

Houston hoteliers optimistic about Super Bowl demand

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This year's Super Bowl is giving hoteliers in the Houston market a boost in confidence that the city might see stronger performance after the big game.



(Photo illustration: Annamarie Hudson)

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HOUSTON—In a market hit as hard as Houston by the low demand for oil and gas production, hoteliers in the area have high hopes Super Bowl LI will bring about a turnaround.

To gauge Houston hoteliers' expectations of demand during and after the Super Bowl, Hotel News Now reached out to operators in the market with a couple of questions to learn their predictions.



Josh Decker, dual GM of the Hampton Inn Houston Downtown and Homewood Suites Houston Downtown



Sal Khatri, GM of The Whitehall in Houston



Scott Austin, regional VP, GM of the Embassy Suites Houston - Downtown



Sergio Cardenas, corporate director of sales and marketing, Presidiana Hotels

1 What are your expectations for your property during and following the Super Bowl?

Josh Decker, dual GM of the Hampton Inn Houston Downtown/Homewood Suites Houston Downtown:

"Our hotel was part of the official NFL block prior to groundbreaking, so needless to say we had the Super Bowl on our mind for quite some time. We are sold out for Super Bowl weekend and both flags of our dual-brand property, Hampton Inn and Homewood Suites, are near sellouts for the days leading up to the event. As a new hotel to the market, we consider this a great opportunity to continue the momentum the game will create in the following months."

Sal Khatri, GM of The Whitehall in Houston: "We have increased security and additional staffing in outlets and extending outlet hours, and we are hosting a special watch party at our new outdoor venue and live music every day. We are also hosting a great welcome reception on the day of the arrival. Staff has attended numerous Super Bowl meetings hosted by the city and the Super Bowl committee, so that everyone is up to date and knowledgeable about all of the Super Bowl events, traffic conditions and extended transportation options to Galleria Mall and downtown restaurants made available for all of our guests."

Scott Austin, regional VP, GM of the Embassy Suites Houston - Downtown: "This is without a doubt our city's and our hotel's best opportunity to shine. In 2004, we did not have Discovery Green next door and surrounding areas including our location were parking lots. This week, we are at the core of Super Bowl Live, and anyone who hasn't been to our area in a while will experience a dramatically different experience. We have improved our hotel infrastructure in preparation of the event including upgrading internet and cell capabilities which are long-term benefits for our guests. With nearly all properties downtown and in surrounding hotels sold out, we are prepared to welcome and assist our guests in discovering what we all have to offer. Our restaurant Hearsay on the Green has spent weeks preparing for massive crowds and the benefits of having all of the activities in a centralized area. It will be 10 consecutive days of events where we are prepared for nearly a million fans to pass by and through our doors with a news outlet broadcasting from our roofscape pool. This is a time when all of us will wake up excited to be a part of it."

"Following the Super Bowl, we will jump right into a very strong convention calendar. Much like other major events we've hosted including the Final Four last April, we return back to normal very quickly. We definitely expect that the newly renovated George R. Brown Convention Center and Avenida Houston will only further our reach as a premier destination."

Sergio Cardenas, corporate director of sales and marketing at Presidiana Hotels: "(The Hilton Garden Inn Sugar Land*) is expected to be sold out during Super Bowl weekend. We look forward to providing those attending the event with a 'place to call home' while they are enjoying the festivities before, during and after the big game."

2 Do you believe the Super Bowl will have lasting benefits for the market? Why/Why not?

Decker: "I believe the Super Bowl will be a starting point to highlight Houston downtown as a destination. Certainly an event like this highlights the market to larger conventions. When they see how exciting the downtown experience is with activations like NFL Live and the NFL experience, combined with our nationally recognized culinary scene, it puts Houston front-and-center. The Hampton Inn and Homewood Suites Houston Downtown is preparing to welcome these attendees, as we have developed a hotel package that will be highly competitive for many of the larger conventions in the country."

Khatri: "The city is in a much better position to host these large events today, as compared to even when we last hosted the Super Bowl in 2004. Downtown has undergone a complete transformation with the new Avenida de las Americas, the expansion of the light rail system and overall convention hotel package in downtown has tripled since we last hosted the Super Bowl. I think visitors will take notice of all the great improvements the city has made to welcome visitors. It is definitely an exciting time in our great city and at our hotel—we are really happy to be a part of it."

Austin: "We have seen projected occupancies of up to 95% over Super Bowl weekend in Houston with many hotels able to sell remaining inventory at posted maximum rates. The downtown hotels have been sold out for months during the peak nights leading up to the big game with potential to more than triple prior year performance."

"The changes that have occurred leading up to Super Bowl over the past several years include Avenida Houston, improvements throughout downtown and airport corridors, and at the George R. Brown Convention Center, which will create impact far beyond the Super Bowl. We are known for doing things big down here in Texas, and the changes in Houston are big. This is our chance to put the spotlight on us, a city of the future, where the visitor experience at the Super Bowl will definitely bring them back."

Cardenas: "Yes, I believe the positive exposure from the Super Bowl will enhance the image of the city, and position Houston as a top-of-mind destination for leisure travelers this spring/summer, as well as group, sporting or special event planners. Each of these groups is important as the city works to maintain positive momentum in the efforts to ramp-up economic activity in areas outside of the energy sector."

**Correction, 30 January 2017: An earlier version of this story misidentified the name of the Houston hotel associated with Sergio Cardenas, corporate director of marketing and sales at Presidian Hotels. HNN received incorrect information.*