



**BRANDING STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING
HAWAII TOURISM AUTHORITY
Wednesday, March 27, 2024, at 10 a.m.**

Virtual Meeting

MINUTES OF THE BRANDING STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Blaine Miyasato (Chair), David Arakawa, Dylan Ching, Mufi Hannemann, Mahina Paishon-Duarte
MEMBERS NOT PRESENT:	Menor-McNamara, Sig Zane (Vice-Chair)
HTA STAFF PRESENT:	Daniel Nāho'opi'i, Kalani Ka'anā'anā, Jadie Goo, Caroline Anderson, Maka Casson-Fisher, Iwalani Kūali'i Kaho'ohanohano
GUESTS:	Dennis Suo, Alex Wong, Jay Talwar
LEGAL COUNSEL:	John Cole

1. Call to Order and Opening Protocol

Chair Miyasato called the meeting to order at 10:17 a.m. Mr. Casson-Fisher did the opening cultural protocol by the Nā 'Aumākua pule.

2. Roll Call to Announce Name of Participating Board Members and to Identify Who Else is Present with Board Member if Location is Nonpublic

Ms. Kaho'ohanohano did the roll call, and members were confirmed in attendance by themselves.

3. Approval of Minutes of the November 20, 2023 Branding Standing Committee Meeting

Mr. Hannemann made a motion to approve the minutes, and Mr. Ching seconded. Ms. Kaho'ohanohano did the roll call, and the motion passed unanimously.

4. Presentation and/or Discussion on HTC's China Market Updates

Mr. Suo and Mr. Wong led the presentation. Mr. Suo highlighted what happened in the China market. China opened in January 2023. In terms of total China outbound travel in 2023, there was a recovery of 87 million trips. Pre-pandemic, there were 160 million trips. So, it is about a 50% recovery. The recovery is to the short-haul destinations, like Southeast Asia, Japan, and Korea. Long-haul travel includes Europe, the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand, which is lagging behind short-haul travel.

There is a strong recovery in the Europe market. The U.S. market had 850,000 Chinese visitors in 2023, compared to the pre-pandemic, which was 2.9 million. In terms of flight development between China and the U.S., before November 2023, there were only about 48 direct flights between the U.S. and China. The latest development is that by March 31, it will have 100 flights between the U.S. and China. The recovery pace is strong. This is double in terms of flights. There were 350 flights during the pre-pandemic time.

The total number of Chinese visitors to the U.S. is recovering well. Going forward, there has been significant progress between the two countries. The China-U.S. tourism leadership summit will be held in China from May 21 to May 23. Both sides will have tourism board leaders, and they will meet to discuss how to improve development between the two countries. The HTC will conduct the first China travel mission in China, partnered with ITB Shanghai, one of the most influential and well-known travel trade shows. The industry stakeholders will be invited. So far, they have received a great turnout, and about eleven companies and entities signed up for the China travel mission, including hotels, attractions, tour operators, and island chapters. It will take place in Shanghai from May 27 to May 29, and in Beijing, it will be on May 31. The Beijing event will have a panel with the U.S. embassy Beijing, commercial service department. They will arrange the industry networking event with the U.S. embassy in Beijing. They have been working closely with the embassy, the U.S. consulate in China, and Education USA over the past few years.

The main objective of the ongoing partnership is to get a U.S. visa for all Chinese travelers. Because one of their target markets is the family and student market, the other objective is to get Chinese students their visas. About 300,000 Chinese students are starting their studies in the U.S. The third objective is to leverage all the resources from the embassy, consulate, Brand USA, and other state tourism leaders. The market is recovering well, and they are thinking about moving the initiative further and getting more support for the coming projects. Mr. Suo shared some of the updates.

Mr. Wong asked if there were any questions. Chair Miyasato said that when he and the Chair had a conversation, they spoke about sister states and their relationships. He said it worked well in Japan, and Korea is also starting to be effective. He asked for any thoughts on that. Mr. Suo said they have a seven-sister-city relationship between China and Hawai'i. There are two state-level sister relationships. One is the Hainan province, which had a successful event in August of the previous year. The lieutenant governor from Hainan province came to visit Hawai'i in 2023. They have been leveraging the Hainan provincial government. They had a great discussion with Hainan Airlines, the number four airline in China. They discussed how Hainan Airlines could initiate a non-stop direct flight from Beijing to Honolulu. There will be about 100 flights weekly between the U.S. and China, with 15 new flights weekly. Hainan Airlines is also trying to get new flight rights between the U.S. and China. They will then start to apply for non-stop direct flights. Fuzhou, the capital city of the Fujian province, and Honolulu have sister city relation for two years. The lieutenant governor of the Fujian province visited Hawai'i and met Lt. Governor Luke, Rep. Quinlan, and City Councilman Calvin Say the previous week. They expressed great interest in viewing the sister-state relationship between Fujian province and the state of Hawai'i. The Fujian community is growing strong. Based on the sister-state relationships, they can leverage many business opportunities in the future.

