

VIRGINIA BUSINESS

Industries › **Hotels/Tourism**

Transformative properties?

New and updated resorts will give Virginia more convention settings in 2017

December 30, 2016 |      Like 4

[Print this page](#)

by Elizabeth Cooper



*The \$1.4 billion MGM National Harbor opened in December in Prince George's County, Md.
Robb Scharetz/ MGM National Harbor*

The new year will be a big one for Virginia's hospitality industry in terms of openings. December saw the much-awaited debut of MGM National Harbor, a \$1.4 billion casino and resort in Prince George's County, Md., across the Potomac River from Alexandria. Two more properties, The Main in downtown Norfolk and a restored Cavalier on the Hill in Virginia Beach, will open in the spring. All three properties promise the latest in

amenities and luxury, and travelers and convention planners are checking them out and making reservations.

From huge swirling fountains to a trio of 60-foot-tall stainless steel sculptures, there is a grandness of scale and Las Vegas glitz at MGM Resort International's first East Coast property. Yet MGM National Harbor also plays on its proximity to the nation's capital with plenty of outside terraces with panoramic views of the Potomac and the city skyline.

The 308-room resort rises 24 stories above the mixed-use National Harbor development. Room rates are adjustable, based on time of stay and type of room. During the holiday season one room ranged from \$299 a night right before Christmas to \$1,599 on New Year's Eve.

Guests staying at the resort are within walking distance of its spa, dining and entertainment venues, upscale shops and a 125,000-square-foot casino with 3,300 slot machines and more than 100 gaming tables. "We're confident the MGM National Harbor experience will resonate with guests from all over the globe," says General Manager Bill Boasberg. "Our intent is to grow domestic and international visitation to National Harbor, Prince George's County and across the region."

The resort's entertainment options include a 3,000-seat theater. Duran Duran was scheduled to play on New Year's Eve, and Cher is booked to perform in March. "The venue is intimate and will allow guests to see some of the industry's top artists up close and personal rather than in a large-scale arena," Boasberg says.

MGM National Harbor also touts its restaurants, some of which are new to the region. There's a seafood restaurant led by celebrity chef José Andrés, a sports bar, a pan-Asian eatery and a market offering 10 food venues ranging from Vietnamese sandwiches to Southern fried chicken. Epicureans can top off their meals with a visit to the resort's European-inspired pastry shop, Bellagio Patisserie, showcased by a 12-foot chocolate fountain.

The resort's conference center offers 50,000 square feet of meeting space, including a 16,200-square-foot grand ballroom and a 6,000-square-foot outdoor terrace.

The Main

Meanwhile, downtown Norfolk is preparing for an influx of new convention business with the anticipated March opening of a 21-story hotel and convention center, The Main. Bearing the Hilton brand, the 300-room hotel will offer 42,000 square feet of high-tech meeting space as well as an 18,382-square-foot ballroom, touted as the largest hotel ballroom in Virginia.

Other selling points include 11 luxury suites and two presidential suites — with views of the Elizabeth River and downtown Norfolk — a fitness facility, indoor pool and three full-service restaurants. They include Grain, a rooftop beer garden, and the Fruitive, which will offer a vegan menu. The hotel's public spaces will be tied together by a 100-foot-tall ground-floor glass atrium known as Grand Central Station.

The Main represents Virginia Beach developer Bruce Thompson's first venture in Norfolk. The CEO of Gold Key|PHR persuaded the city to invest \$86.6 million in the \$150 million development, which is expected to generate an estimated \$2 million in annual city tax revenues while creating 100 jobs. The city of Norfolk owns The Exchange, the hotel's conference center.

About 100 groups have reserved space at The Main between April and 2020, including nearly 70 traveling to Norfolk for the first time. "Combined, that's over 22,000 individual room nights," says Michael Woodhead, Gold Key's vice president of marketing. "What we are offering for the large-scale corporate meeting planner is something you can't get anywhere else in the state."

By attracting large groups, he adds, The Main will help fill rooms at nearby hotels, including Norfolk's Waterside Marriott and the Sheraton. "It stands to reason that if we have more meeting space than guest rooms to accommodate, we are going to overflow into the surrounding hotels. It's going to have a transformative impact on occupancy rate growth in downtown Norfolk."

Cavalier on the Hill

At its other property, Gold Key is melding history with modern amenities in

restoring Virginia Beach's Cavalier on the Hill. Built in 1927, the hotel is undergoing a \$75 million renovation that Woodhead describes as a renaissance. "We're taking a historic hotel and preserving what's special and magical about it and marrying that concept with the contemporary amenities the 21st century traveler expects," says Woodhead.

On tap to reopen this spring, the Cavalier will be a five-star member of Marriott's Autograph Collection, the first in Hampton Roads. New design elements, combined with décor reminiscent of the early 20th century, include saltwater swimming pools, enlarged guest rooms, a farm-to-table restaurant, and an onsite vodka and bourbon distillery.

The grand dame of the resort city, the Cavalier has hosted 10 U.S. presidents, as well as numerous celebrities. Gold Key is playing up that history by inviting couples that married or honeymooned at the hotel to submit their love stories. Eighty-five couples will be chosen for an all-inclusive stay during the Cavalier's grand reopening, including a vow renewal ceremony and champagne brunch.

Link to Article: <http://www.virginiabusiness.com/news/article/transformative-properties>