A MESSAGE FROM RICHARD R. KELLEY TO OUR OUTRIGGER ‘OHANA

Travel & Tourism in Turbulent Times
By Dr. Richard Kelley

As Americans put away the leftovers from their Thanksgiving dinners and we enter the month of December, we are all hoping for a busy holiday season for the Travel & Tourism industry. However, there are a number of disturbing activities taking place around the world that have me concerned for both the immediate and the longer-term future of our industry. For example:

• Islamist terror groups are currently taking over large swaths of Iraq and Syria, leaving a wide path of death and destruction.

• This week, al-Shabab terrorists from Somalia hijacked a bus in northern Kenya, picked out 28 non-Muslim passengers and killed them.

• A few days ago, a suicide bomber in Afghanistan plowed into a motorcade carrying lawmaker Shukria Barakzai, a prominent supporter of women’s rights, killing three civilian bystanders and putting her in the hospital.

• Authorities in Germany and several other European countries are trying to determine how to handle citizens of their countries who went on jihad (Islamic “holy war”) to Syria to topple dictatorial President Bashar Assad, but are now returning home and getting involved with local terrorist organizations.

• In the Ukraine, travelers have shunned the formerly popular coastal resort city of Odessa after firebombs flew between Ukrainians and pro-Russian activists this past summer.

• Last month in Ottawa, Canadian-born Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, who converted to Islam several years ago and was planning to leave for Syria to participate in jihad, shot and killed a soldier guarding the National War Memorial and then rushed into the nearby Parliament building where he opened fire and wounded several more people before security personnel shot him.

• In Israel, there have been two recent incidents in which terrorists drove vehicles into crowds waiting at bus stops, killing two people, including a baby, and injuring numerous others.
I could fill several pages with a little more research but that is not necessary to make the point that the world is now a very dangerous place where fanatics can and do carry packets of highly lethal explosives in a small backpack or in a vest hidden under a jacket. As a result, terrorism is having a very negative effect on global Travel & Tourism today and probably far into the future.

This is sad not only because of the senseless loss of life, but also because Travel & Tourism is a force for peace and prosperity, so that damage to this industry harms the prospects for a happier world.

David Scowsill, president and CEO of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), frequently reminds us that “Travel & Tourism brings people together. It allows us to build relationships, to understand other cultures and as such is a vehicle of diplomacy and trade. Travel & Tourism drives peace and understanding in the war against terror.”

Scowsill adds, “If something does happen, Travel & Tourism is resilient. Over the past two decades we have faced challenges in the shape of terrorism, economic crises, as well as natural and man-made disasters. On each occasion Travel & Tourism has returned to growth with remarkable speed.”

Continuing, Scowsill says, “While other industries can take time to recover from such shocks, Travel & Tourism can be up and running within days or even hours after a terrorist incident. It is crucial in these situations that a country remains open to tourism. The message has to be clear – tourists are welcome and safe in the destination, and they will have the wonderful experience that they are seeking.”

The visitor industry in Phuket, Thailand, is an outstanding example of this concept. Almost exactly 10 years ago, on December 26, 2004, a series of tsunamis generated by an underwater earthquake destroyed a significant number of hotels, restaurants and other facilities in that popular visitor destination. Many of these facilities were rebuilt and functioning normally in as little as six months to a year later, bringing much-needed stability and economic growth to the area.

No matter which one of the 42 Outrigger Enterprises Group properties is your place of work, every member of our ‘ohana should remain vigilant. Constantly watch for signs of unusual activity. If you see something suspicious, contact your department head, your manager and/or Security immediately.

Jerry Dolak, CPP, Outrigger’s director of Security and Safety, lists the following as examples of suspicious behavior on the part of strangers:

- Asking questions about security or building security procedures.
- Loitering in guest hallways or lobbies with no apparent reason.
- Quickly looking away when others approach.
- Looking nervous or repeatedly glancing behind themselves.
- Waiting in the same place for too long.
- Being present in secure areas where only hotel personnel are authorized to be.
- Deliberately seeking to avoid security cameras.
- Asking questions about sensitive information such as building blueprints, security plans, or VIP travel schedules.
- Unusual chemical smells or fumes are also cause for suspicion.

These things may or may not mean anything, or they may be something other than what they appear to be, but there is no harm in having Security investigate them and determine if there is a problem.

Study your emergency manuals. Know where you should go and what you are expected to do in an emergency. Practice, practice, practice! The life you save may be your own.