

BIG BOOKINGS SOUGHT VIA GLOBAL TRAVEL TRADE SHOW

6,000 Destination Decision Makers Descend on OC

By Katie Murar

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The first week of June in Anaheim will see the results of a project long in the works by local hospitality groups and hotels: a five-day gathering at Anaheim Convention Center to showcase Orange County to 6,200 attendees, global decision makers who help guide where millions of travelers go.

IPW—formerly International Pow Wow—is a travel trade show facilitating bookings of all things tourism, and OC's time to shine, with an expanded convention center, new luxe hotels on the way, and the official opening of Disneyland Resort's biggest expansion ever, Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge on May 31 (see story, page 1).

Expect many attendees inside county borders by that day—also the official centenary of the Hilton brand, which has its name on OC's largest hotel by room count and adjacent to the convention center, Hilton Anaheim.

Travel buyers and sellers from all over the world will look to put corporate and leisure business on the books via direct interaction with each other at the event, an appointment-based show now in its 51st year.

Destination marketing organizations including event host Visit Anaheim make up a major portion of the 1,300 exhibitors seeking to nab tour, hotel and event bookings several years into the future, while tour packagers, trade organizations, incentive groups and others are scoping out new offerings and markets.

OC's role as the site for all this gives a marketing advantage—a live look at the high points versus a brochure or video stream in a booth—and buttresses several years' work by local destination marketers and OC's largest hotels (see story and list, beginning next page) to put higher spending, longer staying heads in beds.

Open House

Think of it as an open house for Orange County.

"So much has changed," said Charles Harris, Visit Anaheim senior vice president of marketing. "There's been tons of development in the area since we last hosted the event" 12 years ago.

"We're all looking forward to showing off what Anaheim has to offer."

IPW is June 1 to 5. Organizer U.S. Travel—a destination marketing organization and trade group for the country—says it produces \$4.7 billion in future travel to the United States; local tourism and hospitality executives believe OC can capture about 10% of that total and bring 1 million more travelers to the county in the next three years.

As with the show, many will fly in to John Wayne Airport; stay at Hilton Anaheim and Anaheim Marriott near the convention center, the coastal resorts, or a growing number of hotels in Irvine; and visit attractions, including the newest Disney offering.

And that's the idea.

Speed Dating

A second idea is a laser focus on buyers and sellers actually meeting and talking about where events go next.

Buyers—tour operators, wholesalers, trade groups planning events—meet with sellers—cities, venues, attractions—in pre-scheduled 20-minute appointment blocks.

A growing element of the speed dating environment involves foreign affairs.

International attendance this year is up 7% over last year's shindig in Denver, according to U.S. Travel. Seventy countries are sending people to the show, with the most coming from United Kingdom, China and Japan.

Japan's contingent tops 100 "a huge increase," said Malcolm Smith, senior vice president of business development for U.S. Travel. "We haven't seen that" in years.

He said international travelers average about four times the spending of domestic tourists.

Disney Debut

Because other destinations showcase their wares at meetings, having the event here keeps OC front and center, organizers said. The new Star Wars land attraction across the street doesn't hurt.

Disneyland Resort will host a kick-off event for IPW including exclusive access for conference attendees.

The June show comes to town "during one of the most incredible times in Disneyland history," Resort President Josh D'Amaro said in a promotional video for the event.

Knott's Berry Farm is tapped for closing festivities.

On the convention center campus, Visit California, the state's destination marketer, plans "a courtyard with happy hours, fitness classes and games," Smith said.

In-between are festivities at coastal OC properties, with Anaheim taking center stage on site visits to newer projects in the Platinum Triangle and elsewhere, as well as the four-diamond-level hotels in the works: a JW Marriott near the GardenWalk restaurant and retail center and Westin Anaheim Resort, next to the convention center; both are in full-construction mode to bring more than 1,000 luxe rooms combined to the city.

About 500 members of the media will also attend, pushing the marketing message beyond OC's borders, organizers said.