Spring Break Tourism

Currently, Outrigger and OHANA hotels are hosting an increasing number of young people and families. Some are here as tourists escaping colder climes while schools are on Spring Break. Others are here with a sports team. The reason for their presence does not matter. With occupancies in Hawaii’s hotels down this year, the sight of young people and families in hotel lobbies, restaurants, shops, and beaches is welcome and encouraging. However, we should be aware that in other resort areas, the gathering of youth for Spring Break and post-graduation vacations receives mixed reviews from local businesses and residents.

For some destinations, particularly South Padre Island, Texas, and Panama City, Florida, Spring Break travel has become enormous. Tens of thousands of teens and early twenty-somethings descend on these areas in March to enjoy the warm climate, sun, and beaches. Hotels and restaurants are jammed, and their staffs struggle to provide service, while preserving some sense of hospitality. Maintaining order can be a problem, given that many of the popular activities are such things as beach parties, wet T-shirt contests, and toga parties—with alcoholic libations liberally lubricating them all.

Major businesses have taken note of the concentration of potential customers and have signed up as sponsors of events. Geico, Gillette, Neutrogena, Anheuser-Busch, and Coca-Cola set up booths and give away samples and logo items. Even the U.S. Army sees opportunity in this annual gathering of youth and, according to TravelVideo Television News, sets up an Army Adventure Challenge obstacle course and an Army Sports Zone to test skills and abilities. They give away Army T-shirts, beach towels, and beach bags. The Army’s elite Golden Knights parachute team was scheduled to perform at South Padre Island earlier this month.

Mexico also hosts a lot of U.S. Spring Breakers. TheChannelsOnline.com reports that an estimated 100,000 U.S. students take a spring trip south of the border each year. Cabo San Lucas and Cancun are very popular with students who know that the legal age for drinking alcohol is only 18 in those areas.

Some Spring Breakers do stupid things and end up meeting the local police. According to the Wall Street Journal, there are attorneys in these resort areas who specialize in handling the legal issues of youthful offenders. One attorney, Mike McNamara of South Padre Island, posts fliers that read, “Got drunk? Got caught? Call Mike. He won’t tell your mama!”

Not all Spring Break travelers are frivolous or girls “gone wild.” Many go to the trouble of doing serious charitable work in areas needing assistance. This year, according to the Chicago Sun-Times, college students are rebuilding homes destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, digging ditches in Oaxaca, Mexico, and trying to relieve poverty as far away as Zambia.

Thinking about South Padre Island and Panama City, I feel that we are lucky that in the areas served by Outrigger and OHANA hotels. Spring Break is generally an orderly, peaceful family event. We’re glad they’re here!

It’s been a brutal winter throughout the U.S. and many other parts of the Northern Hemisphere. Let’s give our visiting Spring Break families and sports teams our warmest aloha.