**Denight: Updating Guam's Tourism 2020 plan**

Buenas yan håfa adai! I want to congratulate our island, especially the more than 21,000 hard-working women and men in the tourism industry, for a job well done in welcoming 1.56 million visitors to Guam. Together, we achieved the best fiscal year in Guam’s history.

The recent record in arrival numbers reinforces the bureau’s vision to grow and diversify our visitor markets, which is the second objective of the Tourism 2020 strategic plan.

Growth and diversification is extremely important. In years past, Japan made up more than 80 percent of our market mix. Now, Japan makes up 43 percent, while Korea has grown to 41.6 percent of that mix. We additionally cultivated other source markets to include Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, Russia, the U.S. mainland, and the Philippines.

Like any strategic plan, it’s important to update it every few years. The Guam Visitors Bureau is in the process of doing just that. It’s interesting to look at Tourism 2020’s visitor arrival projections, which were developed in 2014. Our goal for the Korea market was 350,000 visitors by 2020; Guam nearly doubled that goal in fiscal 2017 with 649,435.

Japan arrivals have been steadily declining, and it’s critical that we recover this important source market. Did you know that Guam has welcomed more than 29 million Japanese in the last 50 years? GVB participated in a roundtable discussion at the Guam Legislature last Friday, where government and tourism industry stakeholders came together to address the Japan market and the negative effects of the North Korea situation. I thank our Sen. Dennis G. Rodriguez Jr. for bringing everyone together.

We also need to keep building our brand in China, the world’s largest and highest-spending source market. Guam attracted around 25,000 Chinese visitors without a visa waiver, while the CNMI welcomed more than 200,000 Chinese last year through its visa waiver program, which made up 40 percent of their arrivals.

Diversification helps to maintain our industry when situations beyond our control arise. When the North Korea issue happened in August, it resulted in thousands of cancellations, mostly from Japanese groups. If not for our market diversification, fiscal 2017 would have ended differently.

As we grow and diversify our markets, Guam has added airlines along the way. Our island has 16 airlines today; we used to have seven. The latest launch was Air Seoul’s direct service from Incheon on Sept. 13, increasing the number of airlines from Korea to six. However, some existing carriers, such as Delta, have suspended their service.

Some of the obvious benefits of growing and diversifying our markets translate into an increase in tourism-related jobs, government tax revenues and tourism economy sales that support private and small businesses. The greatest reward is helping to improve the quality of life for our residents.

Next week, I’ll talk about the third objective of Tourism 2020 – adding high-end hotel rooms and incentivizing reinvestment.

Also, I invite everyone to experience the Guam Ko’ko’ Kids Fun Run and Guam Ko’ko’ Half Marathon this coming weekend. You can still register online at guamkokoroadrace.com for both GVB events. I hope to see you there!

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