



ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

Addressing Threats To Visitor Safety

Much has been reported and publicized lately of some very unfortunate crime-related incidents in the heart of our visitor industry in Waikīkī. When these things occur, it begs the question of why these things are happening and if there's anything we can do to prevent them from reoccurring in the future. I have always been one to believe that we should be proactive rather than reactive when dealing with a problem or a potential crisis.

About 20 years ago, we invited Dr. Peter Tarlow, a world-renowned speaker, to lead a group of tourism security experts to address us at the first-ever Visitor Crime Solutions Conference, which I helped lead the charge on as a response to the rash of negative incidents against Japanese tourists at that time. Government officials from Japan went public with their concerns. In my opinion, we could not afford to stand pat and risk being seen as insensitive to visitor safety in Hawai'i. At the time, Florida's economy was reeling from a series of crimes against tourists that were highly publicized.

I organized the event with the help of the City and County of Honolulu, Honolulu Police Department, state Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism and Hawai'i Hotel & Visitor Industry Security Association (HHVISA) to shed light and hopefully resolve some of the issues we were having in Waikīkī. It also went a long way towards assuaging our



(From left) Rick Egged, the author, Jessica Rich, Dr. Peter Tarlow, Scott Ingwers and Jerry Dolak gather at a joint Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association-Hawai'i Hotel & Visitor Industry Security Association meeting to discuss tourism security. PHOTO COURTESY JARED HIGASHI

Japanese visitors that their safety was a high priority for us. We called for a number of improvements and initiatives that required HPD, government and the visitor industry to collaborate for the good of the industry. One of the results was that it hastened the establishment of the Waikīkī Business Improvement District to provide a safe, clean and enjoyable environment for visitors, employees and residents in Waikīkī. It also laid the groundwork for a greater emphasis on the safety and security aspects of our hospitality industry if tourism were going to continue to be successful. When I was mayor, making the argument to the White House and the Department of State that Honolulu is one of the safest big cities in America, especially when you factor in the dominating presence of our military forces, was a

compelling reason why we were able to lure the APEC Summit to Hawai'i.

I believe the time is ripe for another conference on tourism security in Hawai'i. Many of the solutions we called for after the conference in '97 are propositions we still are clamoring for today, such as increased HPD presence in Waikīkī and a boost in video surveillance. At the Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association's recent general membership meeting, I invited international hotelier, president and CEO of Bickson Hospitality Group, and Saint Louis graduate Ray Bickson to moderate one of our educational panels and talk to our board of directors about crisis management. When it comes to this topic, Bickson has had plenty of first-hand experience dealing with disasters: he led crisis management teams at The Mark Hotel in

New York, which he was in charge of during 9/11, and managed the Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces in Mumbai during the 2008 terror attack, among other unfortunate ca-

tastrophes. His message to our board was to have plans and policies in place for minor incidents as well as worst-case scenarios and to conscientiously update them.

HLTA also recently partnered with HHVISA and the Visitor Aloha Society of Hawai'i (VASH) for a talk-story session with Dr. Tarlow, who continues to be a respected tourism security resource and expert. During his session with HLTA's board of directors and members of HHVISA, Dr. Tarlow shared thought-provoking perspectives on the recent mass shooting in Las Vegas, the hurricanes in the Caribbean, Florida and Texas, and the ever-present threat from North Korea. Dr. Tarlow understands that strong security measures equal strong tourism numbers, so it is of utmost importance that we continue to stay

vigilant on this front. He reminded the group that it only takes one manmade or natural disaster for our visitor statistics to plummet and for tourism in Hawai'i to take a negative turn.

We are already in discussions with Tarlow, Bickson and important stakeholders like the Waikīkī Improvement Association, HHVISA, VASH, Waikīkī area Councilman Trevor Ozawa and others to stage another Visitor Crime Solutions Conference in collaboration with HPD and key government organizations and the hospitality industry. As we all know, the world we live in today is very different from the 1990s, but the bottom line, to borrow a page from the Boy Scouts motto, remains the same: "Be Prepared."

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