunity to be involved in the RFP process and submit a proposal. This helps give planners the most competitive rates."

In addition to the facilities, the biggest draw for event planners is Ocala/Marion County's incentive funding program. Using a straightforward formula, event organizations can receive a set amount of funding for every room night attributed to their event from the Ocala/Marion County VCB. This can be used to offset an event's operational and marketing expenses.

The funding program considers any overnight accommodation in the county, including hotels, motels, vacation and extended stay rentals, campgrounds and RV parks.

"Our incentive program is unique because we are one of the few VCBs that offers a set amount per room night," said Locke.

"Ocala and Marion County is a top sports destination because we have great facilities, hotels offering better rates and the best incentive program," Locke concluded.



Photo Credit: World Equestrian Center

minutes from Gainesville to the north and within 75 minutes to Tampa to the southwest, Orlando to the south and Daytona Beach to the east. Even Atlanta and Miami are less than a six-hour drive.

"With I-75 running through the center of the county, it's easy for people on both ends of the state to plan and attend events here," said Locke.

Favorable Business Terms for Event Planners

Hotel rates and favorable business terms give Ocala/Marion County an edge over potential competitors.

"The hotels in Marion County are more affordable for people staying for multiple day tournaments than other areas of the state," said Locke.

Through an RFP program, the Ocala/Marion County VCB provides assistance to meeting planners to secure the best rates. This helps them evaluate rates, special accommodations and amenities.

"Ocala/Marion County VCB is a government operation," said Locke. "Our program is not





A CHAMPION DESTINATION



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- ✓ Top-Notch Facilities
- ✓ Team-Friendly Accommodations
- ✓ Winning Value
- ✓ Easy Access
- ✓ Off-The-Field Fun

Let's Get the Ball Rolling!

Our Visitors and Convention Bureau offers all-star staff ready to help you make your next event one for the record books. We will treat you like the MVP you are, and do everything we can to help knock your event out of the park!

Sales@MarionFL.org

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