Aloha and Mahalo
By Kathy Oyadomari

On June 3, Outrigger employees gathered to bid aloha to Bob Finan, who retired after 20 years of dedicated service. Barry Wallace, Ruthann Yamanaka, and Dave Lee expressed their appreciation on behalf of Outrigger Hotels & Resorts for his hard work and contribution. Gifts of aloha and recognition were also presented.

Bob first started with Outrigger Services, Outrigger’s construction company. Most recently, he worked in Property Services and was involved in numerous renovation projects.

Bob shared that he plans to “take it easy, take time to smell the roses, and approach one day at a time.” He is planning a trip in July with his wife and two youngest grandchildren, to visit family in Guam. He also has a “honey-do” list of projects around the house that are waiting for him and hopes to get involved in volunteer work in the near future.

Bob expressed his gratitude for the Outrigger Lifetime Achievement award and shared how he was overwhelmed by the feedback he received about how much he impacted others. An event he says he will always remember during his career with Outrigger is the typhoon with 200 mph winds that hit Guam. Bob recalls the call for help from Guam and

Fix Hawai‘i’s Travel & Tourism Industry First
By Dr. Richard Kelley

Richard Lim, the new director of Hawai‘i’s Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT), claims that tourism in Hawai‘i has remained “stagnant” for the past 20 years and can no longer be counted upon to move our local economy into a prosperous future. He calls for the development of new industries in Hawai‘i to supplement, if not replace, tourism.

In response, Richard Borreca, columnist for the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, points out the importance of our Travel & Tourism industry and says “It’s Too Soon to Throw Isle Visitor Industry Under the Bus!”

We agree with Borreca. Tourism is still Hawai‘i’s “economic engine,” and there are many ways to strengthen its future. Rather than letting our No. 1 industry decline, it’s time to reinvigorate it. If we can improve our marketing efforts, keep the cost of a Hawai‘i vacation competitive, and provide a superior visitor experience, this industry – and the people of this state – will enjoy many more years of prosperity.

Yes, tourism in Hawai‘i is stagnant

Lim made some great points about our current situation. He is correct that our tourism industry has been stagnant for many years. After World War II, Hawai‘i enjoyed four decades of exponential growth in Travel & Tourism, but in the past two decades the number of visitors has hovered in the range of 6.5 million (1991) to 7.5 million (2006) arrivals a year.
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Happy Birthday!
June 25: Jing Yun Wu, Emmanuel V. Tapat, and Rui Mei Qiu.
June 26: Maricor M. Kiamco, Charlene T. Goo, and Renato C. Urubio.

Aloha Toasties!
By Heather Doeringer

Our Outrigger Toastmaster Club is a collage of humor, suspense, education, and emotion – we're kind of like our own Blockbuster, where you can get your fix on any genre of speech you can imagine. Every person brings a special and unique skill, which is the basis of our team – we learn from each other, we help each other, we laugh with each other (and sometimes laugh at each other), we cry together, but most of all, we support one another.

We are not a formal meeting group. We have fun! We tell jokes and funny stories! We meet new people! And most of all, we’re not just “members” of the Toastmasters group – we’re friends! It’s an amazing feeling to know you always have a bunch of friends you can rely on.

So, become a friend of the Outrigger Toastmaster Club! We're always open to having new friends join us for some fun. Take a chance – we invite you to sit back and enjoy a good story with us! Every other Wednesday in the OHANA Waikiki East Learning Center from 12 noon to 1 p.m! Email me for more info; I'd be delighted to host you – heather.doeringer@outrigger.com.

Employment Opportunities

If you are interested in the positions listed below and meet the qualifications, you may apply online. Please go to WWW.OUTRIGGER.COM, click on ABOUT OUTRIGGER, then EMPLOYMENT. We only accept online applications for the open-listed positions from internal candidates. If you have any questions, please call Chad Teramae at (808) 921-6989. Application deadline for the following positions is June 17, 2011.

General Maintenance (Full Time)
Must have two years experience with interior and exterior maintenance, including demonstrated ability to install, repair, service, inspect, and maintain FF&E facilities. Must also have experience with heating, cooling, plumbing, ventilation, water, electrical, and mechanical systems, and be flexible to work any day and shift.

