**Denight: Improving our island begins with its product**

Buenas yan Håfa Adai! In the last Tourism Works column, I discussed the Tourism 2020 strategic plan, which serves as the road map for our number one industry. The vision was to transform the island into a world-class, first-tier resort destination of choice, and the mission is to grow a sustainable visitor industry that makes Guam a better place to live, work and visit.

The plan identified eight core objectives aimed at helping us reach that shared vision and mission. The first objective – improve quality and yield – addressed the need to elevate the Guam product to attract a higher-spending visitor. Historically, Guam has been a budget destination offering a close and cheap getaway, but we aspired to move our image closer to resort destinations such as Hawaii.

As part of improving Guam’s product, attracting a higher-spending visitor and significantly raising the tax base, we must first improve its quality. Here are some of the improvements to the island that have been ongoing:

* Guam Visitors Bureau launched the Visitor Safety Officer program to act as a concierge and crime deterrent in Tumon.
* The A.B. Won Pat International Airport started construction on its new International Arrivals Corridor and other upgrades.
* Docomo Pacific and GVB teamed up to install an updated digital sentry surveillance system in Tumon to increase public safety efforts.
* GVB has been fixing sidewalks, crosswalks and streetlights, as well as installing bus shelters in Tumon.
* The Hotel Occupancy Tax bond provided funding to restore many of the island’s iconic sites such as the Plaza de España and the Malesso’ Bell Tower and built the Guam Museum.
* The Dusit Thani Guam Resort opened in 2016 as Guam’s first five-star resort.
* Construction is underway to build the new Tsubaki Tower next to the Hotel Nikko Guam, which is projected for completion in 2019.
* Extensive renovations to existing hotel properties have been ongoing.
* GHRA, GCC and UOG offer tourism and hospitality training programs at both the high school and college levels.
* GVB is currently developing free, online training modules that make up the Visitor Industry Professional program to be launched in 2018.

So what have been the effects on yield? Yield has definitely increased for hotels. According to the STR report, Guam’s average daily rate for rooms in 2012 was $154.09. So far in 2017, the average daily rate is $208.62. Visitor spending has been on the rise since 2012 and grew 8.5% in 2016, surpassing $1.75 billion.

Overall, improvements have been made to our destination, but much more still needs to be done. Ultimately, we want all our visitors to have the best experience possible, come back again and again, and share their love for Guam with the world.

In my next column, I’ll go over the second objective of Tourism 2020 – grow arrivals and diversify.

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