If you have decided to have a holiday office party, you have to do some planning. And depending on the size of your business, you may have to start planning well in advance.

However, you can make your holiday office party one to remember – provided you know what is involved in planning the perfect office party.

Here are some tips for your holiday party planning:

**Get Everyone Involved**
Discuss the party with your employees and colleagues. Solicit company holiday party ideas from everyone who is interested. This helps in forging a sense of unity and avoiding resentment.

Then, consider forming a committee to organize the party. If your business is smaller, then everyone should be involved.

**Holiday Party Themes**
Decide on a theme for your holiday party. Having a holiday party theme helps in organizing a more entertaining party.

Try to think a bit differently; go for something new and exciting. Consider taking the company to play a round of golf, visit historical places, or taking a dinner cruise or going to a fine dining restaurant.

The idea here is to opt for a holiday party theme that takes you away from the mundane office environment.

**Pick a Suitable Date**
Decide on a date that is good for everyone. Christmas Eve usually isn’t very good, as most people want to take off early to be with their families.

Make sure you inform everybody well in advance, and that your holiday office party date does not clash with a holiday or fall on the date of an important company event.

Ask your employees if they think it should be held on a weekday or the weekend. This will ensure that everyone will be able to participate.

**Choose the Right Location**
The idea behind a holiday office party is for everyone to unwind and enjoy themselves.

Choose a location that is festive, comfortable and beautiful. When you choose the location, make sure that it is in a location that is convenient for everyone.

**Food and Beverage Considerations**
Naturally, the people in your office have different dietary requirements. Some may be vegetarian while others may be on a diabetic diet.

Having a menu that caters to everyone is a good idea. It is always better to serve non-alcoholic drinks so that things don’t get out of hand.

You can ask your employees about their dietary restrictions and preferences.

Make sure that you arrange to have the right amount of food and drinks available.

**Decorations to Create that Party Feeling**
While doing your holiday party planning, pay special attention to the decorations. They should match the season and the holiday.

**Games and Activities to Enjoy**
Be sure to plan games and activities that help break the ice.

For example, you can organize games and have singing competitions. You can have prizes for the best-dressed person. Play lively music in the background. Try to hire a DJ if your budget permits.

Remember, this is your opportunity to show your employees your appreciation.

**Cool Gifts and Prizes**
At the party, give gifts and prizes that are cool, fun and useful. They can be the latest electronic gadgets, party favors or gift certificates.

Ask all your employees to pitch in when it comes to gift ideas – that way, everyone will feel that they have an opportunity to contribute.

Organizing a great holiday office party can be fun for everyone. Follow the tips above and make your party one to remember!

Sydney Chafee is a freelance writer.
A Different Train of Thought for Company Holiday Parties: Chartering Private Railcars

Right now in companies everywhere those charged with planning the annual company holiday party are booking the usual event venues – restaurant party spaces or hotel banquet rooms.

Meanwhile, parked at Los Angeles Union Station, there are three plush American Railway Explorer private railcars designed by James Park, the architect of the Venice Simplon Orient Express, that promise to transform a mundane holiday party into a “moving experience” – in both senses of the expression – with a daytrip to San Diego.

The three private charter railcars of the American Railway Explorer collection – a salon party car, a dome car and an open platform car – can be chartered for coastal holiday party trips hitched to the back of a scheduled Amtrak train. The company takes care of all the details, including catering and arrangements with Amtrak.

The company’s president and CEO, Jim Bain, says, “When you are in a private railcar that’s traveling along the coast, there’s a shared experience and intimate atmosphere that generates real camaraderie.”

Amtrak has more than 20 trips daily from Los Angeles Union Station, providing many itinerary options. On a daytrip to San Diego, linked to an Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train, your chartered railcar departs Los Angeles in the morning. En route, your guests are treated to breakfast and coast-hugging views of the Pacific. The train drops your guests off in San Diego. There, historic buildings mix with many visitor attractions on the site of California’s first Spanish settlement. The train departs San Diego in the late afternoon and arrives back at Los Angeles Union Station by early evening. En route, guests enjoy cocktails and hors d’oeuvres.