Host/Hostess (On Call)
Responsible for greeting and escorting guests to their tables and coordinating the activities of the dining room and pool area personnel to provide fast and courteous service to guests. Must have a friendly, positive, service-oriented attitude, and be able to work any day and shift.

Happy Birthday!
June 25: Jing Yun Wu, Emmanuel V. Tapat, and Rui Mei Qiu.
June 26: Maricor M. Kiamco, Charlene T. Goo, and Renato C. Urubio.
Aloha and Mahalo

Continued from page 1

taking the first flight there out of Honolulu the next day with Dave Lee. Through teamwork, assistance, and support from the Outrigger ‘ohana, this major renovation project was accomplished.

Bob’s words of advice are to “be fair and equitable and to do unto others as you want others to do unto you.”

On June 3, Outrigger Reef employees gathered to bid aloha to James Lin, who retired after 22 years of dedicated service. Ruthann Yamanaka and Bill Comstock expressed their appreciation on behalf of Outrigger Hotels & Resorts for his hard work and contribution. Gifts of aloha and recognition were also presented.

James worked in Housekeeping at the Outrigger Reef from the beginning of his Outrigger career. Myra Kuboyama, Executive Housekeeper, thanked James for always being flexible with his schedule and considerate of others. She shared that James was a quiet, but “wise” person who gave constructive feedback. Myra also invited James to return to the annual “Flavors of the ORF” event, to do his famous calligraphy.

During his retirement, James will be very busy taking care of his youngest grandchildren. James currently has six granddaughters. He also will help his daughter with her flower shop. James wished everyone success at Outrigger and told everyone to be happy.

Some Housekeepers sang a beautiful Chinese song titled, “Friends Forever,” to James.

How many friends will we have forever in our life.
Today we are shaking hands and saying good-bye.
But, our friendship will remain in our heart.
We won’t see each other often.
But, we still will be friends.
No matter how far apart we may be.
Our friendship will never change.

Outrigger Hotels & Resorts is proud of Bob and James for their many years of dedication and service and wish both of them the very best in their retirement. Mahalo and a hui hou!

On June 11th of each year, we honor one of Hawai’i’s greatest ruling chiefs and prolific leaders, Kamehameha I. Kamehameha is most known for his achievement of uniting the Hawaiian Islands under a single rule. Prior to his conquests, each island, and sometimes parts of an island, were ruled by a different chief.

On June 11, 1877, Kapi‘olani Park was dedicated as the first Hawaiian public space. At 300 acres in size, Kapi‘olani Park is the largest and oldest public park in Hawai‘i located on the east end of Waikiki, and is named after Queen Kapi‘olani, the queen consort of King David Kalākaua.

In its early days, Kapi‘olani Park was the site of a one mile oval horse racing track. Complete with a grand stand and clubhouse, the race track was the focal point of social activity in Waikiki. Today, the park is a pleasant venue for a wide variety of sports, multicultural entertainment, and family events.

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In a raging battle on the island of O‘ahu, Kamehameha defeated chief King Kalanikūpule. The battle at Nu‘uanu, also known as Kaleleka‘anae, or “the leaping mullet”, ended with more than 800 O‘ahu natives losing their lives over the Ko‘olauloa’s 1000-foot high cliffs.

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Outrigger Hotels & Resorts is proud of Bob and James for their many years of dedication and service and wish both of them the very best in their retirement. Mahalo and a hui hou!
I am pleased to join Human Resources in announcing that Robert Czeschka has been appointed Executive Chef at the Outrigger Laguna Phuket Resort and Villas in Thailand, effective 16 May.

Robert, an Austrian national, will be responsible for all the resort’s Food and Beverage outlets.

Robert brings 26 years’ experience to Outrigger from Shangri-La, Hilton, Marriott, Starwood, and the Michelin star Palais Schwarzenberg in Austria, which includes 16 years as an Executive Chef in Germany, Egypt, Malaysia, Thailand, China, and most recently at the luxury Nam Hai Resort in Hoi An, Vietnam.

Robert is a member of the prestigious Chaine des Rotisseurs and the World Association of Chefs.

Fitness is a big hobby of Robert’s; he is a triathlon Ironman and practices aikido in his spare time.

