**Denight: Guam seeks to grow group travel market**

Buenas yan Hafa Adai! The Guam Visitors Bureau is excited to have received a recent award for the best themed booth at the International Travel Fair, Taiwan’s largest travel fair. It welcomed more than 360,000 attendees.

Our booth was one of the largest at the fair and included representatives from local businesses, hotels and cultural practitioners. I believe our håfa adai spirit and hospitality made a lasting impression. Si Yu’us ma’åse’ to our entire delegation for a job well done.

The GVB team looks for opportunities to diversify within each of our markets. We want to become better known as a Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions, or MICE, destination. Focusing on group travel, particularly MICE, provides the greatest potential for growth, which is the fourth objective of the Tourism 2020 strategic plan.

GVB heavily markets Guam as an ideal destination for group travel. An increase in group business can have a significant economic impact: in the form of increased hotel room nights; greater hotel occupancy taxes collected; an influx of local spending and revenues; and an increase in demand for flights to the island. Guam’s unique cultural offerings, local hospitality, tropical setting and world-class facilities make Guam an ideal location for group travel.

On average, Guam welcomes more than 150,000 group travelers a year. We’ve discovered that marketing to groups is an excellent strategy in filling in the slower periods and has helped us to maintain arrival numbers above 100,000 visitors a month.

When groups select a destination, they not only book hotel accommodations and meeting facilities. A typical MICE program will include: transportation services; food and beverage services and offsite dining; optional tours; shopping excursions; and cultural experiences.

MICE travelers are categorized as business travelers who prefer higher-end accommodations and services. They spend more per day compared to the leisure traveler.

Eighteen of Guam’s hotels offer group facilities, and some can host up to 2,500 people, such as this year’s Nojima group from Japan. One of the larger incentive groups from Korea was Prudential Life in April 2017.Prudential Life brought 1,200 participants and their families for a seven-day trip to attend a conference and enjoy optional tours.

Another notable international conference was the PATA Annual Summit 2016, which welcomed 640 delegates from 33 countries. The four-day event was a significant success for Guam, allowing us to showcase our MICE capabilities to the world.

Guam is the No. 1 destination in the U.S. for school group travel from Japan. More than 180 Japanese school groups visited Guam last year. This represents 60 percent of all school groups that visit the U.S.

While many school groups canceled their trips to Guam as a result of the North Korea issue, we were happy to welcome two groups with more than 350 students in each from Osaka just a few weeks ago. We highly value this segment, not just for its economic importance but for the valuable cultural exchange that takes place.

Next week, I’ll talk about the fifth objective of Tourism 2020, and my personal favorite– promoting the Chamorro culture.

Nathan Denight is president and CEO of the Guam Visitors Bureau. Email him at info@visitguam.org.