The charter cost is $5,000 per day for the first car, with a lesser rate for a second or third car. Catering and Amtrak charges are additional. Car capacities range from 12 to 30. The total daytrip capacity for all three cars is 64.

The cars were designed in 1987; they were refurbished in 2012. The cars are available for charter on trips nationwide attached to Amtrak trains.

The company’s website is www.AmericanRailwayExplorer.com. Bain can be reached at (720) 635-2002 or by e-mail at jbain@aretrain.com.

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HOLIDAY VENUES

If you would expect the ultimate holiday festivities at the hotel where “Surviving Christmas” was filmed in the early 2000s—and Millennium Biltmore Hotel Los Angeles is prepared to meet every expectation, down to the last “Partridge in a Pear Tree?”

For 90 years, the Biltmore—with its stunning architecture and reputation for hosting magnificent social events—has been a destination for celebrities, film location shoots, dignitaries and presidents. Fittingly, Millennium Biltmore has a long-standing tradition of celebrating the holidays in glitzy style.

The Ultimate Holiday Office Party - Suite Style

Ideal for intimate office parties, the Biltmore is making available one of its most popular suites—the Music Suite—for the warmest and coziest holiday office parties imaginable. Ideal for 25 to 35 guests and as an alternative to a restaurant or function room (while lovely in their own right), the living room-like atmosphere of a suite conjures up images of warm holiday toasts and festive gift exchanges among friends and colleagues, celebrity-style.

Accented by stunning holiday hues and twinkling accents, the 2,000 square-foot Music Suite boasts views of Pershing Square, a baby grand piano and antique music stand. The living room also features a large reception area where gifts may be exchanged and the festivities will linger as long as the spiced cider warms the spirits.

Holiday Festivities Heighten the Spirits

Let the talented chefs at the Biltmore do the cooking this Thanksgiving and enjoy a bountiful Thanksgiving Buffet with all the trimmings on Thurs., Nov. 28th from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., featuring traditional and contemporary favorites, comforting entrees, and tantalizing desserts.

Served in the elegant Smeraldi’s and Rendezvous Court, with seating in Smeraldi’s, reservations are highly recommended: 213-612-1562. $59 per adult; $25 for kids 4-11, excluding tax and gratuity.

Why spend your time in the kitchen when you can focus your attention on family and gift exchanges this holiday? All of the senses will be delighted with this warm Biltmore culinary tradition offering a delicious Festive Holiday Buffet featur- ing t早晨izing and seasonally inspired entrees and desserts with a contemporary flair. On Wed., Dec. 25th, a sumptuous buffet will be served 11:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m., including breakfast and traditional holiday fare. Served in Smeraldi’s and Rendezvous Court, seating will be in Smeraldi’s. Reservations are highly recommended: (213) 612-1562. $59 per adult; $25 for kids 4-11, excluding tax and gratuity.

Join revelers in one of the most historic locations in downtown L.A., providing a celebratory dinner and dazzling ambiance that will help ring in the New Year in memorable fashion, fashions back through 90 years of singing Auld Lang Syne at midnight! On Tues., Dec. 31st, 5-10 p.m., New Year’s Eve Dinner in Smeraldi’s features a three-course meal and includes a glass of sparkling wine per guest; $65 per person, excluding tax and gratuity.

Embrace the Holiday Spirit: Parties, Packages and Sumptuous Buffets

Holiday Shopping Destinations

For most of holiday shopping with up to 20% discounts at popular and unique shopping destinations, and receive complimentary breakfast for two in Smeraldi’s Restaurant, free valet parking for one vehicle and enjoy a 25% discount off authentic Afternoon Tea Wed-Sun. Package rates start at $229 per room, per night, plus tax (based on availability): www.millenniumhotels.com.

