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From the story below: *The Manchester Grand Hyatt, the second-largest hotel in the Hyatt chain, has a similar promotion called "Great Meetings Happen in Sunny San Diego," in which it is offering corporate customers a 10 percent discount.*

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S.D. pushed as meeting, convention destination

Visitors bureau launches campaign

BY LORI WEISBERG, UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER Tuesday, January 26, 2010 at 12:02 a.m. Hoping to inject some much-needed revenue into the ailing tourism industry, the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau has launched an aggressive campaign to attract more meetings and convention business.

Hoteliers and other members of the tourism industry plan to reach out to local corporations and business leaders to encourage them to hold group meetings here rather than travel out of town. And if any of them serve on boards of associations, they are urged to promote San Diego County as a meeting destination for those groups.

At stake are hundreds of millions of dollars in visitor spending that have evaporated as the economy worsened in the past year.

While the county has clearly felt the effects of a sharp drop in leisure travel, the biggest impact has come from cutbacks in business travel, especially for group meetings and conventions. Revenue per hotel room related to convention business fell nearly 27 percent through November compared with a year earlier, while room revenue stemming from leisure visits dropped 18 percent, according to the bureau.

The decline in meetings business translated to a loss in direct visitor spending of \$623 million, the bureau reported.

"We've struggled as everyone else has, but we rely on group meetings in San Diego more than other destinations," said Joe Terzi, president of the Convention & Visitors Bureau.

He noted that in focus groups, people have said that hotel rooms are harder to come by in San Diego and that they're pricier than those in other locales.

"We're hoping to reach meeting planners who might not have been able to afford us in the past and let them know we're more affordable than we were," Terzi added.

Dubbed "Keep It in San Diego," the \$25,000 initiative will include print advertising, direct mail, online marketing and public relations outreach. It is paired with a \$275,000 "Have It All Meetings" promotion that offers groups a 10.5 percent discount on hotel rooms and food and beverage costs if they book by the end of the year and hold their meetings by March 31, 2011. The discount applies only to new business booked through the Convention & Visitors Bureau.

A flier boasts, "San Diego is affordable, available and we're ready to help." All of the county's 130 conference and convention hotels are participating in the campaign.

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The message from the visitor industry is that it's willing to negotiate in order to nab more business in what is already a very competitive environment for large conventions, as well as small group meetings. The campaign has caught the attention of San Diego-based Petco, which organizes about 50 meetings a year.

"About a third of our meetings are held in San Diego, but the incentives would help us hold more in San Diego," said Lisa Hurst, Petco's director of meeting management. "I do think there is a perception that San Diego is more expensive. Obviously, San Diego, with its sunshine, is a draw, but there is an expense to hold a meeting in San Diego. The incentives should make it a more positively received city."

Kerrie Smith, event marketing coordinator for the American Council on Exercise, also based in San Diego, agreed. Her nonprofit moved its yearly fitness symposium from Las Vegas to San Diego last year, and it will return this year.

"I spoke with 10 different hotels and we wanted to stick to our same price point in Vegas, and every single one of them was willing to work with us," Smith said. "We'd like to keep the event here in San Diego. It's a really good location, the weather is a motivating factor, and prices are extremely competitive with other places."

<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2010/jan/26/sd-pushed-as-meeting-convention-destination/>