

# Hawaii Tourism optimistic despite drop in stopover traffic

By Lee Mylne

**O**PTIMISM is the watchword for Hawaii Tourism after a year in which visitor numbers from Australia were down by about 10 per cent.

Hawaii Tourism Oceania (HTO) country manager Australia, Helen Williams, says although official figures are not yet available for 2009, it is expected that the number of Australians heading to the Islands of Aloha will come in at around 130,000.

"Visitor numbers were about 10 per cent below those for 2008 through to the end of November," she says.

Williams says much of the reduction in numbers was due to a drop in the number of stopovers being booked, with visitors heading to Hawaii as their sole destination increasing by one per cent.

"The main reason for that was that there was so much discounting on non-stop services to mainland USA, which almost eliminated the stopover business."

Recent months have seen things improve, although she says Hawaii will still struggle overall to achieve numbers like those of two years ago.

"Numbers started to pick up in August and September, and November in particular was up on the previous



Hawaii Tourism Authority / Sri Maiava Rusden

Visitors numbers to Hawaii are starting to pick up after a drop in stopover traffic from the Australian market as a result of airlines discounting non-stop services to mainland USA.

year," she says. "Wholesalers are telling us that they have seen that trend as well, with some growth in business in the last few months of 2009."

Williams says she is optimistic about 2010 and there is "a lot of positivity out of the Australian market" despite a strong Australian dollar which has also had an impact on the market.

"The hotels have done a great job managing pricing last year and going forward. They have not increased rates and have offered a lot of value-add, and will continue to do that in 2010.

"The airlines are also being very pro-active in bringing out package deals in the market; Jetstar has phenomenal deals at the moment, and that's all helping to create a buzz about the place."

Williams says HTO will continue to work closely with the travel trade this year, with a lot of emphasis on online training for agents, a strong presence at the Discover America shows, and its annual Aloha Down Under event in May and Experience Aloha megafamil in November.

"We are working with retail agents and wholesalers on a co-operative

advertising strategy and supporting them in as many ways as we can," she says.

"Our MICE business is really starting to pick up too, with a 40 per cent increase in enquiries from the Australian market.

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"Hawaii is a great destination for small groups, associations and clubs – 20 to 30 people – and we're seeing interest from groups from golf clubs and other sporting clubs.

"A large contingent of Hawaiian partners will be at AIME, waving the Hawaiian flag and hoping to pick up more of that business," says Williams.

More Australians are also taking an interest in sports events and festivals,

"the cultural component that makes Hawaii unique", she says.

Among the many special events likely to attract visitors to Hawaii this year is the Nā Hōkū O Hawai'i Music Festival – Hawaii's answer to the Grammy Awards.

The festival will be held from May 27 to 30 at the Hawaii Convention Centre and throughout Waikiki, and includes the Hawai'i Academy of Recording Arts Nā Hōkū Hanohano Awards.

Supported by a \$US150,000 grant from the Hawaii Tourism Authority, it focuses on Hawaiian music, arts, and crafts through workshops, demonstrations, exhibitions and performances and is expected to attract about 5000 people.

"HTA sees the Nā Hōkū O Hawai'i Music Festival not only as a way to boost travel to Hawaii during a typically slower season, but also as way to showcase our talented artisans and musicians on a global scale," said Hawaii Tourism Authority president and chief executive Mike McCartney.

Williams says it is hoped that some Australian wholesalers will package the festival.



HTA / Sri Maiava Rusden

sellingHawaii

# Allan 'pleasantly surprised' by Hawaii

WITH a large group of clients in the planning stages of a Hawaii trip for a wedding later this year, Allan Piggot decided it was time to update his knowledge of the Islands of Aloha – a destination he had last visited about 15 years ago.

Having completed Hawaii Tourism's Ke Kula online training program, Allan applied to take part in the "Experience Aloha" super-family last November.

"One of the main reasons I wanted to go was I have a wedding party going in May – 30 or 40 people – and I wanted to make sure the properties they had chosen were alright," said Allan, who is travel manager at Jetset Singleton, in the centre of the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales.

And the reality more than lived up to his expectations.

"I was pleasantly surprised," he says. "I had heard a lot from other travel agents, only to find out that it was not as expensive as I'd been led to believe."