Contact Kendra Walker, Biltmore Marketing Manager, at kendra.walker@millenniumhotels.com.
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Planning this year’s company holiday bash can be easier than ever if you stay on trend with the wishes of your attendees and honor the true holiday spirit, according to Derek Haug, the new Director of Conference and Catering at Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel. “Instead of planning the same agenda year after year, companies are looking to make their holiday celebration more meaningful to their team members with innovative activities and experiences.”

A few ideas for this year’s holiday party:
- Make it a family affair – Create a kid-friendly environment with childcare and activities like gingerbread house decorating or screen holiday movies.
- Give back – Partner with a charity, such as a local children’s shelter, and do a toy drive or other philanthropic effort to engage guests in the spirit of holiday giving.
- Celebrate partnerships – Invite clients, local partners and other community members to celebrate the successes of the year and maximize time and exposure for networking.

Why choose Loews for this year’s holiday party? The Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel was recently chosen by Condé Nast Traveler readers as one of the nation’s best Business Hotels in the magazine’s 16th Annual Business Travel Awards reader poll. The award comes on the heels of the hotel’s $4.5 million façade renovation, featuring new glass guestroom balconies that enhance the crystal clear mountain views.

continued on page 29
Holiday parties are part of the American holiday spirit. Whether it is with family, friends or co-workers, the annual get-togethers are always anticipated and enjoyed.

Decorating the halls for the annual office holiday party has never been easier – just let Fairplex do it all for you! The Sheraton Fairplex Hotel & Conference Center offers a variety of festive party plans for every budget and menu – and it is centrally located to Los Angeles, Orange and San Bernardino counties.

Whether it is a major corporate formal dinner or a casual lunch, the Sheraton is prepared to serve. Guest lists from 10 to 10,000 can be accommodated. A private dining niche in the new Garden Room intimately seats 20 and includes access to the patio with its beautiful outdoor stone fireplace. For the larger set, the hotel can accommodate up to 10,000 guests in a creatively transformed Fairplex exhibition hall.

The Sheraton’s creative team will work to make your party the perfect celebration with custom holiday menus and expertly decorated rooms. The hotel can entertain in one of its many ballrooms or at a “winter wonderland” at a Holiday Pavilion on the Fairplex grounds.

“This is a great place to celebrate the season in style,” said Beth Gallagher, director of catering for the hotel. “We offer everything from a four-course meal to a buffet to a cocktail reception.”

To reserve a date or for more information, call the Sheraton sales office at (909) 868-5902.

The venue of choice for your next corporate or nonprofit gathering, the new Guerin Pavilion at the Skirball Cultural Center provides the ideal setting for large-scale conferences, networking events, trade shows, galas, fundraisers, and special occasions.

Together with the adjoining Herscher Hall, the pavilion adds 17,500 square feet to the Skirball’s extraordinary meeting and event space.

For more information, visit www.skirball.org/guerin-pavilion or call (310) 440-4589.
Holiday Events in VenturaCountyWest Can Inspire

Camarillo

Closest to Los Angeles of the three VenturaCountyWest cities, Camarillo hotels host an abundance of small holiday parties, but for larger events, the city is rich with historical sites, secluded gardens and unique banquet facilities—all within a few minutes from affordable Camarillo lodging. 

Camarillo Ranch, once owned by Adolfo Camarillo one of the city’s founding fathers, can accommodate up to 600 lunch or dinner guests at its manicured front lawn and garden sites and 250 guests in its 5,200 square foot “Big Red Barn.” “Businesses come from all over central and southern California including Santa Barbara and all points south to hold their events here,” said Marsha Rea, executive director of the Camarillo Ranch. “Besides our large lawn, garden and barn venues, the property’s Queen Ann Victorian mansion is open for small dinner parties.”

Rea said the holidays are busy with both private and corporate parties. “We’re booked on the weekends for private parties, but have some availability Monday through Thursday for corporate lunch and dinner holiday parties and team building functions. We have a variety of hotels and great restaurants nearby for those who want to stay to explore the area. The Courtyard by Marriott Camarillo, for example, is just three minutes away.”

