

"Russia is a very different market"

20th January 2012

20<http://www.guampdn.com/article/20120120/NEWS01/201200301>

As the Lunar New Year approaches, businesses in Guam's hotel and restaurant industry are looking forward to a busy start this year. More flights are coming out from China, Taiwan and South Korea, said Guam Hotel and Restaurant Association Chairman Bart Jackson.

"It's a good beginning to the year. I expect the new year to be up 10 to 15 percent over 2011," he said.

Guam's tourist arrivals last year won't be as tough to beat compared to the 2010 total. In large part because of the Japan disasters, Guam's total visitor arrivals last year dipped 3 percent, to 1,157,993 tourists.

Jackson cautioned, however, that the travel patterns of Guam's main visitors -- Japanese and South Koreans -- are shifting.

"Japan's outbound travel is declining and Korea outbound is growing, but they are traveling farther and being more adventurous," he said.

Last year, Japanese visitor arrivals dipped 7.8 percent, while South Korean tourist numbers increased 10.7 percent, but Japan makes up the bulk of the arrivals, with 823,699 tourists out of Guam's 1.15 million total arrivals.

When the shift translates to further visitor arrival declines, Jackson said, "we have a lot of empty hotel rooms to fill; to do that we need to diversify."

Jackson spoke at the GHRA's first membership meeting this year.

For the tourism industry to grow, Jackson said Guam will need a visa waiver for tourists from China. The approval of the visa-free entry of Russian tourists to Guam boosted his confidence the island could see the same for Chinese tourists within the end of the year.

"Russia is a very different market," he said, adding it might be a few years until Guam will see a surge in Russian visitor arrivals. The number of Russian visitors who came to Guam last year increased by nearly 50 percent, to 632. But with the Jan. 15 implementation of the visa-free program for Russian visitors, other industry experts have projected that number to double or triple this year."