Allan's eight-night stay took in the islands of Maui and Oahu. On Maui, he took an ATV Adventure in a 4WD dune buggy, cruised and snorkelled to Molokini

Island, visited the Maui Ocean Centre, did a helicopter tour to Molokai and took part in a surfing school. He rates the heli-tour as "really worthwhile", and says that after the well-run surfing lessons "we all thought we were champions".

On Oahu he visited the factory outlets, Pearl Harbor, the Polynesian Cultural Centre and a number of hotels including the newly opened Trump International Hotel Waikiki Beach Walk.

"At \$7000 a night for the penthouse, I'm not sure it will appeal to many Australians," he says, noting however that the suite sleeps 16 to 18 people.

More to his taste are the iconic Moana Surfrider and the Royal Hawaiian hotel ("the Pink Palace"). But his top pick of the accommodation he saw was the "magnificent" Turtle Bay Resort on Oahu's North Shore.

Overall, Hawaii offers great value for money. "Airlines are so cheap. I prefer to send clients with Hawaiian Airlines, which has some great deals at the moment. They have good service and a happy crew and the Hawaiian experience starts as soon as you are on the plane."



Hawaii Tourism Authority / Sri Maiava Rusden



Maile Sky Court Hotel

## Aqua tempts travellers with latest hotel offer

AQUA Hotels and Resorts has announced an introductory special for the most recent addition to its stable, Maile Sky Court Hotel.

"We're eager to have travellers experience this great Waikiki hotel so we're offering a MSC Introductory Special of \$US69 (about \$A80) per night plus taxes for a city view room, with one free room upgrade upon availability," said Aqua's Elizabeth Churchill.

Maile Sky Court is an ideal choice for budget-minded travellers looking for comfortable accommodation in a convenient location. Facilities include a restaurant, sports bar, beauty salon, pool and jacuzzi, business centre and free WiFi in the lobby.

The "MSC Introductory Special" is available until June 30 and is based on single or double occupancy. There is no minimum night stay requirement.

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# Hawaiian Airlines looks forward to new Airbus A330-200

HAWAIIAN Airlines expects to take delivery of the first new Airbus A330-200 in April, one of three that will join the fleet this year, and one of 27 the carrier plans to have by the end of this decade.

The first two A330s will commence servicing the Honolulu-Los Angeles route in June, with the third in the air by November. Hawaiian has also signed a purchase agreement with Airbus to acquire six wide-body A330-200 aircraft (starting in 2012) and six A350XWB-800 (Extra Wide-Body)

aircraft (starting in 2017), as well as purchase rights for an additional six aircraft of each model.

Hawaiian Airlines' Sherilyn Robinson says this will be a plus for the many Australian travellers who make a Hawaiian stopover part of their mainland US travel plans.

The A330 seats 294 passengers in a two-class configuration and offers Hawaiian increased seating capacity coupled with improved fuel efficiency, and a greater operating range. Hawaiian will be able to fly nonstop

to all of North America and points in eastern Asia.

Hawaiian's new A330s will have a state-of-the-art interactive on-demand entertainment system for every passenger. Each system will also include a USB port allowing customers to connect their own media players, while first class seats will be equipped with a larger monitor and iPod compatibility.

From Australia, Hawaiian offers nonstop flights between Sydney and Honolulu on Boeing 767-300 aircraft,

departing mid evening, crossing the international dateline and arriving about 10 hours later, mid-morning the same day. The airline also offers onward connections to neighbouring Maui, Kauai and the Big Island of Hawaii, and to 10 destinations on the US mainland.

Hawaiian has also begun implementing new fuel saving "Winglet technology" on its B737s, a green initiative which will significantly reduce fuel usage and carbon dioxide emissions.

## Creative expands Hawaii offerings, from luxury to 'low rates'

CREATIVE Holidays has expanded its Hawaii range for 2010, catering for growing demand, according to general manager sales, marketing and product, Andrew Yell.

Waikiki Beach Walk. Rooms are priced from \$262 per person per night.

Yell says the best value hotels for Australians visiting Hawaii continue to be Aqua Waikiki Beach Hotels and Resorts on Oahu, which have eight different hotels on offer with Creative Holidays, providing "fantastic value for money and low rates".