Mr. Arakawa asked if there are any direct flights between China and Hawai'i, the status, and the number of people. Mr. Suo mentioned they are in the recovery phase, as mentioned earlier. There are 100 flights. From the airline perspective, they always look at the top cities to recover first, e.g. Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and Chicago, to connect to the first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou. The first-tier cities are defined as cities with a population of 20 million. As a first stage, they want to connect the hub cities. Hawai'i is considered a leisure destination as there is not much business, and it is a student market. Mr. Suo reiterated that the Hainan to Hawai'i non-stop flights mentioned earlier are still being negotiated.

Mr. Arakawa said there has never been a direct flight from China to Hawai'i. Mr. Wong said that currently there are no direct flights from China to Hawai'i. Prior to the pandemic, China Eastern flew from Shanghai to Honolulu, but that ended in February 2020. There are currently hundreds of connecting flights between China, going through Seoul, Korea, and Japan to Hawai'i. Mr. Arakawa asked if they could calculate how many Chinese visitors are coming so they could measure their marketing efforts to see if they must put more money into the Chinese market. He asked if the future reports could detail this information. Mr. Suo said that, at the pre-pandemic time, they had three direct flights, namely Air China, from

Beijing to Honolulu, and Hawaiian Airlines from Beijing to Honolulu. Currently the most convenient or economical way for Chinese visitors going to Hawai'i is to transit from Tokyo or Seoul. All other flights have over 300 flights combined, flying to China (over 20 cities). For Chinese people, one transit is very convenient. The previous year, there were 13,000 Chinese visitors. He said there is complexity in the Asia market, namely Japan and Korea. The Chinese visitors are coming from multiple places, and those passengers are difficult to track as Chinese visitors. A lot of Chinese visitors are coming from L.A. and San Francisco. The weekly social media campaign updates through WeChat, Little Red Book, and Weibo reach out to Chinese not only in China because they are in various countries. Chinese social media presence is critical for the Chinese-speaking population worldwide.

Mr. Arakawa asked if Chair Miyasato could elaborate on some of that information, including the questions about sister-city or state relationships. Chair Miyasato agreed with Mr. Arakawa. He said that when the time is right, they need the details he requests to help them make good, educated decisions about where they spend their dollars.

Mr. Hannemann asked about the sister states and cities. He asked where the other existing state relationships are. Mr. Suo said it is Guangdong province. Mr. Hannemann said the two sister-state relationships existed when he was the director of DBEDT in the 90's, which means they have not grown the sister-state relationships, so they have been stagnant. They need to identify where they can develop the sister state relationships. There is a growing Chinese presence in Hawai'i from Fujian province. He said they must start a new sister-state relationship in China. Mr. Suo said that besides the Fujian province, there are also other big provinces that they can hopefully develop.

5. Presentation and/or Discussion on HTUSA'S New Campaign

Mr. Talwar did the presentation. He spoke about who they target. All the messaging is focused on the mindful Hawai'i target traveler, who is the right audience for them. They spend the appropriate level; they travel frequently, and travel mindfully. The messaging update they want to share is to evolve the invitation to visit statewide and then to continue creating demands for Maui with the Maui plan. As a reminder, all they do is consistent with paid media, earned media, travel trade education, and marketing programs. As they pick a strategy, all the funds are behind it in full force. The new message is that they have been a creative production factory for the last month and a half and will continue this through the rest of the year. Coming out of COVID, they already had good fortune with great ambassadors across the state, helping them with the Mālama Hawai'i messaging. After COVID, travel was seen differently. The destinations that people felt safe in were limited and

mostly domestic. Hawai'i did well, and the essence of the Mālama Hawai'i message resonated well and increased the desire to visit the destination by over 15 points. This is the most they had seen. Times are different now, and people are eager to travel out of the U.S. market and are doing so to the point where some of the planes are moving now from the continent of Hawai'i to the European continent. They feel the competition and are revolving their messaging around the changing times.