We wish Robert a long and successful stay at Outrigger Laguna Phuket Resort and Villas.

I join Human Resources in welcoming Ronal Roylesh Gopal as Sous Chef of the new Sundowner Bar & Grill at the Outrigger on the Lagoon – Fiji. Chef Ronal will work directly under the guidance of Executive Chef, Shailesh Naidu and Executive Sous Chef Ezaz Khan.

A local Fijian, Chef Ronal worked with a number of leading hotel chains, and with 12 years experience in the world of culinary arts, he is well placed to head up the team at Sundowner Bar & Grill.

Previously from Sheraton Resort Denarau, Chef Ronal began his hospitality career in 1998 moving quickly through the ranks to become an Executive Sous Chef at the tender age of 28.

At the Sundowner, Chef Ronal will focus on the overall culinary direction of the Bar & Grill and concentrate on securing the best quality produce from which the menu has been carefully developed.

Outrigger on the Lagoon – Fiji General Manager Peter Hopgood said he was eager to welcome Chef Ronal to his team and to the newly refurbished Sundowner Bar & Grill. “The spotlight will be on the new kitchen’s 1.8 metre grill and a sensational wood-fired pizza oven which, with Chef Ronal’s skill and expertise, should render the Sundowner Bar & Grill a very popular dining option,” said Peter.

Chef Ronal has worked in numerous kitchen setups from large banquet and world-class golf operations to a busy steakhouse and one of the South Pacific’s greatest fine dining restaurants, in its day, Ports O’ Call.

We are looking forward to the Sundowner Bar & Grill’s success, thanks to the many years of culinary expertise found in the kitchen!

“My husband and I stayed at the Beachcomber from May 1-12th, 2011. Just wanted to let you know how pleased we were with our stay. The service in the entire hotel was excellent! From the front desk to the housekeepers, we found the staff to be so friendly and pleasant at all times. It was a pleasure to stay in a hotel with such a warm, positive atmosphere! The hotel itself and the hallways and rooms were very tidy and clean, as was the pool. We would definitely stay at this hotel again and have highly recommended it to our travel agent and friends. Thanks for a wonderful visit to Waikiki.”

Diane and Dean Eldred
Cranbrook, B.C. Canada
Sunshine and Smiles at Outrigger Little Hastings Street

By Sophie Secombe

The team at Outrigger Little Hastings Street Resort & Spa Noosa had reason to smile recently after being selected by the region’s peak tourism body to host a major familiarisation for 30 professional conference organisers (PCOs) from around Australia.

Business Events Sunshine Coast is the dedicated tourism body responsible for marketing Queensland’s Sunshine Coast as an attractive and sustainable business events destination, worth an estimated A$60 million to the local economy.

This year’s event focused on highlighting new products and, being just under 12-months old, Outrigger Little Hastings Street was a perfect choice.

Hosting a sumptuous breakfast in the sun-filled lounge terrace area, the PCOs, whose clients comprise some of the country’s largest government and private businesses, took in the magnificent national park and coastline views before touring the resort and day spa.

As we approach our first birthday, we have been overwhelmed by the level of demand for our meeting facilities and expect this to continue given the limited range of large conferencing venues in Noosa.

In the coming months, Outrigger Little Hastings Street will host a number of large events including the Australian Psychological Society’s annual conference and pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca, which will draw delegates from around the world.

We congratulate the onsite conference team for their outstanding efforts in hosting this very important industry group.

New Recruits at the Outrigger on the Lagoon - Fiji

By Una Murray

The Outrigger on the Lagoon – Fiji recruited 39 new staff members, the majority of whom were trainees from the resort’s community training program for school leavers living in nearby villages.

Resort Training Manager Joyti Ram said it is the first step to permanent employment for the recruits. The future of a relationship with the resort depends on how they settle into the job. Nineteen of the new recruits will take part in the opening of the recently refurbished Sundowner Bar and Grill.

General Manager Peter Hopgood said that the staff’s welfare is important, “Happy staff equals happy guests, which in turn, makes happy owners. Everyone is a winner when you get the basics right.”

