

Hawaii Tourism Slumps on Heels of Smoking Ban

HONOLULU, Hawaii – Mar. 12 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – According to Travel Hawaii LLC, Hawaii's tourism industry is in a slump, with overall January arrivals down nearly 6 percent from January 2006 and the lucrative Japanese market down over 12 percent. The decline comes on the heels of Hawaii's strict new smoking ban, which went into effect in November, and some in the tourism industry wonder whether the smoking ban is chasing away a good portion of Hawaii's traditional clientele.

Japan is considered a "smoker's paradise" relative to the U.S., and some observers feel that the cigarette-puffing Japanese tourists are being deterred from visiting Hawaii, in favor of more smoker-friendly destinations. "We've had several Japanese clients with pre-paid bookings cancel their reservations because they couldn't get a smoking room," said Chris Freas, Sales Manager at Travel Hawaii, a Hawaii-based Internet retailer (Travel-Hawaii.com).

Since the smoking ban went into effect, Hawaii's hotels have become decidedly non-friendly to smokers. Entire large hotel chains – including Outrigger, Marriott, and ResortQuest – have banned smoking everywhere in their hotels, offering no smoking rooms or smoking areas anywhere in their hotels.

The most draconian of smoking policies, perhaps, belongs to ResortQuest, a moderately-priced chain of 29 hotels and condos. Clients checking in to a ResortQuest hotel in Hawaii are required to sign an agreement that they will be liable for a cleaning fee of \$425 should the hotel determine that they have smoked in their room.

The Outrigger chain, with 25 hotels and condos, charges a cleaning fee of \$150 should a client smoke in one of their rooms, though they don't require the client to sign a separate agreement.

"The imposition of such cleaning fees is good news for non-smokers," said Freas, "as there's little chance they'll check into a room that has that telltale odor." But such policies will, of course, chase away a portion of potential clients who consider smoking a necessity.

Other hotel chains – such as Starwood and Prince – have dramatically limited the number of smoking rooms and smoking areas in their hotels. Smaller chains and individual hotels have a wide variety of new smoking policies, so smokers should do their research before traveling. A good place to start is the compendium of Hawaii hotel smoking policies that can be found on Travel Hawaii's web site at: <http://Travel-Hawaii.com/smoking.html>.

"We believe the smoking ban is indeed having an impact on the Hawaii tourism market," said John Lindelow, owner of Travel Hawaii. "Sales to Japanese travelers, in particular, are down considerably compared to last year, and we can't help but wonder about the correlation between the ban and this slump in

our industry.”

Figures released by the Hawaii State Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism on Feb 27 indicate that arrivals from the U.S. West Coast were actually up by 1.4 percent for January, while arrivals from East Coast residents were down a whopping 9 percent. “Again, we can’t help wondering about this correlation,” said Lindelow, “since the West Coast states have, on average, a lower percentage of smokers than the East Coast and Mid-West states.”

About Travel Hawaii LLC

Founded in 1997 by computer scientist John Lindelow and travel agency owner Roz Rapozo, Travel Hawaii has become a leading Internet booking service for consumers wishing to vacation in Hawaii. Travel Hawaii maintains sophisticated online booking systems and databases focused on Hawaii travel.

For more information on the smoking policies of Hawaii hotels, visit Travel-Hawaii.com/smoking.html.

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