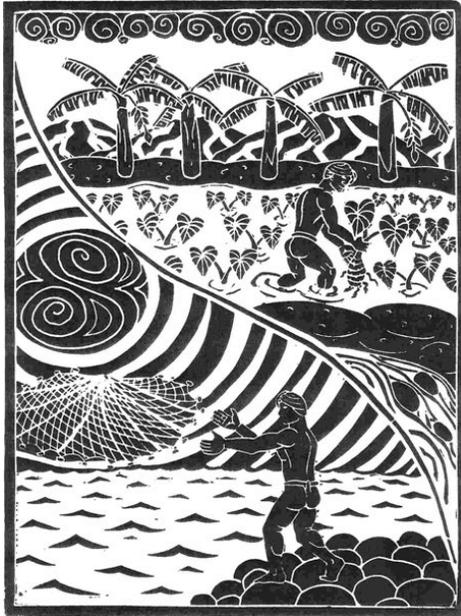# SUSTAINING CULTURALISM AS A KEY COMPONENT OF SUSTAINING MARKET VALUE IN A TOURIST ECONOMY

Aloha kakou. I thank you for the opportunity to join you today and share some thoughts about cultural tourism which I do on behalf of the Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association. We are a private non-profit organization and our membership is open to any individual or organization who support our effort to bring a higher presence of the host Hawaiian culture into the mainstream of Hawaii's visitor industry.

THE GLOBAL EXPERIENCE OF MASS TRAVEL

I'd like to begin my remarks by first visiting the global experience of mass travel to create a context for addressing sustainable culturalism and its relationship to sustaining market share.

MASS TRAVEL WILL CHANGE THE WORLD

Mass travel, of which seventy five percent is tourism travel, is today about a three and a half trillion dollar industry. Within the first quarter century of the new millennium economists predict it will soar upwards of 8 trillion to make it the world's largest growth industry. Why are we so sure that the growth curve will maintain itself? Because the urge to travel is one of the purest of human urges. It is the urge to see the world, the urge to meet other people and see how they live, the urge to see the world's great and famous wonders. Traveling for pleasure not only informs and excites us – it in fact possesses us. In addition to the stratospheric numbers - more than any other phenomena of the last hundred years which includes nuclear power, television, computers, and so forth – mass travel will be the one that will most change the world. Whether these changes present opportunities or controversy for existing and emerging destinations will depend on the quality of the corporate and government leadership in whose hands lie the destiny of the place.

MASS TRAVEL FINDINGS ARE NEW

Consider that mass travel, particularly travel for tourism, is a relatively new phenomenon to the world. It's only in the last 60 years that mass travel has been affordable for large numbers of people and that technologies and travel systems have made it possible to move millions of people around the world swiftly and safely. Tourism has achieved unprecedented levels of sophistication in marketing, transportation systems, transient accommodations and food management. Today, whole armies of tourists descend wave upon wave on the most far flung destinations that only fifty years ago were inaccessible. In my own lifetime in Hawaii

we've gone from a few Pan American Clippers and a couple of Matson ocean liners a week to millions of visitors carried by fleets of jet liners. And yet the industry is so young that only in recent years have we been able to begin measuring the long term impact of tourism on destinations around the globe. One outcome we've observed is a pattern of negative impact on native cultures in locations that are home to native peoples when tourism has emerged as a major part of that community's economy. Sustaining culturalism in these places has been difficult at best. The good news is that the degree to which we benefit from hindsight we are beginning to assign a much higher priority to the presence of culturalism as important to the sustainability of a destination.

CULTURALISM DEFINED

Culturalism or cultural tourism is travel directed toward experiencing the arts, ethnic heritage, and the special character of a place. It is surprisingly the most neglected and misunderstood phenomenon of global tourism and the one from which the industry and local governments are the most distanced when assigning value to a destination's marketability and visitor satisfaction. Genuine culturalism tended to be but a footnote on the value index that guides investment policy in the prevailing corporate and governmental business model of deliberate destination development. In fact, industry leaders are sometimes startled by surveys that suggest exponential increases in the rise of a more sophisticated traveler seeking more than escape. In a Louis Harris survey for Travel and Leisure magazine they found that 80 per cent of frequent travelers gave their highest marks to visiting cultural, archaeological, and historical sites - and that good night life, luxury resorts, and shopping were less important in the traveler's destination choices. This segment of the traveling public are tired of the homogenization of places around the world and genuine experiences of different cultures are an important factor in their travel decisions and expectations. More and more people travel seeking personal enrichment and search for accurate and insightful interpretation of local cultures. For tourism communities across the world this is good news. As we begin to directly connect corporate and government economics to preserving and proliferating the culturalism of a destination the industry then becomes an agent for positive and affirming contributions to the place, its people, and it's life. The 20th century model of destination development made little provision for culturalism and in far too many cases destination development came at the expense of culturalism where the heritage and traditions of local communities that took years and in some cases centuries to create are nudged aside to make room for commodified presentations of culture that compromised the dignity of the place and it's people. The challenge then is how to move from the existing ad hoc approach of destination development to a business model that is culturalism inclusive. A business model that engages all the stakeholders which include the private and public sectors, community organizations, cultural leaders and institutions. A model that   is systematic and dynamic and one that would preserve the destination's culturalism, which ironically, has as much value to the visited as the visitor.