Front: Mohammed, Suresh, Adi, Vini, Patricia, Litia, and Abdul

Middle: Ratu Luke, Apakuki, Kinijoji, Ratu Buli, Sacenaca, Wame Inoke, Anare, Matelita

Standing: Ateca, Litiana, Sheron, Divo, Mere, Lavenia, Elia, Vaemaca, Joyti, Bulou, Vini, Laitir, Anaseini, and Lusi
I am pleased to join Human Resources in announcing three new appointments at the Outrigger on the Lagoon – Fiji.

Jennifer Yip joins the Outrigger vuvale as Sales Manager, William Work as Duty Manager, and Michael Bali as Front Office Manager.

Jennifer comes to us from the Warwick Le Lagoon Resort & Spa, Vanuatu, where she worked as a Distribution Manager, managing the daily day-to-day third-party websites on the Internet. Prior to that, she worked for Korean Airlines as a Passenger Traffic Agent.

Jennifer is a student of Yat-Sen Secondary School and a graduate of the University of the South Pacific with a double major in Tourism and Management. She was a Digicel Coral Coast Carnival Contestant in 2008 and Young Achiever of the Year recipient at the AON Fiji Excellence in Tourism Awards in 2009.

William Work is well known in sporting circles. The Nadroga native has represented the province and donned the national colours on the soccer field. His first foray into tourism was as a member of the Reservations Team at Shangri-La’s Fijian Resort and Spa in 1994.

He joined the Outrigger Reef Resort, as the Outrigger on the Lagoon – Fiji was known back then, in 2000. He stayed with the resort through the rebranding process and was promoted to Reservations Duty Manager. He left for a time in 2006 joining the Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji’s Hospitality and Tourism School as a Training Officer before joining Vodafone, a global telecommunications company, for two years. Just prior to rejoining Outrigger, William lived in England and said he’s glad to be back and working as a Duty Manager for one of Fiji’s best resorts.

Michael Bali completed secondary education at Andhra High School, (now Andhra College) and began his hotel career as a Page Boy in 1989 at the Shangri-La’s Fijian Resort & Spa. Over a span of ten years, he worked as a PABX Operator, Reservations Agent, Reception Clerk, and finally, Guest Services Officer (Concierge).

In 2000, he joined the Outrigger on the Lagoon – Fiji, formerly known as Outrigger Reef Fiji Resort, and held positions of Guest Services Agent, Night Auditor/Manager, and Duty Manager. In 2003, he joined the Sheraton Fiji Resorts as a Sales Coordinator, and in 2005, he took up the role of Systems Administrator, handling third-party Websites and reporting directly to the Director of Revenue Management. In 2010, he headed back to the Coral Coast and assumed the role of Front Office Manager at the Warwick Fiji Resort & Spa, a position he held until he joined the Outrigger on the Lagoon – Fiji in 2011 as Front Office Manager. Michael said he finds his new role very challenging, yet the experiences of dealing with guests and staff have been phenomenal.

Congratulations and welcome to the Outrigger ‘ohana and the Outrigger on the Lagoon – Fiji vuvale, Jennifer, William, and Michael!

APEC Economies at a Glance

As Dr. Richard Kelley shared last week in his column, the Saturday Briefing will highlight each of the 21 APEC Economies every issue up to the November meetings. On the following page, we feature Australia. Get to know these exciting areas that have shifted the economic center of the world to the Pacific Basin.
Australia

The Flag
Symbolizes Australia's historical links with Britain (representing the British flag, known as the 'Union Jack') and Australia's location in the southern hemisphere (represented by stars of the Southern cross). The larger seven-pointed star represents the six original states and the territories of the Commonwealth.

National Colors
Green and gold were proclaimed Australia's national colors by the Governor-General on 19 April 1984. They are the colors of the crest of the present Commonwealth coat of arms.

Coat of Arms
Granted by King George V in 1912. It consists of a shield containing the badges of the six Australian states, enclosed by an ermine border. The shield is a symbol for the federation of the states, which took place in 1901. The crest is a seven-pointed gold star on a blue and gold wreath. Six of the points represent each of the states of the Commonwealth; the seventh point represents Australia's territories. The supporters of the shield are native Australian animals, the red kangaroo and the emu.

