



The farm-to-fashion workshop lets participants get hands-on with locally sheared wool to be made into scarves.



Don't have enough time to coordinate a group outing during your meeting? Let folks explore the fashion scene on their own by choosing event dates that coincide with one of Columbus' major fashion events throughout the year, among them the Fashion Meets Music Festival in September or HighBall Halloween (billed as "Carnival meets Halloween") in October. These—and many other fashion-related events—are open to the public and serve as built-in entertainment for visitors to the city.

You can also hire transportation and make the two-hour drive to Kent State University Museum, where group tours can be arranged to view an extensive collection of textiles, designer clothing and costumes; or plan a visit to the Short North Arts District for lessons in applying makeup or to be fitted for custom-designed suits and dresses. In Columbus, it's easy to help your group dress for success.
—*Erin Caslavka Deinzer*

COLUMBUS ON THE CATWALK

Columbus is the capital of Ohio, but the city of 850,000 people is also making a name for itself as the Midwestern capital of style. With well-known retailers like Abercrombie & Fitch, Henri Bendel, Victoria's Secret, DSW, Express and L Brands (which alone grossed \$12.7 billion in sales last year) calling the city home, Columbus just might be America's most fashionable city outside New York and Los Angeles.

When Amy Weirick, president of Weirick Communications, brought the Midwest Travel Writers Association's biannual meeting to Columbus in May, she wanted to immerse members

in Columbus' retail-focused culture. The team at the Columbus CVB helped create just the thing.

"We arranged a 'farm-to-fashion' experience with clothing designer Celeste Malvar-Stewart at her studio in Columbus' historic German Village," says Weirick. Malvar-Stewart walked them through the textile-making, dyeing and design processes; then each person chose a wool sheared at a local farm to make scarves.

"Our entire group—both men and women—loved it," says Weirick. "It was creative and educational, and we all went home with a one-of-a-kind creation."



CHAMPIONS RETREAT MASTERS ITS DOMAIN

At Champions Retreat near Augusta, Georgia, there are two seasons. "There's Masters week and the rest of the year," says Cameron Wiebe, general manager of the private golf club.

Featuring three nine-hole courses designed by golf's Holy Trinity—Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player—Champions Retreat is a natural for corporate groups looking to mix business and pleasure.

Occupancy rates for the 16 on-site cabins currently run about 22 percent, slightly under the 30 percent par Wiebe is shooting for. "This is a hidden gem," he says.

That's not all bad. The club is out to maintain a private and luxurious feel. The exclusivity reaches to the golf courses themselves: Champions Retreat is the only club Palmer, Nicklaus and Player collaborated on. The attention to detail is evident everywhere, from a golf pro stopping a tour to pick up a stray water bottle to the fully stocked liquor stashes in each sleek cabin.

A 17th cottage is in the works in time for the 2017 Masters, and there's room to add 40 more over the coming years. The bulk of corporations that own cabins rent them out during Masters week to pay the yearly mortgage. Otherwise, they use one of the country's biggest sporting events as a backdrop.

The big draw for corporate groups is the 10,000-sq.-ft. Barn, a beautifully rustic events space capable of holding 400 people for a reception or meeting session. And if golf is priority No. 1 at Champions, F&B is priority 1a. Southern comfort meets sophistication in each dish, down to the delicious chicken wings. And if you'd like your group to dine in a little more unusual setting, consider a Lowcountry boil served on a golf hole atop the Savannah River.

Among the popular on-site activities are night golf and fishing on the ponds/water hazards.
—*Matt Swenson*