



Hawaii positioned well for a rebound

Economist says safe destination will appeal to Asian tourists

By Rick Daysog

While visitor arrivals to the isles from Asia have plunged with the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, Hawaii is better positioned to recover than competing destinations like San Francisco and New York, according to one well-respected Chinese economist.

Liu Pak-Wai, an economics professor at Chinese University of Hong Kong and a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar representing Hong Kong, said that once the shock of the deadly attack wears off and travelers begin to feel more confident about flying, many Asian travelers will look to Hawaii as a relatively safe destination.

"Tourists will be traveling less because of the September attack, but among all of the destinations, I think Hawaii is safer as far as Asian travelers are concerned," said Liu, who is in town this week to give a talk about Asia's economies at the East-West Center.

"Hopefully, they won't be holding off their travel plans for so long."

Liu likened Hawaii's dilemma to that faced by Hong Kong, which saw its visitor traffic plunge by 30 percent in the days following Sept. 11 attack.

Liu said that tourism officials in Hong Kong, who are already struggling with a recession, said travelers from the United States and Japan curtailed their visits to Hong Kong, just as they did with their trips to Hawaii.

The same as visitor traffic from Asia to Hawaii gradually picked up after the Gulf War in 1991, Liu envisions slow improvements in the eastbound market.

But there are plenty of economic hurdles. Japan's economy has not been able to shake off its 10-year bout with recession and other Asia-Pacific economies such as Singapore, Taiwan, Korea and Thailand are stuck in low-gear thanks in large part to continuing effects from the 1997 Asia currency crisis.

The regional crisis, combined with an U.S. recession, could place additional pressures on travel from the region, Liu said.



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