“We host quite a few small offsite meetings and events during the holidays, but guests also stay here after attending functions at the Camarillo Ranch or the Maravilla Gardens in Santa Rosa Valley. Both are close by,” said Mellany Arbues, general manager at the Courtyard by Marriott Camarillo. “Many of those attendees stay an extra night or two to enjoy local wine tasting, museums, Old Town Camarillo restaurants and shopping at the Camarillo Premium Outlet Mall.”

Oxnard

In Oxnard, the Adagio Bella Gardens, an Italian inspired luxury banquet hall, shares a parking lot with the Hilton Garden Inn and Homewood Suites by Hilton in Oxnard. The three properties also share

Reserve your holiday event at the Omni Los Angeles Hotel at California Plaza. We offer a variety of flexible venues to accommodate parties of any size. With sensational catering options and award-winning service, we can produce your perfect event.

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AN ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT TO THE LOS ANGELES BUSINESS JOURNAL

Through March when snowbirds from the holidays (that comes in January) see employee appreciation lunches and dinners,” said James Boldizar, general manager of the Hilton Garden Inn, Oxnard/Camarillo. “I’ve noticed, however, that some businesses are now moving employee events to January to take advantage of lower room rates.”

The Residence Inn Oxnard River Ridge is right next door to two beautiful, championship 18-hole public golf courses. Golf is not the main attraction during the holidays (that comes in January through March when snowbirds from Canada stay two weeks to a month at the hotel and play golf every day). Instead, December finds its 10 meeting rooms filled with business and personal holiday parties. The hotel can seat from 20 to 300 guests for lunch or dinner. To get everyone in a festive mood, the hotel chef will be creating a giant gingerbread house that will be on display in the lobby in December.

“Many businesses reserve a block of rooms at the hotel so their employees can spend the night after a night of holiday festivities,” said Millicent Bennett, director of sales at the hotel. “Some December dates are still available for last minute bookings.”

Ventura

Built in 1910, the historic Pierpont Inn & Spa in Ventura was originally a stopping point for travelers heading up and down the California coast. Today, it is a destination that features rich architectural highlights from over 100 years ago and breathtaking ocean views. It is a favorite spot for weddings, religious and business retreats and corporate events. “We accommodate parties from 30 to 220,” said Sue Stalley, Pierpont general manager. “People come for the ocean views and historic nature of the inn.”

For larger functions, Ventura Beach Marriott has more than 16,000 square feet of meeting space in 18 meeting rooms, with in its largest, Costa De Oro, seating 400 guests for lunch or dinner. “We host lots of holiday celebrations for companies that want to thank their employees,” said Alissa Van Keuren, the hotel’s director of sales. “They will come for lunch, a full evening event with cocktail hour, dinner and dancing or something more casual like a happy hour. November and early December is when many companies hold management, department and board retreats here. Some book their retreats close to the weekend so participants have the option of extending their stay and their families can join them for a quick vacation.”

Ventura Beach Marriott attracts companies locally and from the Los Angeles area. “Our staff is what draws customers,” said Van Keuren. “They really know the hotel and anticipate our customers’ requests. That’s why we get so many repeat customers and first-time customers become regulars. Our location is also an asset. We’re less than 200 steps from the sand, about 1 1/2 miles from the Ventura Harbor Village with its restaurants and family friendly atmosphere and a short walk or bike ride to the Ventura pier.”

The Marriott works with Island Packers to book guests on sea excursions to the Channel Islands National Park, whale watching and harbor cruises. “Coming to Ventura means getting out of the city and getting the chance to take part in ocean oriented activities,” said Van Keuren. “There is a sense of calm when you come to Ventura. You don’t have the distractions of work and city life.”

Events

Since the weather is usually mild even in winter in Ventura County West, there are plenty of outdoor holiday events taking place throughout the month of December. Tamales are part of many a family’s holiday tradition. Try some of the best anywhere at the Oxnard Tamale Festival December 7.

