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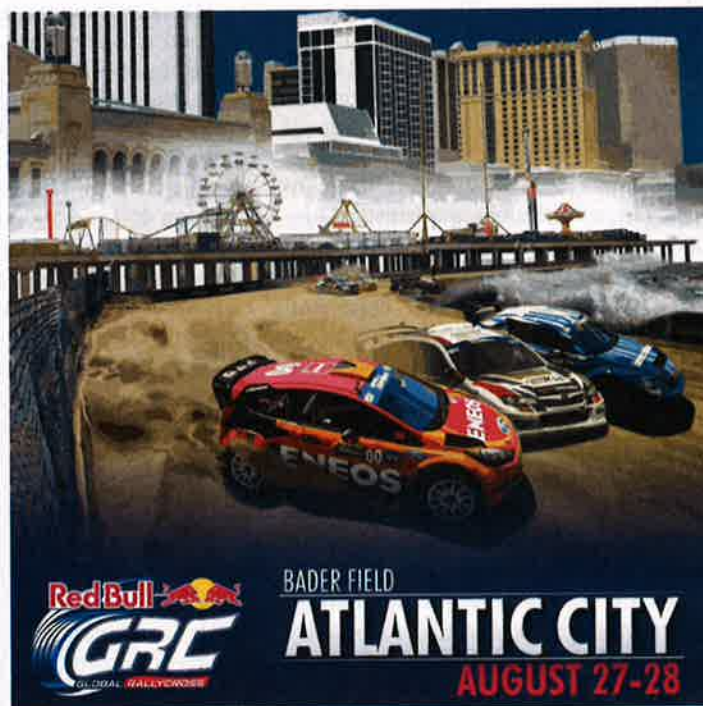
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Mid-Atlantic Destinations: The Most on the Coast

By Andrew Cohen | *On Every Surface, Signature Events are Transforming the Bottom Lines of CVBs Across these States*

AS SPRING TURNS TO SUMMER, the mid-Atlantic region is getting ready to welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors to events that attract national and even international athletes and followers. On grass, turf, dirt, sand and water, there are events for every taste, facilities to host them and fully staffed sports commissions and CVBs that can work with event organizers to make everything come together. Take a look at what this region has to offer and what it will be hosting.



New Jersey

A special edition of the Copa America is coming to 10 U.S. cities in June, with a group-stage, a quarterfinal and the final match set to be held at MetLife Stadium. The first time the oldest international continental soccer competition will be hosted outside of South America, the Copa America Centenario, held between the usual four-year cycle, will feature an expanded field of 16 teams, 10 from CONMEBOL (the South American foot-



ball confederation) and six from CONCACAF (North and Central America and the Caribbean). Secured for the New York/New Jersey area by MetLife Stadium and the Meadowlands Liberty Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Copa is expected to be wildly popular in this soccer hotbed.

“We developed an excellence in visitor experience training program for the Super Bowl when it was here in the winter of 2014, which we called A Warm

Welcome, and we’re using it again for the Copa,” says Judy Ross, director of the Meadowlands Liberty Convention & Visitors Bureau. “We’re certainly looking forward to the event. The area is rich with soccer fans, especially in the Ironbound section of Newark, which is known as a Portuguese neighborhood. It’s been a couple of years since the Super Bowl, and this is another big event we can wrap our hands around.”

Atlantic City is gearing up for some

major events this summer and fall, including the Atlantic City Offshore Grand Prix, presented by the Offshore Powerboat Association, in June; the Red Bull Global Rallycross, in August; and IRONMAN 70.3 Atlantic City in September. A first-time event for Atlantic City, Red Bull Global Rallycross pits small production-based cars driven by star drivers against each other in door-to-door racing featuring dirt, asphalt and tabletop jumps. The cars produce 600 (CONTINUED ON PAGE 64)



horsepower and can accelerate from zero to 60 mph in less than two seconds, and can also withstand 70-foot jumps and other vehicle contact.

“We are very excited to host this thrilling motorsports event for the first time in Atlantic City,” says Jim Wood, president and CEO of Meet AC and the Atlantic City Sports Commission. “The uniqueness of Bader Field, the event venue, will allow racers and spectators to appreciate the surroundings Atlantic City has to offer.”

New York

July in the Adirondacks means the fourth annual Saratoga Shootout Lacrosse Tournament and the Strong to Serve Saratoga Half Marathon and 5K, taking place in the beautiful Saratoga Spa State Park. The latter event, in its third year, benefits the Strong to Serve mission to empower and motivate individuals to engage in athletic activities as a means to raise funds for orphan children in the developing world.

