

The Gates Hotel to Bring Back 1920s-Era Key West



Lobby at The Gates Hotel

Long before tourism, Key West, Fla., thrived from cigar trade, followed by bootlegging in the prohibition era—both of which made the city the largest and wealthiest in Florida at the time. It's this 1920s-era Key West that the 245-room [Gates Hotel](#) will bring back for meeting planners and their groups when it opens in April.

The hotel does this through its artisan partnerships selected to help build the bygone experience at the property, says Stephanie Happ, complex director of sales and marketing for the hotel. These important aspects of the island are integrated into the hotel via the Rodriguez Cigar Lounge and prohibition-themed bar, Rum Row, serving exclusive rum from Key West's First Legal Rum Distillery.

"We also promote our eccentric and artistic community by featuring local artists throughout the property," says Happ. "Our lobby and guest rooms feature stunning photography of the Florida Keys by Jorge de la Torriente. Our beds are dressed with hand-painted bed runners by local artist Noelle Rose."

While the hotel design evokes something out of an Ernest Hemingway novel, its teambuilding activities are equally authentic. For instance, the hotel offers cigar-rolling classes for groups up to 20 people. Attendees will get to learn how to roll cigars similar to the ones offered in the hotel's Rodriguez Cigar Lounge. These cigars are hand-rolled at the Rodriguez Cigar Factory, the oldest operating cigar manufacturer in the Florida Keys.

The hotel's Rum Row bar also features a food truck called the Blind Pig—another nod to prohibition establishments in the early 19th century. The onsite food truck features tapas inspired by Cuban, Bahamian, Caribbean and Floridian cultures, which is a signature Key West cuisine dubbed "Conch fusion." Smaller groups can take cooking classes in the food truck to learn more about the traditional cuisine.

Artsier groups will enjoy the painting classes and vintage screen printing classes offered at the hotel. Meeting planners can also work with the hotel to organize scavenger hunts around the island, which will take groups to a variety of historic sites such as the Hemingway House.

"These types of class are beneficial to teams, allowing them to have fun and work together," says Happ. "Tapping into the creative side of people allows them to express themselves differently than they may in the workplace. Often commonalities are found amongst co-workers that were unknown before, and that can support better relationships and more productivity."