



MARIANAS VISITORS AUTHORITY
News Release

Tourism is Everybody's Business!

PERRY JOHN P. TENORIO
MVA MANAGING DIRECTOR

For Immediate Release- March 15, 2012
For further information, contact:
Perry John P. Tenorio, Managing Director
Marianas Visitors Authority
Telephone: (670) 664-3200/3201 Facsimile: (670) 664-3237
mva@mymarianas.com
www.mymarianas.com

MVA BEGINS TOURISM MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands (NMI) – The Marianas Visitors Authority (MVA), with the support of a technical assistance grant from the U.S. Department of Interior’s Office of Insular Affairs has announced the completion of the new “CNMI Tourism Master Plan for 2012-2016.” Highlights of the plan will be presented to members of the MVA on March 16, to be followed with publication of the document later this month.

While the plan discusses key marketing challenges and opportunities, it is essentially an economic development plan that is designed to help revitalize a mature tourism industry, according to the MVA. The new Tourism Master Plan addresses a myriad of issues affecting the current performance of tourism. It provides the most robust analysis and collection of tourism statistics ever gathered for the islands to date.

The plan incorporates industry feedback and ideas from more than 130 stakeholders in Saipan, Tinian, Rota, Japan, Korea, China and Guam. It also incorporates the views of more than 2,300 international and American visitors that participated in a *2011 Exit Survey* conducted for MVA at the Saipan International Airport.

For more than 30 years, tourism has provided essential economic support for the people of Saipan, Tinian and Rota. In the year 1997 tourism peaked with 727,000 visitors, but emphasizing the seriousness of the current decline, in FY 2011 the islands received only 338,646 -- a drop of more than 50%.

The plan discusses the fact that to revitalize tourism to an adequate level of economic sustainability, a holistic approach with more support from the community and the government is needed. It states that the industry must target a level of at least 538,000 visitors annually to fill the number of operating hotel rooms. This can be achieved only with adequate international and inter-island transportation, which must also be supported by destination marketing to drive demand.

The plan recommends that the CNMI continue efforts to diversify its tourist markets, identifying special issues for visitors of each nationality based on thorough research. Throughout the plan, relevant best practices from many international and U.S. destinations are given to provide new ideas and approaches to the CNMI's current challenges.

Based on visitor feedback, the islands have an urgent need for new attractions to help remain a competitive visitor destination. Significant projects in nature-based tourism "product development" are identified, including ways to maximize existing opportunities..

To preserve the beauty of snorkeling and scuba diving in key sites, the plan discusses the importance of more rigorously protecting marine resources. It also provides ideas to make better use of valuable, but underutilized cultural assets, including the ancient Chamorro latte stone sites. The plan further identifies the need for a more comprehensive park management approach for the historic Marpi area of Saipan. It also provides a vision for a regional celebration with Guam in connection with the 70th Commemoration of World War II in 2014.

"We would like to extend our appreciation to the planning team and to the Department of Interior Office of Insular Affairs, which funded this project. This document will help us to establish a way forward in improving the CNMI's tourism industry," said MVA Managing Director Perry J. Tenorio. "Since many of the proposed action items and initiatives will involve other government entities and community organizations, MVA looks forward to working with the Office of the Governor in establishing a leadership framework to help implement the plan."

The master plan was developed for MVA by Management Analysis, Incorporated of Vienna, Virginia which coordinated a multi-national team of experts and a nine-member survey team that was hired locally. The project team featured two U.S. and internationally-known tourism economists and individuals who had extensive experience with CNMI tourism. ###