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County Tourism Organizations Unite to Support CowParade SLO

Art and charity event expected to draw 200,000+ visitors from the U.S. and around the world

SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA – CowParade SLO County is unifying the county’s many tourism agencies for the first time ever, with representatives working together to promote what will become the county’s largest public art display.

Since the initial CowParade was launched in Chicago in 1999, CowParade Holdings Corp., which owns the brand, has featured the event in 79 cities worldwide, including metropolitan destinations such as Tokyo, Paris, New York City and London. Now San Luis Obispo County has been selected to join the herd.

From Nipomo to San Luis Obispo, Cambria to Atascadero, Pismo Beach, San Simeon, Los Osos/Baywood, Cayucos and Morro Bay, CowParade SLO will feature 101 (as in Highway 101) life-sized cows, painted, decorated or sculpted by sponsored artists. The hefty herd will be unveiled to the public in the meadow outside the Madonna Inn September 17th before the colorful cows are dispersed at high-profile locations across the county, where they will “graze” in style for seven months. Organizers anticipate more than 200,000 tourists and locals will view and take selfies with the beautiful bovines during the exhibition, which will run through April, 2017. The largest public art exhibition ever in SLO County will benefit The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County, ARTS Obispo, California Mid-State Fair Heritage Foundation and selected sponsor charities.

“For San Luis Obispo County to be the first U.S. regional destination to be selected to hold such a well-known international event of this size is a great testament to the quality of our area,” said Molly Cano, tourism manager for the City of San Luis Obispo.

Amanda Diefenderfer, with Visit Atascadero, said San Luis Obispo County is uniquely qualified to host CowParade.

“With roots in agriculture and appreciation for arts and culture, hearing that CowParade was coming seemed like a natural fit in multiple areas that our community is so passionate about,” she said.

Because of its wide appeal, tourist organizations county-wide have stepped up to support the campaign.

Brent Haugen, executive director of the Morro Bay Tourism Bureau, said he expects CowParade enthusiasts to visit multiple locations in the county.

“I think it will be a great outlet for artists and art lovers to get out and explore the area,” Haugen said, noting that those guests will do their part to promote the communities, as they typically do in Morro Bay. “I see a lot of visitor selfies happening and posted on social media.”

While locals are expected to enjoy the cows in their backyard, tourism organizations hope the event will also encourage tourists to extend their visits, eating at local restaurants and staying at local hotels.

“Our hope is that it drives overnight stays and folks stay longer in order to see our entire county-wide herd,” said Cheryl Cuming, chief administrative officer of Highway 1 Discovery Route, which promotes tourism in the unincorporated areas of the county.

While CowParade SLO spans the entire county, each community is distinct, allowing artists to tailor designs to each city or town’s unique character.

“Pismo Beach Conference and Visitors Bureau is working with local artists to design two cows that match our brands of Classic California, Wine and Waves and Monarch Butterflies,” said Gordon Jackson, Executive Director of the bureau.

Visit San Luis Obispo County has a plan for a special cow that will draw attention throughout the county – but that’s still a secret, said Chuck Davidson, president and CEO.

“We are in the planning phase of something really exciting that will create significant engagement for the event in the months to come,” he said.

Francine Errico, who recently relocated to San Luis Obispo, previously promoted a CowParade event in Australia, when she was the CEO of the Augusta Margaret River Tourism Association.

While Margaret River is a small community, the event was a notable success.

“I cannot think of another event which gives such wonderful creative exposure to businesses and their brand; showcases the length and depth of artistic talent of a region and beyond; pulls the community together to work for a common cause; increases tourism to a region over an extended length of time; raises money for local causes and charities and has such a remarkable sense of fun and frivolity,” Errico said.

Margaret River’s tourism to the region increased between 11 and 18 percent during the CowParade, she said, resulting in an economic benefit between \$22 million and 36 million. And their CowParade was four months shorter than San Luis Obispo County’s will be.

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