We cannot examine all the aspects of emerging models of destination management that preserve and promote culturalism as fundamental to sustaining the value of a destination. But, we can look at a handful of fundamental challenges that can dramatically affect a destination's ability to compete for market share. The first has to do with the built environment and a phenomenon labeled place-less-ness.

PLACE-LESS-NESS

The condition of place-less-ness emerges whenever the growth of a destination occurs without thoughtful planning and usually results in a diminished presence of a cultural sense of place and a long term de-valuing of the destination for the increasingly demanding traveler. Place-less-ness, in fact, is an emerging condition that is particularly haunting for America. It's a condition that is articulately described in a publication titled Place Makers: Creating Public Art that Tells You Where You Are. With our mass consumerism and our throw away economy we are creating the same kind of banal sameness everywhere. We are witnessing the homogenization of America. It shows up in the strip malls on the way to the nation's airports. It shows up in new urban developments with its architectural dullness of building surface – blank space. It shows up in the obnoxious corporate logo and franchise design that dominate the landscape and turns everyplace into anyplace, USA. It shows up in the billboards and road signs that obliterate any real landscape. All of this, in the aggregate, disconnects us from our past, and worse, it obliterates our very image of ourselves. We are building spaces that never become places. Cultural-less spaces. Roger Kennedy, the director of the National Museum of American History defines "place-less-ness" as the phenomenon of needing "small directional signals deliberately inserted in the monotony of most places to help us know we have arrived somewhere". Place-less-ness is a particular sufferance of a multi-generational community that watched their town go from someplace to no-place as they continually search for ways to re-connect to an environment that speaks to them and defines the place as theirs. For a visitor destination the conversion from someplace to no-place leads to declining interest in the destination and loss of market share.

CULTURALISM AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

In architectural and landscape development terms place-less-ness is generated by development projects that have no sense of meaning to the people who have to live in and around it. These projects lack any decorative richness that celebrates who we are. Nor do they do much to generate a feeling of belonging or to secure any harmony about a place. They lack any sense of a past nor have any future value for the cultures that surround it. They become impalements on the landscape that diminishes the cultural landscape and the presence of heritage. We tend to refer to this as losing our sense of place.   To be clear the message is not that all new development is the enemy of culturalism. On the contrary it can be dramatically effective in connecting culturalism past to culturalism future. In their consideration of new development, people are not so concerned about freezing landscapes in time as they are in wanting development design that is more naturally evolutionary of the place. Development that connects the past to the future and development that is symbiotically connected to both preservation and conservation. So, decision makers who exert any primary influence in the development of a destination would do well to tread cautiously and guard against reshaping their community into another place-less wonder by inclusive planning that gives a voice to those who stand the most to lose. The people who claim the place as their home. The host population.

THE PRIMACY OF THE PLACE

Most of the conditions that determine the amount of culturalism present in a destination are related to the primacy of the place. If any of you had participated in a George Kanahele ho`okipa workshop you are familiar with his guest, host, and place model of sustainability. A

visitor experience occurs whenever a guest, a host, and a place converge. The order of importance we place on each can yield dynamically different results over an extended period of time. the business of tourism is about managing the convergence. The prevailing business model to manage the encounters is to compete for holding visitors time (and money) captive for as much of their length of stay as possible. So the visitor emerges as the highest priority for attention. The customer is always right model. And in our rush to accommodate and manipulate what we believe to be visitor demands for creature comforts, as well as competing for control of their access to experiences, bizarre things start to happen. First, we start to change the destination so that over time it begins to look like the lace the visitor was trying to escape from; and second,, the host community and the cultural experiences they used to be able to offer directly to the visitor falls victim to a giant wall of corporate commerce. A juggernaut of a sales and marketing gatekeeper system springs up the disenfranchises and alienates the host community. They are replaced by a surrogate host brandishing fabricated culturalism. Ironically, when this model is played out long enough – the visitor also becomes a victim.

A native Hawaiian model of destination development would treasure the place as the most important element of sustainable growth. The logic of the primacy of place is that it is the element central to the experience of both the host and the guest. The integrity of the place is the key to sustaining the quality of the visitor experience. It is also the key to sustaining the goodwill of the host community. The place manifests itself as a cultural landscape that cradles everything that defines the people who live their. Traditions, customs, historic sites, and institutions. A sense of place that gives value to the visitor experience and lends pride and dignity for the host. To be clear,
the principle of place first by no means precludes development and growth. But it demands quality growth that accommodates the fundamental societal need for the community to celebrate itself as part of the business model.

ACCESSING CULTURALISM
Another important aspect of the presence of culturalism in a destination is visitor access to authentic and meaningful cultural experiences. But Hawaii's experience has been that the mere presence of culturalism in a place or the fact that our host culture practitioners are ready and willing to share their cultural practices does not mean that visitors have access to that culturalism. The deepest forms of culturalism, which generally translate to high levels of visitor satisfaction are cultural presentations and experiences that invite intimacy between the host and the hosted.

