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INFLUENCERS ► ECONOMY ► INNOVATION ► GLOBAL IMPACT ► REVITALIZATION

BIGGER AND BETTER

How population growth and visitor appeal are driving investments across the Greater Houston area

Downtown Houston

Already the nation's most diverse major metro, Houston is also the fastest-growing, adding more than 740,000 people since 2010. Its bedroom communities are expanding, its cities are on the up, and—as in cities across the nation—downtown Houston is seeing an influx of residents at an unprecedented rate.

This downtown population increase has been accompanied by enormous investment in its buildings, parks and infrastructure. Since the mid-1990s, more than \$6 billion of projects have contributed to downtown's renewal, including new stadiums for the Rockets and Astros, and an expansion of the George R. Brown Convention Center. A light rail system extending through and beyond downtown was opened in 2004 and extended several times since.

Beyond this, downtown has also witnessed a renaissance in its lifestyle and visitor attractions, including the Discovery Green and Market Square urban parks, which have helped drive growth in the east and north, respectively. Add to that seven new hotel high-rises, and it's clear to see there are plenty of new arrows in the tourism industry's quiver.

"This past month, I've eaten in four new restaurants that didn't even exist a year ago," says Mike Waterman, president of the Greater Houston CVB. "The pace of development and new infrastructure improvements, whether it's restaurants or hotels or venues to accommodate visitors, is astronomical."

Many of these amenities are arriving just in time, as the city prepares for one of the most important days in the U.S. sporting calendar, Super Bowl LI, which will be hosted here on 5 February, 2017.

"The Super Bowl is a marquee event with media exposure that allows us to showcase these assets to the rest of the world," says Sallie Sargent, president and CEO of the Houston Super Bowl Host Committee. "It then takes on this ripple effect that you can go back to and identify in other host cities, when your conventions increase as a result and your tourism increases as a result."

All told, more than \$3 billion of projects are still under construction downtown, around a third of which are residential developments, as the city continues to blaze its own path as an exciting destination to live, work and play.

"We don't have San Francisco Bay to look out at, or Sydney Harbor; we don't have some of those natural attributes,"

says Bob Harvey, president and CEO of the Greater Houston Partnership. "But we can make this a very high quality of life, fun city by the things we create and nurture, and we can create an opportunity city that says everyone has the economic means of accessing what the city has to offer."

Galveston Island

Head south along I-45 from Houston, and you'll soon find yourself on Galveston Island, a barrier island on the Texas coast that in the late 1800s was known as the 'playground of the south'.

The grandeur that made it popular then is still evident in one of the nation's largest concentrations of well-preserved Victorian architecture, which complement 32 miles of beaches and a host of modern attractions, many of which were established as the island recovered from the impact of Hurricane Ike, in September 2008.

HOUSTON WAS RANKED AMONG THE TOP PLACES TO VISIT IN 2015 BY THE *BOSTON GLOBE*, *TRAVEL + LEISURE* AND *CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER*.

IN 2016, *VALUEPENGUIN.COM* RANKED HOUSTON SECOND ON ITS LIST OF BEST CITIES TO RAISE A YOUNG FAMILY.

For a community where the visitor industry supports close to a third of all jobs, the storm could have proven catastrophic, but instead tourism surpassed pre-Ike levels as soon as 2011. At the heart of this was a decision to not just repair what was damaged but build Galveston better than ever before.

The beaches were quickly restored and more than \$125 million were invested in new attractions—a movement that continued in the years that followed. Landry's \$60-million construction of the Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier provided the island with another iconic destination when it opened in 2012, and even more recently, the Bryan Museum launched in 2015 with the world's largest collection of Southwestern artifacts.

"The past five years have just transformed the island," says Meg Winchester, director of the Galveston Island CVB. "The city has really put a lot more focus on infrastructure and really started to enhance areas that needed it. And from a tourism standpoint, we just keep growing year after year."

The Woodlands

Established in 1974, The Woodlands is a 28,000-acre master planned community some 28 miles north of Houston. Though it made its name as a desirable residential environment, the plan always was for it to some day encompass so much more, and now it also boasts a true downtown, retail and numerous entertainment venues. Meanwhile, a

large corporate community provides the bulk of the 63,000 jobs that The Woodlands now supports.

With that diversification has come tremendous growth. Its population is around double the 55,649 recorded at the 2000 census, while more people now enter The Woodlands on a daily basis than leave to work. And with another 10,000 residents expected to move in before the end of the decade, the onus is on making sure the infrastructure required is in place.

"We know that growth is coming and we need to be careful and to be able to manage that growth," says CEO of The Woodlands CVB, Nick Wolda. "That's what the Woodlands has been about since the start, and what it will need to be about going into the future."

This growth has also driven its appeal as a visitor destination—as a location for business events, but also increasingly for leisure travel. For evidence, look no further than the response of The Howard Hughes Corporation, which has opened two new hotels here in recent years, while completing a \$75-million renovation of The Woodlands Resort and Conference Center.

"With the growth of The Woodlands, and the growth of the Greater Houston area, we saw an opportunity to get more into the resort destination business," says general manager Greg Parsons. "By adding some amenities to the property we really have become a drive-in, regional destination for family travel and staycations."