Climate
Australia is so large that it experiences most climatic conditions, from tropical monsoons to hot, dry weather, and snow. Generally, however, the climate is warm and temperate, particularly in the major coastal areas.

Unemployment
Relatively low (in December 2007, it was 4.3%). The gross per capita income is around $39,000. All people are equal under the law in Australia, and all Australians have the right to be respected and treated in a fair manner.

Tourism
One of Australia's largest and fastest-growing industries. The number of short-term visitors to Australia grew from 4.3 million in 1997 to a record 5.6 million in 2007. The inbound tourism sector contributed about $22.5 billion to the Australian economy in 2006-07.

Some Etiquette Tips
- When meeting friends or new people, it is becoming less common to require the handshake to be firm, though many are still offended by a 'limp' handshake, referred to as giving someone a 'dead fish'. A quick clasping of hands may be ok for younger people; however, it is always respectful to make eye contact when you shake hands.
- Enquiring about which sporting team 'you root for' will be met with amusement. 'Root' is a vulgar term in Australia. Use 'go for' or 'support' instead. 'Barrack for' is also used by some Australians.
- The term 'bring a plate' is synonymous with 'potluck'.
- Unlike the U.S., tipping is not an expectation, but is welcomed at the customer's discretion.

Key Facts
- Capital: Canberra
- Largest City: Sydney
- Population: approximately 22 million
- Currency: Australian Dollar
- Thirteenth largest economy
- One of the world's oldest land masses
- Populated by human beings for an estimated 60,000 years
- Welcomed more than 6.5 million migrants from over 200 countries, including more than 660,000 refugees
- More than 5 million Australians speak a second language
- Since 1990, Australia's economy has grown by an average of 3.3 percent a year with 17 consecutive years of growth
- In 2007, Australia's gross domestic product (GDP) was around $1 trillion in value terms, making it the 10th largest industrialised economy
- Australia is the only nation to govern an entire continent
- Australia has 10 percent of the world's biodiversity and a great number of its native plants, animals, and birds exist nowhere else in the world.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etiquette_in_Australia_and_New_Zealand
In 2007, 2008 and 2009 there was a drop in arrivals which was clearly related to the problems facing the U.S. and global economies. Fortunately, visitor arrivals bounced back to 7.1 million in 2010 and have continued to climb significantly over the first four months of 2011, with arrivals up nearly 9 percent and visitor spending up almost 18 percent so far this year.

But tourism is still our “economic engine”

We all recognize that tourism is by far our biggest industry, and it generates more than $1 billion a month in revenue for our state. It is also the source of one out of every three jobs in Hawai‘i. These jobs are for all levels of skill, training, and experience, from entry level to top executive level, from no prior experience to advanced, cutting-edge technology skills. AND, these are jobs that stay in Hawai‘i. They cannot be easily exported or outsourced to another area of the world where wage rates are lower. Actually, most of them cannot be outsourced at all as long as the tourists keep coming. These jobs can only be outsourced if Hawai‘i allows itself to become a less attractive destination than its many competitors, resulting in “our” visitors choosing other places to vacation.

So until something far better comes along, Hawai‘i’s Travel & Tourism industry will remain our “Golden Goose,” laying 14-karat eggs that support so much of what makes Hawai‘i a great place to live, work and raise a family.

We can strengthen our marketing

Like any business or industry, we must constantly market our goods and services to the world in order to get customers. Unfortunately, in recent years there has been a significant reduction of state funds available for advertising and marketing Hawai‘i as a travel destination.

In 1997, I was a member of the Economic Revitalization Task Force convened by Governor Ben Cayetano. The Task Force recognized that the then-current level of state tourism marketing dollars (about $25 million a year) was totally inadequate to effectively compete in the global marketplace. Accordingly, the Task Force recommended that the Transient Accommodations Tax (TAT or “hotel room tax”) be increased from 6 percent to 7 percent and that 3 percentage points of the tax, then about $60 million annually, be dedicated to tourism marketing. The total dollars for marketing would increase as inflation drove up room rates in future years. A new state agency, the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority (HTA), would manage the funds.

This concept was approved by the Legislature and, with more marketing funds available, visitor arrivals began to rise once again.