Clients who book through Creative Holidays can get five nights for the price of four across all Aqua Waikiki Beach Hotels and Resorts until March 31, 2011 (not valid on Q value or Savvy Saver rates).

"Since the launch of Hawaiian Airlines' flights from Sydney in May 2004, Hawaii has boomed with Australian travellers," says Yell. "With the introduction of more flights to Hawaii and with Jetstar now also in the mix offering competitive fares, the number of Australians heading to Hawaii to enjoy the year-round surf, sand and sun continues to grow."

He says most Australians heading to the Aloha State still stay exclusively in Waikiki. "At the moment only a small per cent of travellers are taking advantage of the great experiences available on the outer islands, offering agents an untapped market to provide a higher level of specialised service to up-sell," he says.



The new range includes exclusive mini-stay packages, cruising, car hire, hotel and apartment accommodation, sightseeing options and inter-island/international flight transfers available for travel to Oahu, Maui, Hawaii and Kauai.

For agents with clients looking for a little more luxury in Waikiki, Creative has added the Trump International (pictured above), which opened last November, to its offering. The five-star hotel is one of the first ultra-luxury properties in Hawaii and is near Waikiki's famous white sand beaches and the new

## Agents increase earnings with Outrigger specialist program

SAVVY travel agents – including Australians – used the Outrigger Hospitality Specialist Program during last year's economic slowdown to increase their earnings, according to Outrigger Hospitality vice president of distribution Lois Shore.

The program, launched a year ago, will be expanded in 2010 and is receiving high marks from travel agents for its user-friendly technology, in-depth product curriculum, and competitive agent incentive program.

According to Outrigger Hospitality vice president of distribution Lois Shore, almost 4000 travel agents have completed the program, and most have already claimed cash rewards for a significant number of bookings in 2009.

The program is open to all travel agents with proper credentials, and Shore says about seven per cent of those currently enrolled are from Australia and New Zealand.

"The benefits are the same for all agents no matter where they are located," she says. "The program is booking channel neutral – bookings can be made via a tour operator/wholesaler, through a GDS, direct at the property or central reservations

by phone, or online. In fact, many agents from Australia and New Zealand use the booking engine on [www.OutriggerAgent.com](http://www.OutriggerAgent.com) to make their reservations. Agents do not have to be certified Outrigger Hospitality Specialists to use the booking engine, but they must have an account on the website."

The dedicated website offers agent-only information and fast facts on all Outrigger-owned, managed and affiliated hotels, resorts, and condominiums, plus helpful tips and valuable agent alerts.

"Credit goes to these savvy travel professionals who took advantage of the Outrigger program during the economic slow-down to increase their earnings," says Shore.

Among the 2010 promotions are: For every 50th online booking, made before March 31, 2010, agents will receive a \$50 cheque; every 100th booking a \$100 cheque; and every 500th booking a \$500 cheque.

All new client-stay bookings made at any Outrigger condo properties before March 31, 2010, for stays through to December 21, 2010, will earn double Specialist Reward Points.

## OHANA Waikiki Malia unveils \$US6.6m new look

OHANA Waikiki Malia has celebrated the New Year with the completion of its \$US6.6 million (about \$A7.4m) lobby and guest room refurbishment, and is offering introductory rates starting at \$US89 (about \$A100).

All guest rooms in the Malia Tower have been remodeled and include new 32-inch LCD televisions, free high-speed internet access, refrigerator, safe and state-of-the-art energy-efficient air conditioning system. The adjoining low-rise Luana Tower also offers spacious one-bedroom suites featuring kitchenette facilities.

The new hotel lobby has a sophisticated feel, with a cut glass, pineapple-shaped chandelier and curved wooden lamps.

Centrally located on Kuhio Avenue, OHANA Waikiki Malia is a five-minute walk to Waikiki Beach Walk, where guests can present an OHANA room key to any second floor trader and receive a booklet of discount coupons for food and merchandise.

All OHANA guests can also take advantage of the popular Waikiki Connection, which offers a long list of amenities including local phone calls, and free rides on the Waikiki Trolley's Pink Line which runs throughout Waikiki and to Waikiki Beach Walk and Ala Moana Centre.

There are five OHANA properties in Hawaii – four in Waikiki and one at the Honolulu Airport.



OHANA Waikiki Malia king room



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