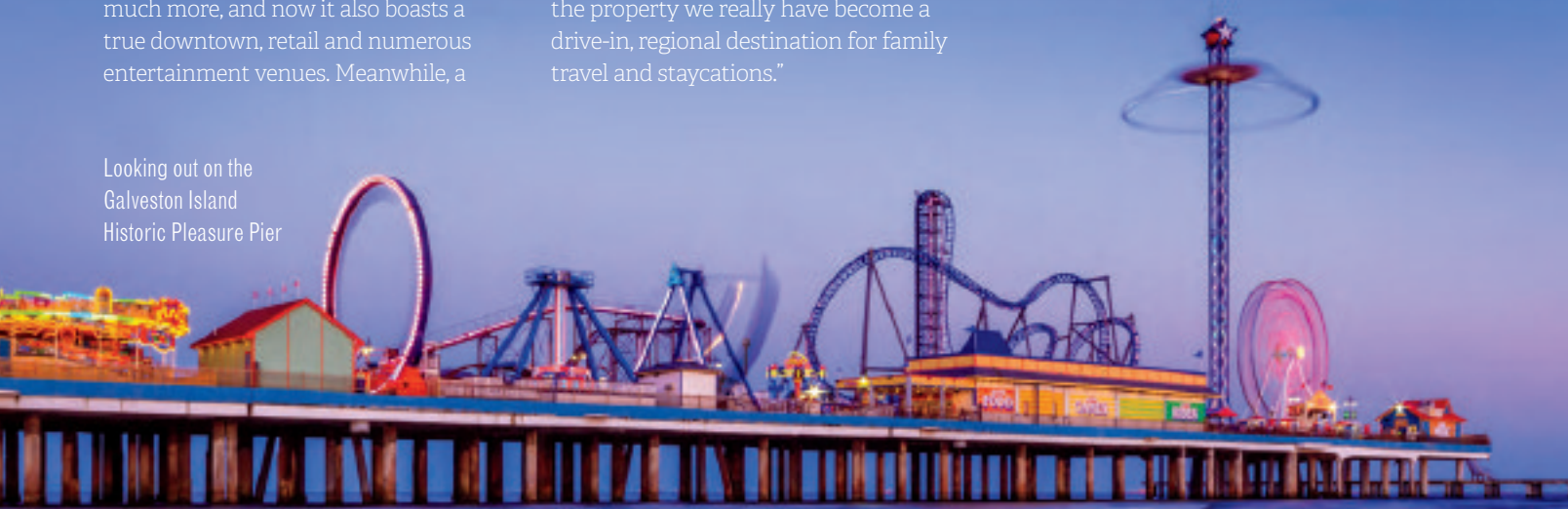
TAKING FLIGHT

According to its most recent economic impact study, the Houston Airport System is directly responsible for 230,000 jobs in the region, and contributes more than \$275 billion to the local economy each year. That's only set to rise as it builds upon the 55 million passengers that passed through its facilities in 2015, and the system is responding in kind with a host of infrastructure investments to support future growth.

For example, at George Bush Intercontinental Airport, the system has rebuilt Terminal B South, with construction underway on a new \$244-million Terminal C North concourse. A new international terminal is the next major project on the horizon, all complemented by a revamped concessions program.

"In five years, you won't recognize Intercontinental," says director of aviation Mario Diaz. "It will be so different, not only with respect to the physical aesthetics of the airport, but with the customer service, the products and the relationship that you will experience as a passenger that we expect will be second to none."

Looking out on the
Galveston Island
Historic Pleasure Pier



GALVESTON IS HOME TO THE THIRD-LARGEST MARDI GRAS CELEBRATION IN THE COUNTRY.

IN 2015, NERDWALLET NAMED THE WOODLANDS AS THE NUMBER-ONE PLACE TO LIVE IN TEXAS.

OUT OF OFFICE

From lively downtowns to relaxing resorts and one-of-a-kind cultural attractions, Greater Houston's a place to play as well as work

FACTFILE

ANNUAL VISITORS: 17.5 million (2015)
VISITOR SPENDING: \$17.2 billion (2014)
EMPLOYMENT: 135,000
TAX REVENUE: \$1.4 billion



The Woodlands

The forested surrounds of The Woodlands offer a respite from the bustle of Houston—but that doesn't mean there isn't plenty to do. Explore more than 11 million square feet of shopping space, and enjoy world-class arts performances at the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion.

Sports

Even if you can't get tickets to Super Bowl LI, there's still plenty of top-notch action happening in the city throughout the year. Whether it's J. J. Watt's Texans, the Astros, the Rockets, or world-class golf, Houston has emerged as one of America's premier destinations for professional sports.



Space Center Houston

More than 400 artifacts introduce guests to the wonders of space exploration at Houston's number-one attraction for international travelers. Since opening in 1992, more than 18 million people have visited.



Sugar Land

West of Houston, the city of Sugar Land offers lots for visitors to see and do. Stop by Constellation Field for a Skeeters baseball game, browse the shops at First Colony Mall and get up close with a T. Rex at the Houston Museum of Natural Science at Sugar Land.



Galveston Island Pleasure Pier

Galveston Island continues to draw visitors with a variety of new attractions. Case in point: the Galveston Island Pleasure Pier opened in 2012 with thrilling rides, fantastic restaurants and eclectic shopping, while jutting out 1,130 feet into the beautiful Gulf of Mexico.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VISIT HOUSTON, HOUSTON MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCE

IN 2014, HOUSTON HOSTED 364 CONVENTIONS, EVENTS AND SHOWS, TRANSLATING INTO AN ECONOMIC IMPACT OF \$485M.

AT MORE THAN 81 FEET, GALVESTON ISLAND'S SCHLITTERBAHN WATERPARK IS HOME TO THE TALLEST WATER COASTER IN THE WORLD.