Unfortunately, the Legislature later capped the TAT dollars dedicated to marketing at not much more than the 1998 level. For the 2011-2012 fiscal year, the portion of the projected $290 million total TAT collections that will be dedicated to tourism marketing is only $69 million. In terms of 1998 dollars, that buys only $52 million worth of marketing. In 2011, it would take about $80 million dollars to buy the equivalent of $60 million of 1998 marketing services.

In other words, viewed in inflation-adjusted terms that give the true picture, the state’s current contribution to Travel & Tourism marketing is nearly 15 percent less than it was in 1998. Over the same period, unfortunately, the marketing challenge has grown substantially, so we now face the task of literally having to do more with less.

But that’s only the beginning. The Legislature has mandated that the HTA use the $69 million not only for marketing but a number of other cultural and community activities. These are admirable but they are not necessarily marketing activities. This further weakens Hawai‘i’s ability to be heard in the growing world Travel & Tourism marketplace. Unless we spend the money to market Hawai‘i, our share of the world’s travelers will continue to drop.

We can keep the cost of a Hawai‘i vacation competitive

Once our potential visitors hear about us, they will only travel here if the price of their vacation is affordable and competitive with other destinations. There are some great bargains out there in places like Mexico and Southeast Asia, to name just a couple of competing destinations.

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Fix Hawai‘i’s Travel & Tourism Industry First

Continued from page 8

Every tax that the city, county or state levies on the industry gets passed along to the customer, raising the price of a vacation, and making us less competitive. Unfortunately, Hawai‘i has steadily increased taxes that target visitors.

The TAT has been repeatedly jacked up over the past two decades from 6 percent to 7 1/4 percent to 8 1/4 percent and now to 9 1/4 percent. That’s a whopping 54 percent increase.

Moreover, the state’s General Excise Tax (GET) was raised to 4.712 percent on O‘ahu, so that Waikiki tourists are now looking at a tax rate of 13.962 percent on their hotel rooms.

While this is only slightly higher than the national average of 13.73 percent (according to the National Business Travel Association), it hits travelers a lot harder because room rates in Hawai‘i are much higher than the $97 national average. Room rates average $185 statewide and $170 in Waikiki. As a result, the average daily tax tourists pay on their rooms in Hawai‘i can be almost double the national average of $13.31, depending on which island they are visiting.

Of course, one of the reasons hotel rates in Hawai‘i are so high is that they reflect the special high property tax rates imposed on hotels. Hotels must also pay Hawai‘i’s compounding General Excise Tax on all goods and services they buy – from carpets to computers and wallpaper to toilet paper. The pyramiding nature of the GET boosts its cost to hotels – and to all Hawai‘i businesses and residents – far beyond its apparent value. In fact, the Tax Foundation of Hawai‘i estimates that thanks to this pyramiding, the state government collects as much from the 4 percent GET as it would get from a straight sales tax of 10 or 11 percent.

Today there is even a tax on complimentary or “comp” rooms. Hotels market themselves by inviting travel agents, corporate travel managers, convention planners, and tour operators to come to Hawai‘i and familiarize themselves with our state’s natural beauty and tourism resources. Hotel stays have been given to these members of our industry on a complimentary basis for as long as I can remember. Somehow, this bothered some members of the Legislature who retaliated this year by imposing a $10 per night tax on a room occupied on a “comp” basis. It’s hard to believe, but in Hawai‘i, our lawmakers are so innovative they’ve even figured out how to tax something that’s free! Unfortunately, this tax on a comp room makes our job of trying to inject new energy into Hawai‘i’s “stagnant” visitor industry even harder.

Our customers are also taxed at every transaction throughout their stay. The taxes on rental cars have been rising at a particularly alarming rate. That tax has gone from $2 per day to $3 per day to $4 per day. That’s on top of the GET. And Governor Neil Abercrombie now has a bill on his desk that will nearly double the rental car tax, raising it to $7.50 per day. Probably the vast majority of automobile rentals are made by visitors but, alas, this 88 percent tax increase, if signed, will also hit local residents hard whenever they travel to a neighbor island.

When viewed separately, each of these taxes may appear reasonable and appropriate. But add them all together, and continue ratcheting them up year after year, and pretty soon travelers will decide to vacation elsewhere.