Saratoga Spa State Park will later this

year serve as the starting point for the Reebok Ragnar Relay Adirondacks, in which teams of 12 cover 24 hours and 200 miles, finishing up in Lake Placid. “Saratoga has grown into a year-round destination, thanks in large part to the robust sports market here,” says Todd Garofano, president of the Saratoga Convention & Tourism Bureau. “Saratoga offers four seasons of great indoor and outdoor facilities with a safe, walkable and vibrant downtown.”

The Long Island Convention and Visitors Bureau has helped bring back the Divas® Half Marathon & 5K Series for a sixth year this fall. Dubbed “the most fun and glam women’s running series in the nation,” the race offers participants pink tutus with their registrations, a “big, sparkly medal definitely fit for a diva,” and either alcoholic and non-alcoholic Champagne (depending on the location). Before that, though, in July, Nassau County will host Tough Mudder Long Island for a second year and an exciting first-time event, America’s Next Soccer Star Tour.

Held at Stony Brook Soccer Park, home of the Three Village Soccer Club, the tour provides a unique opportunity for male and female soccer players in different age groups — Professional and Non-Professional Adult (18 and older), U-18, U-16, U-14, U-12 and U-10 (minimum age of eight) — to showcase their skills at a regional level of competition and win an invitation to be coached by elite coaches from around the country at the Ultimate National ID Camp.

Pennsylvania

Two of central Pennsylvania’s biggest annual events are the U.S. Junior Nationals Hershey Showcase, an AAU girls’ basketball tournament that brings about 250 teams to the region every year, and the Big 33 Football Classic, an all-star football game (nicknamed the Super Bowl of High School Football), featuring the state’s top high-school football players, that has been contested since 1957. Gregg Cook, sports marketing manager for Visit Hershey & Harrisburg, reports that his organization is (CONTINUED ON PAGE 66)

Photo courtesy of Hershey Harrisburg Sports



pursuing more lacrosse events, including with the National Scholastic Club Lacrosse Association's National Cup, which it is hosting in June for the second straight year, and Hogan's Hershey lacrosse tournament, back for its seventh go-round in July.

"We get more than 200 teams at this point, and if we can get enough fields, that number can get to 300," says Cook. "We've seen lacrosse growing north from Baltimore and west from Philly, and both waves are hitting us. We're a 'do it all' destination — we don't really focus on any one thing. But we're a three-hour drive for 25 million people and we're able to handle pretty much everything that comes down the pike."

Discover Lehigh Valley Sports sees no sign of a slowdown in the lacrosse phenomenon, with every indication being that lacrosse will continue to be one of the industry's fastest-growing sports nationally as more athletes, both girls and boys, are introduced to the sport at a young age, similar to the growth of soccer in years past. In six weeks through June 28, 2015, the Lehigh Valley hosted six lacrosse tournaments comprising 750 teams and more than 17,900 lacrosse players, plus their families. Four of the six tournaments were hosted at Lehigh University.

"We're very fortunate in that our location in the Mid-Atlantic region is a big reason for our success in hosting multiple lacrosse events every year," says Michael Kusmuk, director of sports travel marketing with Discover Lehigh Valley Sports. "We've actually had to turn away a few well-respected lacrosse organizers be-

cause of the huge demand. Our strategic reach can put us in touch with millions of families whose children participate in a wide variety of different sports activities and competitions. As it relates to sports travel tourism, lacrosse and soccer are our biggest generators of economic impact for the community. Without the support of our community, the impact would be significantly diminished."

Virginia

Virginia Beach is blessed with natural beauty that doubles as a natural playing surface, which makes it the perfect place to take advantage of a national trend. "We're finding that many traditional sports are looking for new opportunities for their athletes to compete in, and so



they're starting beach events or beach divisions of traditional grass events," says Nancy Helman, director of sports marketing for Visit Virginia Beach.

The community will host what Helman calls a "signature Virginia Beach event" in June, the North American Sand Soccer Championships, which will bring close to 1,000 teams to more than 60 "fields" marked out on the beachfront between 15th and 34th Streets. Men's, women's, children's, co-ed, adult, military and professional divisions will compete, with teams coming from around the world to play in the event. The event offers an excellent spectator experience as well, and visitors are welcome.

Virginia Beach has also hosted the USA Ultimate Beach Championship for two years running. "The sand soccer group has done a great job of holding expo sports like beach wrestling, lacrosse and field hockey, to really give that feel of a beach sports festival," Helman says. "It's quite the happening." **SDM**



Photo courtesy of Virginia Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau