The past 10 days have been a tremendous challenge for so many people. My heart goes out to all those in Japan whose lives were suddenly changed forever – and the families of the perhaps tens of thousands whose lives were lost – by the devastating 9.0 magnitude earthquake of March 11 and the catastrophic tsunami and nuclear power plant disaster that followed. As the tsunami sped through the night toward Hawai’i, virtually our entire ‘ohana responded quickly and successfully in a well-rehearsed effort to protect our properties and the lives of our guests. My profound thanks and hearty congratulations to everyone!

Everything went smoothly at all Outrigger and OHANA properties in Hawai’i thanks to a great deal of advance preparation. Teams had been organized. There had been training sessions and drills. Everyone knew their job and what to do. We expected the unexpected and, when the tsunami was heading toward us, the necessary work was done quickly and efficiently. Many went above and beyond the call of duty in more ways than I can list here.

My Assistant, Pat Stephenson, and her husband Don were guests at the Outrigger Reef on the Beach that evening, and their article (page 2) tells what it was like to be a guest in the hotel at that time.

Another guest, writing as “DeniseVancouver,” posted glowing praise on her tsunami experience at the Outrigger Aina Nalu on the popular travelers’ website TripAdvisor.com (reprinted on page 3).

Fortunately, the tsunami damage in Hawai’i was limited and far less than in the tsunamis of 1946 and 1960, which devastated Hilo, on the Big Island, and killed 165 and 61 people statewide, respectively.

In fact, I had a particularly close personal encounter with the 1946 tsunami. I was 12 years old, living with my family in a beachfront home beneath Diamond Head, not far from Waikiki. For no particular reason, at about 7 a.m., I went out to take a look at the ocean. I was surprised to find the reef almost bare, with fish flopping around. I ran to get my family, and we all went down to the seawall and watched in fascination as the water flowed back over the reef. Our mood turned to horror as the water kept rising and waves began smashing the seawall. We were lucky. The water drew back again, and we had time to run to higher ground before the next tsunami wave hit. (For further details see http://osb.swiftclients.com/?p=1467)

In contrast with the limited damage in Hawai’i from last week’s tsunami, the situation in Japan is still critical over a week after the initial quake (strong aftershocks continue to rock that stricken country) and flooding. Every news outlet is carrying extensive coverage so I will not repeat that here.

However, I have been receiving almost daily e-mails from John Delp, a great travel agent and dear friend who lives in the Tokyo area. He has described the severe daily aftershocks, the breakdown of transportation and utility services, and the supply shortages. I have edited his notes and reprinted them on page 2 for your interest, with his permission.

There is no question that this disaster in Japan, with the world’s third-largest economy, will have significant consequences far beyond that country’s shores.

In the area of Travel & Tourism, Japan sent 16.6 million travelers overseas in 2010, many to destinations where Outrigger and OHANA hotels are located.

- Hawai’i received 1.2 million, about 17 percent of its 7 million visitors
- Guam received 894,000, about 75 percent of its 1.2 million visitors
- Bali received 250,000, about 10 percent of its 2.56 million visitors
- Thailand received 985,000, about 6 percent of its 15.8 million visitors

There is no question that in the short term we will see many cancellations of existing reservations and a significant drop in new reservations. How long this will last will depend on whether Japan can secure its damaged nuclear power plants and then find a way to restore adequate electric service. The world is watching closely as the drama unfolds.

Once again, my sincere thanks and congratulations to every member of our ‘ohana for all you did to get us through the challenges of the past week.
Firsthand Report on Life in Post-Earthquake Japan
By John Delp

March 11 – The earthquake hit at 2:46 p.m., and it essentially stopped all public transportation in Tokyo. I walked from the far end of the Ginza to the American Club. It took two hours. I had dinner and then walked to my office, used Skype to contact some friends in the U.S., and went to sleep on the floor.

March 12 – Some trains are running, so I started back to my home in Tsukuba Science City. (If you are not familiar with the area, it’s about 40 miles northeast of Tokyo en route to Nikko. We are located just between the “not-so-badly damaged Tokyo” and the “worst of it all.”)

Today, the Tsukuba Express went only about three stations and then it STOPPED. I asked staff what to do, and they told me to take the JR Joban Line to Toride. They said there should be onward service to Tsuchiura. However, there was no service beyond Toride. When I got there, I called a friend in Tsukuba and asked him to pick me up in his car. Usually it’s just a 30-minute drive, but this day, it took him three hours. Then, our cell phones quit working, and we had a terrible time trying to find each other.

At home, I found that the earthquake had broken all my dishes, including one of my favorite antique plates from Shanghai. The refrigerator had moved about one meter (three feet) into the middle of the kitchen, and everything else was tipped over or broken. One lucky thing … my microwave, which was on top of the refrigerator, was still there and had not fallen down.

March 13 – In Tsukuba, we have no water at all. All the stores, including convenience stores, are closed. Fortunately, my friend bought six liter (quart) bottles of water a few days ago, so we have enough to cook and drink. Also, he had filled the bathtub on Saturday morning, so we have some water to flush the toilet. I am sure it will be several days before we have running water. We are told that water trucks come to Tsukuba, and we will have to take our bottles to fill up from the trucks. We do have electricity and gas for cooking.

The aftershocks continue, and we are warned that within the next three days, we should expect one of magnitude 7. That’s a MAJOR shock. We
have a magnitude 3 or 4 aftershock every few hours, but those are just babies compared to a magnitude 7. In fact, we are now hardly paying attention to the little ones.

Now we face the nuclear threat. Tokyo Electric Power Co., which supplies power to nearly all of Japan north of Tokyo, has announced the closure of those plants this morning. We now await news regarding the partial meltdowns feared at two reactors. (I may soon be glowing in the dark!!!!!!) Other plants can supply power, so as of this morning, rolling blackouts are in effect. They have divided the region from Tokyo to the north of Japan into areas, and each area will have power cuts of about three hours, and this is to continue indefinitely.

Further, there is not a flashlight or battery to be bought anywhere. Food supply will soon become a major problem, with no delivery service available due to destroyed roads. Cleared roads have traffic backed up for hours and hours. Really, just miles and miles of parking lot. Supply trucks can't move.

Further, the nights to the north of here, which is the worst hit area, are very cold, even snowing. Blankets are scarce, basically not available, nor are medical supplies available for older people needing daily medication.

We just had another large aftershock. In fact, the aftershocks are occurring now every few minutes–many more than this time yesterday.

Cell phones are only operational in VERY limited areas, as the transmission towers are down. I will try to get this e-mail out to you before we lose power.

March 14 – I was nearly thrown out of bed at 4 a.m. today by a huge aftershock. I jumped out of bed at 5 a.m. to find the water running, so I took a shower and started the washing machine. Funny how these simple things sound so important. My plan is to try to find a shop selling bread this morning ... I have lettuce and tomatoes. Blankets, kerosene, and medication are totally unavailable outside Tokyo.

Electricity and the horrid nuclear situation only get worse. The blackouts continue.

Fortunately, the weather remains tolerable. This morning, Tsukuba is sunny, and it will be in the upper 60s today. Farther north, it remains very cold, and they not only suffer from lack of heat, but the trucking agencies cannot get through with food.

On the national news just now, it is advised that we may expect a HUGE quake again within the next two days. Tokyo Electric and Power advises that we can expect a blackout at any time in the next few days. They are showing the complete destruction of another nuclear operation this morning. I may still be glowing in the dark when you next meet me!

I just returned from shopping ... trying to buy something for dinner. I got one of the last loaves of bread. The shelves are EMPTY. You buy anything you can grab. The checkout lines are so long it took me 45 minutes to pay for my five bananas, four apples, and a SMALL loaf of bread. HURRAY! I found some sliced pork at another supermarket on the way home – that’s ALL the stock they had of ANYTHING except some candy.

We have just been advised to absolutely avoid going outside and to keep all windows closed and air conditioning off due to still more nuclear problems that just occurred.

March 16 – Today seems to rate as one of the very worst imaginable. My friend went to school as usual this morning. They are preparing to receive people who had already been evacuated once. Now they’re being evacuated even farther away from the nuclear plants. Embassies in Tokyo have now moved or are moving to the Osaka/Kobe/Kyoto area, escaping from possible nuclear problems, though a strong earthquake in the Shizuoka area south of Tokyo may cut off transportation in that direction too. The TV news is in total disarray. This will surely end sometime. When it is all over, I will head for Waikiki and get some sand between my toes.