In terms of the message evolution, it shows where they have been with Mālama Hawai'i and all of Maui. The Mālama Maui component worked closely with the HTA staff and the committee and Board to allow the people of Maui to speak. They created a platform to share how they managed life, post wildfires and how visitation would help them. At the same time, they had more visitor-orientated messaging to show more dimension to the brand, which was state-wide. Those were the digital and social guidebooks. At the beginning of the following week, they will have new messaging rolling out, continuing through summer.

Mr. Talwar showed some of the social media creatives and the filming they did. They are also looking a bit closer at traveler behavior. Just about everyone has a smartphone with a camera, and they are looking to get more traction on their messaging and get it out to their audiences. Another thing they have seen is the point of view method. On social media, people are using the angle to share more immersive stories. It is more noticeable and gains more traction. Getting a fresh perspective is also a good way to bring traction. Hawai'i cuisine is another attraction, and they have a good story to tell.

Mr. Talwar shared the focus they have on the budget for Maui recovery. On Google, there is still a lot of talk about wildfires, so they need to let everyone know that Maui is open to mindful travel. The messaging timeline for Maui started with the Ola Maui group of ambassadors who already shared the richness of Maui across the island. They supplemented that with a travel guide that showed all the amazing activities and unique experiences. They had a crew working with the people of Maui, producing the messages. Those are running through the end of the month, when they will transition to the new one. One of them is the status update. When they started messaging, they ran into competition where other people said they must not visit Maui. Those people are still out there with that messaging. He said they must also share their experiences across the island to gain traction.

They are also developing a short film, 15 things to do on Maui in 15 seconds, on social media. There will also be several creative versions of this. He spoke about sharing the adventure of traveling to Hawai'i. He said they also pay close attention to the U.S. mindful traveler and what motivates them.

The biggest travel trends to expect in 2024 includes sky and sea travel. This gives them the chance to talk about astro tourism. The PR team will use the same messaging for their virtual media blitz. They are partnering with Mana Up and Shopify to create a pop-up in New York. In May, they will be in Northern California for a media blitz. The media will also be there. Right after that they go to Healdsburg for the food and wine experience. They will do a fundraising for the Maui recovery, so they are connecting with partners across Maui, and they have stepped up. There will be a full event focused primarily on Maui, Maui products, and producers. A few hotel partners and retail outlets work with makers on Maui, so their products will be there. The audience is high net worth - multiple international travel trips per year, so influential with other travelers, and they attract top-tier media.

Chair Miyasato said he liked the tonal change in the presentation and thanked Mr. Talwar for the presentation. He said they must get the mindful traveler to come back and recognize other opportunities they have. Mr. Hannemann said the Mālama campaign has worked very well and is embedded in everything else they have been pivoting towards. He said he looks forward to what the Brand Marketing Campaign can do for them. Mr. Arakawa asked if they could present this at the Board meeting. Mr. Talwar said he could try to fit it under the Chairman's comments. Chair Miyasato said he is hesitant to go out to the full Board without having more conversations about their pivot. He said the conversation should be robust, and once they have full input about the plan and the pivot, they can move from there. Mr. Hannemann said he could mention it at the Board meeting but not discuss it in full, as it would be good for the Board members to know.

Chair Miyasato said it is about balance and ensuring they are not tone-deaf to the community. Mr. Ching said the times and dates when the pivot happens are important. There need to be markers when this happens so that they all speak the same language when talking to different people and the media. Chair Miyasato said those were meaningful observations. He said they will know when the pivot will occur at the next Branding Standing committee. He said he was happy for Mr. Hannemann to reference it at the Board meeting and then have a more robust conversation at the next Branding Standing Committee meeting. Mr. Ching said the process had been long, and it would be good for them to know how long a campaign takes to follow through. Mr. Hannemann asked that they schedule this at the next Branding Standing Committee meeting to make it in time for the April Board meeting. He reminded this committee that the other deadline is the legislature session at the end of April. It will be good for the legislature to know how wise they have been in listening to the community, working with the contractors, etc. to have an effective message as it

builds on the successes of their campaigns. He said they are making strides in what they are expected to do. There were no further questions.

6. Discussion and/or Discussion on Planning for Long-Term Tourism Marketing Strategy

7. Adjournment

The adjournment was moved by Chair Miyasato, seconded by Mr. Ching, and carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 11:17 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Sheillane Reyes
Recorder