Hawaiians are continually disappointed when they try to confront the realities of Hawaii's contemporary visitor industry landscape. Hawaii's visitor industry paradigm has emerged largely as a model of exclusion of the host culture. While the exclusion may not have been deliberate or mean-spirited the fact is that Hawaiian people and cultural practitioners are distanced from the hospitality centers of Hawai`i. Opportunities for Hawaiians to engage the visitor on their own terms and under conditions that allow them to present themselves with dignity in genuine cultural encounters are at best difficult to find. That gatekeeper system, the wall of commerce that is completely dominated by paid advertising separates the host from the guest. It puts the visitor beyond access by the host culture. The tragedy is that one of the

world's greatest societies of natural hosts, the Hawaiian people, are essentially disenfranchised from a cultural activity that is so basic to their nature – the art of welcoming strangers – the practice of ho`okipa. It's tragic that our lei sellers, those beautiful people who lit up Kalakaua Avenue in Waikiki and sprinkled their magic were nudged aside so many years ago and are now replaced with we parrot people, aluminum men, and handbillers.

HAWAIIAN CULTURALISM
So what does genuine Hawaiian culturalism look like? Genuine culturalism is cultural activity that exists for its own sake. Cultural practices and traditions that would occur with or without tourists. Traditions and ceremonies that the host culture engages in for themselves. For instance a hula halau or hula school exists for its own sake. If there were no tourists. the halau would exist. As a visitor experience a formal hula performance staged by a hula school is a deep and moving experience. This is in contrast to the Las Vegas style stage productions of hula we are used to seeing at the hotel luau which may be entertaining but lacks the spiritual power of a halau that touches the heart. Visitors seldom have the opportunity to encounter such an experience because these performances occur outside the scope of the gatekeeper sales and marketing system. There are scores of similar cultural experiences throughout Hawaii's communities to which visitors are welcome but seldom seen. This kind of genuine cultural activity is not tourism dependent but are sometimes a threat to the status quo because they have the potential of luring the visitor away from mainstream ticketed and commissioned events. It's unfortunate to think that visitors spend thousands of dollars to come and see Hawai`i and then leave without the benefit of encountering at least one or two high quality  Hawaiian cultural experiences.  It's particularly unfortunate for them to leave thinking that they had really experienced Hawai`i.

CONNECTING TO CULTURALISM
So the challenges of connecting visitors to genuine Hawaiian culturalism remain. Is it available on demand? Are culturalism experiences and choices known to the traveler? How do you find it? These challenges are being met by the Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association in its creation of the Native Hawaiian Information Alliance. The Alliance is a consortium of corporate and government sponsors. It is a bold initiative to launch an integrated-media information management program that will directly connect the local community, visitors and visitor industry organizations with native Hawaiian cultural events, activities, literature, art, crafts, music, healing arts, historic sites and any information that serves to perpetuate, preserve, protect, ad promote native Hawaiian culture with dignity and integrity. The project will address the "access to genuine Hawaiian culturalism" challenge by instituting an alternative non-advertising driven information system that utilizes all media formats and one that has the potential for market saturation. This is an important initiative that will go a very long way in positioning Hawai`i as a destination where visitors are provided a great menu of culturalism opportunities and choices on demand.

As a challenge the business of culturalism in Hawai`i extends far beyond the host Hawaiian culture. As one of the world's greatest multi-cultural societies Hawai`i culturalism opportunities includes Japanese, Chinese, Okinawan, Filipino, Portuguese, Puerto Rican, all the Pacific Island cultures and others.

The subject of cultural sustainability and sustainable tourism is fast growing into a deliberate discipline of new assumptions and rules governing growth and we have to hope that corporate boards and governments who preside over the global growth of tourism will continue to recognize the fundamental value of preserving culturalism to creating a successful and sustainable visitor experience.

Travel and tourism can be a wonderful industry. Socially and culturally, Travel and Tourism offers the opportunity of providing jobs for minority and disadvantaged groups, bringing adequate training in management skills, education and technology to local people and increasing incomes in rural and local economies, thereby contributing to the alleviation of poverty in developing countries. Again, the challenge is to move from the existing ad hoc approach to destination development, to one that can evolve new patterns of managing travel and tourism businesses in a more systematic and dynamic way. It is inevitable that for any destination to survive 21st century competition there must be a transition to sustainable development strategies that are culturalism inclusive. It's an opportunity for the industry to confirm itself as a solution rather than a contributor to the economic, social and environmental challenges we face.

The way forward is to create strong partnerships between the private and public sectors. Governments are only just beginning to take a more decisive role on the sustainability question and in diminishing the rise of hostile hosts wherever tourism has grown at the expense of local cultures and their landscapes. To repeat an earlier theme, more than any other world phenomenon -television, nuclear power, computers – travel and tourism will be the one that will most change the world. It is the one industry that has the greatest chance of realizing world peace. It presents unprecedented opportunities to share our cultures and traditions. To build bridges of understanding. The most challenging barriers to world peace are not political. They are cultural. Tourism offers us the chance to learn and grow together as global citizens sharing the same finite Mother Earth.