Thoughts On Airline Safety

By Dr. Richard Kelley

The crash of Asiana Airlines Flight 214 at San Francisco International Airport last Saturday, July 6, is disturbing in many ways. We grieve for those killed and injured and their families. We are concerned about what effect the crash might have on the Travel & Tourism industry. And yet, the crash also offers us an opportunity to reflect for a moment on the airline industry. It is absolutely amazing that you can book an around-the-world flight itinerary from the comfort of home, drive to the airport, and, with a fair amount of certainty, expect that you and your luggage will complete the journey safely and on schedule.

Many say that the most dangerous part of a flight is traveling in an automobile to and from the airport. This theory holds up if you consider the number of miles traveled. However, one can manipulate the statistics hundreds of ways to get the numbers to support almost any position.

The really great news is that, according to Aviation Safety Network, 2012 was the safest year in air travel since 1945, despite today's much greater number of flights and passengers. There were 23 fatal airliner accidents in 2012, with 475 people killed. That compares with a 10-year annual average of 34 accidents and 773 fatalities.

The expertise built into modern aircraft by companies such as Airbus, Boeing, Bombardier and Embraer is an important factor. Of last year's 23 fatal airliner accidents, only three involved jets built by these companies. For more information on this topic, see the air safety article dated January 7, 2013, in The Economist (www.economist.com/blogs/babbage/2013/01/air-safety).

Despite this, the fatal crash of an airliner is very unsettling. For me, it brings back memories of several friends I have lost in similar tragedies.

• United Flight 610 crashed into the mountains just west of Denver in 1951 with a high school classmate.
• Pan American Flight 806 crashed on approach to American Samoa's Pago Pago International Airport in 1974 with the spouse of a close friend serving as a flight attendant.
• Pan American Flight 1736 and KLM Flight 4805 collided while taking off from the same fog-bound runway at Tenerife, Canary Islands, in 1977, killing 583 including a prominent figure in Honolulu's real estate industry and his wife.
• I have lost nearly the same number of friends and acquaintances in private aviation crashes and automobile accidents.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asiana_Airlines_Flight_214
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Yet, I will continue to travel frequently by automobile, commercial airliner and maybe even cruise ship or train, knowing that the odds are overwhelmingly in my favor. However, I will improve the odds by carefully selecting my route and carrier with historical safety factors in mind.

I hope others will do likewise and that we will see an ever-increasing number of visitors arriving at the 46 properties that the Outrigger Enterprises Group is operating or developing in Hawai‘i, Guam, Fiji, Australia, Bali, Thailand, Mauritius, Vietnam, and Hainan Island, China.