Blip or Dip – Is This a Trend?

A little over a week ago, I attended a cocktail party hosted by Outrigger and OHANA Hotels & Resorts for the travel agents of Signature Travel Network on the beachfront patio at Duke’s Restaurant at the Outrigger Waikiki Hotel. The weather was perfect. The moon was full. There was Hawaiian music, hula, mai tais, and a sumptuous Island buffet. It all brought into focus why Hawaii is such a special place.

Our visitors seem to agree. In fact, a great majority of the 7.5 million visitors to Hawaii in 2005 were happy with their stays here, according to a survey just released by the state’s Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT).

A little more than two-thirds, 67.4 percent, of U.S. visitors and 63 percent of Canadian visitors rated Hawaii as “excellent.” That is an outstanding report. It shows that a great combination of a wonderful environment, along with the development and operation of high-quality resorts, facilities, and activities by the private sector and proper attention to the infrastructure by government has produced a product that is highly desirable and appreciated by a great majority of visitors.

The thing that concerns me is that the percentage of “excellent” ratings has dipped slightly for the past two years. The high point for U.S travelers was in 2003, when 72.4 percent—nearly three-quarters—rated their trip as “excellent.”

Does this indicate the beginning of a real trend or is it just a blip? At this point, no one knows.

Bestselling author Jim Collins has studied why some organizations—ranging from corporations and governments, to schools and hospitals—go from “good to great” and why others decline and fail. He finds that those that make that leap forward and sustain that performance over the long-term have distinct commonalities including:

• Top leadership
• Dedicated, passionate focus on core values
• Discipline and willingness to evaluate results and change tactics and practices where needed
• The embrace and utilization of technology to achieve goals

As a company, we think about these things every day of the year. That is why Outrigger and OHANA Hotels & Resorts has been a successful, top performer over the past 59 years.

Maybe it is time for the overall Hawaii Visitor Industry to evaluate itself in a similar manner. (That thought could apply equally to the visitor industries in the other Pacific areas where Outrigger and OHANA operate hotels and condos.) This is something that should be initiated quickly. We in Hawaii cannot afford to wait another year for the 2006 statistics to be compiled before we study whether the dip in visitor satisfaction is a trend, and if so, what is causing it, and what can be done to turn it around.

I hope the Hawaii Tourism Authority will set such a study in motion, so that if we find we need to scramble out of a deepening dip, the road back to the top will not be greatly lengthened by delay in getting started.