The lessons I learned in Economics 101 are still valid. When costs go up, volume goes down. So if taxes on Travel & Tourism go up, the number of tourists goes down. And so do our economy … jobs … and even the government’s tax base.

We can make the vacation experience better

Our visitors expect clean attractions, safe roads, clean bathrooms, and either new or well-maintained buildings. We all have a responsibility to maintain the infrastructure used by both visitors and residents.

There is no question in my mind that all levels of government have failed to maintain and improve Hawai‘i’s harbors, airports, parks, sewers, roads and beaches to the standards visitors expect in today’s global tourism marketplace. The rapidly approaching APEC meetings have stimulated our governments to try correcting some of these deficiencies, particularly on O‘ahu. It’s been a long time since Waikiki’s sidewalks and roads have looked this good and, if we are serious about Travel & Tourism, this should be the standard from now on.

Government needs to make Travel & Tourism a real top priority for the state

Things are somewhat better now than they used to be. I can remember that it was years before the state Department of Business and Economic Development changed its name and focus to the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism. However, if state government was really serious about Travel & Tourism, there would be a separate Department of Tourism and its director would be a member of the governor’s cabinet.

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**Government needs to better support entrepreneurs and developers who would like to add to and improve Hawai‘i’s tourism facilities**

There are many examples. The most recent was the sad tale of the effort by a private company investing its own money to run the high-speed Superferry between Hawai‘i’s islands. The company, its vision, its jobs, and its bank account were bled to death by a thousand cuts of bureaucratic red tape and regulations. I remember no one in government providing effective support and leadership.

The development of the Hawai‘i Convention Center took 15 years to accomplish. There was support at the governor’s office and by some in the Legislature, but while others in government dithered or fought the concept, the preferred site on a portion of the grounds at Ft. DeRussy in the center of Waikīkī was lost and costs soared.

I know from personal experience that during the past two decades particularly it has been very, very difficult and expensive for developers and investors to obtain government permits to renovate, improve or add to the private sector’s tourism plant or infrastructure.

**We can make it easier to get to Hawai‘i**

Some of our potential visitors are still deterred by the difficulty in getting a tourist visa. The government needs to do more to make it easier for foreign visitors to come to Hawai‘i.

Many government leaders, including former Governor Linda Lingle and former Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann, have recognized the rapid growth in the vast tourism markets in Asia and their potential for Hawai‘i, but government has yet to really focus on and solve the issue of restrictive federal visa regulations. The difficulties encountered when trying to obtain a visa to travel to the U.S. have discouraged many of those living in China – the world’s largest and fastest-growing outbound tourism market – to come to Hawai‘i. This issue needs a “full court press” by Hawai‘i’s government leaders to help solve Hawai‘i’s tourism stagnation.

Perhaps harder but even more important, we must join together to support changing federal cabotage regulations, which restrict the access of foreign airlines that would like to provide service to Hawai‘i en route to the U.S. mainland.

We can’t change the weather, but we all need to work together to improve Hawai‘i’s business climate.

A few paragraphs ago I cited taxes as one of the reasons hotel rates in Hawai‘i are so high. Another important reason is the high cost of doing business in this state. There are thousands of daily decisions, regulations and examples of bureaucratic red tape that shape the perception of Hawai‘i’s business climate.

The current issue of **Chief Executive** magazine rates Hawai‘i’s business climate as number 43 of the 50 states. That puts us in the bottom eight, along with economically ailing Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and last place California. Hawai‘i is down one place from last year, so things are not improving.

**Summary**

I applaud Richard Lim’s concern for Hawai‘i’s future and his willingness to ask serious questions about our tourism industry. Everyone in the Outrigger ‘ohana is concerned too, as I certainly am. I believe that the most prudent course of action is for us all to work together to improve the health of the industry. Strengthening our marketing efforts, keeping taxes down and the price of a family vacation affordable, and maintaining our infrastructure will pay off handsomely. And taking Travel and Tourism to new heights will give us the base needed to then develop many, many new industries and opportunities, as Lim suggests. But for right now, **tourism is still … everybody’s business!**

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1 Summary of ERTF proposals – http://tinyurl.com/3ctkvg
3 Best and Worst States for Business – http://tinyurl.com/6bvhsop