Ventura Winter Wine Walk is also December 7. Guests sample award-winning wines from local wineries paired with small bites while enjoying live entertainment in various restaurants and stores throughout Downtown Ventura. For an illuminated California-style holiday experience, there is the Channel Islands Harbor Parade of Lights, December 14 in Oxnard and the Ventura Parade of Lights & Fireworks at Ventura Harbor, December 20 and 21. Boat owners get to show off their holiday decorating talent as they cruise the harbors.

For inspiring venue and event ideas for the holidays, visit www.VenturaCountyWest.com

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**Turn “Ho-Hum” Into “Ho! Ho! Ho!”**

By Marilyn Delaney

Depending on the size of your staff and where you are located, your company tradition might be to celebrate the holidays in the function room of a local restaurant. Others may settle on a square, box-in room of a conference center, adjacent to another space that is an exact replica. When planning your holiday events, remember the real estate adage: location, location, location! Don’t settle for ordinary when you might have extraordinary for the same price. Choosing a unique, architecturally dynamic setting can enhance the holiday party experience for the entire organization.

Venue selection can be a challenge, but in the eighteen years the Skirball Cultural Center has been hosting year-end parties for corporate and nonprofits, we have come to know and accommodate the aspects most crucial to the success of year-end events. When considering an unusual or boutique venue for a holiday celebration, here are some important things to keep in mind:

**APPROPRIATE SPACE**—First, the footprint of your chosen venue must work for the number of attendees and the agenda. If your focus will be on presentation and program, arrange for comfortable seating for all. Remember, too, that a social gathering that includes food and drink—even a standing reception—will necessitate an appropriate number of high-tops or small tables so that your guests can rest their glasses of wine while nibbling on the culinary delights. Should the celebration include dancing, the dance floor should be expansive enough to allow for comfort and movement without the risk of jabbing ribs and stepping on toes!

**VERSATILITY AND BEAUTY**—Our incredible California climate makes it possible to celebrate the holiday season at an indoor/outdoor venue, so it makes sense to take advantage of the beautiful weather. If you choose to hold your event in the open air, just make sure your venue is equipped to offer a rain plan. Select a venue that feels comfortable and unconfined as well as beautiful. Hospitality venues in the area are now bringing in authentic elements of nature into a function space (say farewell to the fake ficus!). At the Skirball Cultural Center, where we are seeing increased demand for indoor/outdoor party settings, we find that our clients appreciate a venue with a garden view. For midday or afternoon celebrations, an infusion of natural light, by way of lots of windows and/or skylights, adds greatly to the ambience. A view of the great outdoors will give an expansive feel to the room, while court-yards adjacent to the event space offer an

