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Pow Wow could be the most valuable group that S.F. could host, says Joe D'Alessandro.

Tourism trade gathering timed just right for S.F.

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San Francisco Pow Wow will pack a punch.

The industry trade show that sells America to international tour operators and press will be held at Moscone Center on May 21 to 25. The United States Travel Association said that International Pow Wow registrations are 40 percent ahead of where they were at this time last year, when Pow Wow was held in Orlando, Fla. Pow Wow in San Francisco could be the first International Pow Wow to sell out in a few years.

Joe D'Alessandro, CEO of San Francisco Travel Association, has said that International Pow Wow could be the most valuable group event for San Francisco to host. While the show itself is small by San Francisco standards — only about 5,000 people — they are people who have outsized impact on the hospitality industry.

A traveling travel show

Indeed, the U.S. Travel Association, which hosts International Pow Wow in a different U.S. city each year, has said that the five days of meetings, parties and negotiations result in \$3.5 billion in future travel to the United States.

Host cities tend to draw a greater economic piece of that than other regions by virtue of having the home field advantage.

Local sponsors are lining up to take part and to play host. Platinum sponsors include San Francisco International Airport, the California Academy of Sciences, Alcatraz Cruises, Pier 39, Hornblower Cruises, the de Young Museum, CityPASS and others.

Scores of others, a Who's Who of San Francisco's hospitality industry, have signed on as lower-level sponsors.

All understand that San Francisco is expected to reap \$350 million in additional economic impact over the next three years thanks to Pow Wow.

San Francisco is lucky in the timing of this Pow Wow, since the operators who come are putting together travel programs for 2012 and 2013, when the world economy is expected to be stronger. Too, there's the America's Cup, which is one more international event that San Francisco Travel is using to sell the city. That will peak with yacht racing in the summer and fall of 2013.

Hospitality is San Francisco's largest

Timing is key

The event hasn't been in San Francisco since 1992, so international delegates are excited to come to the West Coast after two consecutive years in Florida. Then there's the improving economy, which is expected to spur higher international travel and spending. Pow Wow attendees are not booking trips for 2011 but for 2012 and beyond, when San Francisco hotel rates are seen reclaiming their 2008 highs.

And there is the America's Cup, as international a sporting event as there could be. Indeed, the city may feature the actual America's Cup trophy at some Pow Wow parties, D'Alessandro said, to drum up enthusiasm and special trips centered on America's Cup events.

Pow Wow plans will be complete later this month, and the Travel Association is looking for 500 volunteers.

Pow Wow 2012 will be in Los Angeles. Being close by is expected help San Francisco reinforce and capitalize on all the work going into Pow Wow this year.

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industry, and over 25 percent of visitors here come from abroad.

Of course, there's no such thing as a free lunch, and Pow Wow does not come cheap.

The total price tag for everything other than the actual U.S. Travel Association event inside Moscone Center — the nightly parties, daily transportation around the city and more — is \$5 million. D'Alessandro said San Francisco Travel is close to meeting its fundraising goals, and \$1.8 million of the total bill was raised by the Tourism Improvement District.

Indeed, one goal of the TID was to create a revenue stream to fund regular travel industry events. Pow Wow is the first of those. Under the TID, San Francisco hotels near tourist areas add a 1.5 percent tax to every hotel stay and hotels farther from attractions add 1 percent to the bill. Those funds go to market San Francisco, put on industry events, repair Moscone Center and otherwise make San Francisco a more desirable destination.

"If we didn't have the TID money, we wouldn't be able to do this because we don't have a Disney Corp. or Universal Studios or Las Vegas casinos to write these big checks" to pay for Pow Wow, D'Alessandro said.