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**HOLIDAY VENUES**

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**HOLIDAY VENUE SPOTLIGHT**

Photograph by Timothy Hursley, Courtesy of Skirball Cultural Center

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continued on page 35
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OWLMOR is for fun. And so are the holidays. Who wants a stuffy, boardroom-style holiday party sharing pleasantries over cheese and crackers? Why not celebrate the holidays in style? At Bowlmor you can eat, drink, and be merry this holiday season at not one but three locations in the LA area. Bowlmor Lanes is so much more than just bowling. Locations in Pasadena, Anaheim, and Orange County offer dozens of high-tech, cosmic bowling lanes, a full-service bar and a top of the line catering menu for you and your party to partake in. From crab bites, to vegetable spring rolls, to gourmet sliders, Bowlmor has something for every discerning pallet and every level of bowler. Shoes, bumpers, and balls are included in our party packages so your party can enjoy themselves in our upscale atmosphere. Bowlmor Pasadena reflects the color and exciting energy of California. With 33,000 square feet, it's perfect for an event of any type or size. Let your guests lace up and bowl on 31 state-of-the-art lanes while enjoying a full-service bar, and lane-side food and drink service. Looking for something more exclusive? Enjoy Bowlmor's seven lane private bowl-
ing suite with vibrant, modern décor. Named “Pasadena’s Best Bowling Venue” by Pasadena Magazine, Bowlmor Pasadena is perfect for a night out, special occasion, or corporate event! Located in Anaheim Gardenwalk near Disneyland, Bowlmor Lanes Anaheim features 41 state-of-the-art bowling lanes — including nine private lanes — and 47,000 square feet of entertainment and meeting space perfect for holiday parties of any type or size. Top that off with a full-service bar, billiard tables, and lane-side food and drink service and you have a party people will be raving about around the water cooler. On-site Event Coordinators make planning your party a breeze with an extensive variety of catering packages prepared by an executive chef. Bowlmor Lanes Orange County offers you and your guests a unique and fun environment where glow-in-the-dark bowling will bring out your guests' competitive spirit while dining on delicious cuisine. Bowlmor Lanes Orange County offers your event 30 lanes of high-energy bowling, each with its own customizable 12-foot video screen so your guests can experience the fun of adding competition to the party. In addition to bowling, Bowlmor OC offers a full-service restaurant, a high-end sports bar with real-time sports ticker, an arcade and a state-of-the-art audiovisual system. At Bowlmor OC, you will be in a chic atmosphere, enjoying great food, drinks and exceptional service. The executive chef's delectable catering menus and experienced service-oriented staff will take care of your every need. Do something different for your holiday party this year. Get your event rolling at Bowlmor Lanes.

Continued from page 32

opportunity for fresh air and sunshine. A cascading fountain or water feature nearby will enhance the feeling of welcome tranquility for your guests.

SUITABLE STYLE—Whether your company is an edgy start-up or an established worldwide entity, it is important that your event reflect your corporate brand. Finding a place with a neutral décor palette will allow you to dress it up to the nines or keep things minimal, depending on the look that suits your organization best. Is the existing décor impressive in itself but still flexible enough to add your own décor touches? If so, you’re on the right track!

TEST THE TASTES—Explore all of your menu options, including specialty culinary offerings that may not be on the printed menu, and be sure to select something memorable that will delight your colleagues. A tasting will confirm the brilliance of your menu design. Keep in mind that any professional hospitality venue can arrange for a preview sampling of its menu options. The best guarantee of quality catering is based on this tasting experience and on referrals from trustworthy sources.

Discuss appropriate beverage service with your event planner, whether juices and sparkling waters or a full premium bar. Non-alcoholic beverages should be available—and if you are planning a full bar reception or dinner, enlist volunteers to be designated drivers. Take into consideration any religious dietary needs, as well as food allergies. If there are specific preferences requested by your colleagues, try to accommodate them. Remember that this is a holiday party, and respectful consideration should be given to diverse cultural and religious observations.

BRING THE WOW—Your catering choices are important but don’t neglect the amenities. Professional lighting enhances the beauty of a room, and a formally set dining room creates a feeling of elegance and conveys appreciation for your guests. If you are in a smaller space, the use of patterned gobos projections expands the visual perception of the room. Make sure that you talk with your event planner to ascertain in-house availability of specialty lighting, both for décor and stage accents. Most venues will also have a list of preferred vendors who know the potential of the setting and can create an unforgettable, customized look. After all, a dazzling first look establishes the most lasting impression!

SAFETY AND CONVENIENCE—Some smaller, more vintage establishments may not be fully ADA-compliant. Consider the needs of all of your guests when making a venue choice. How far from the parking area is the venue itself? What accessibility does the site offer?

Very few venues offer complimentary parking, the Skirball Cultural Center being among those few. In the great city of Los Angeles, free parking is like finding holiday gold! When looking at total cost of your event, calculate all of the variables, including the cost of parking. If there is a charge for parking, inform all of your guests beforehand; it can be a nasty surprise for them if they are not prepared.

Wherever your venue, may your celebrations uplift the spirit and enrich your community.

Marilyn Delanoeye is Vice President, Hospitality and Private Events for Skirball Cultural Center.

Los Angeles Business Journal 35

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