

YOUR MONEY

PATA pushes Micronesia brand

By Amritha Alladi

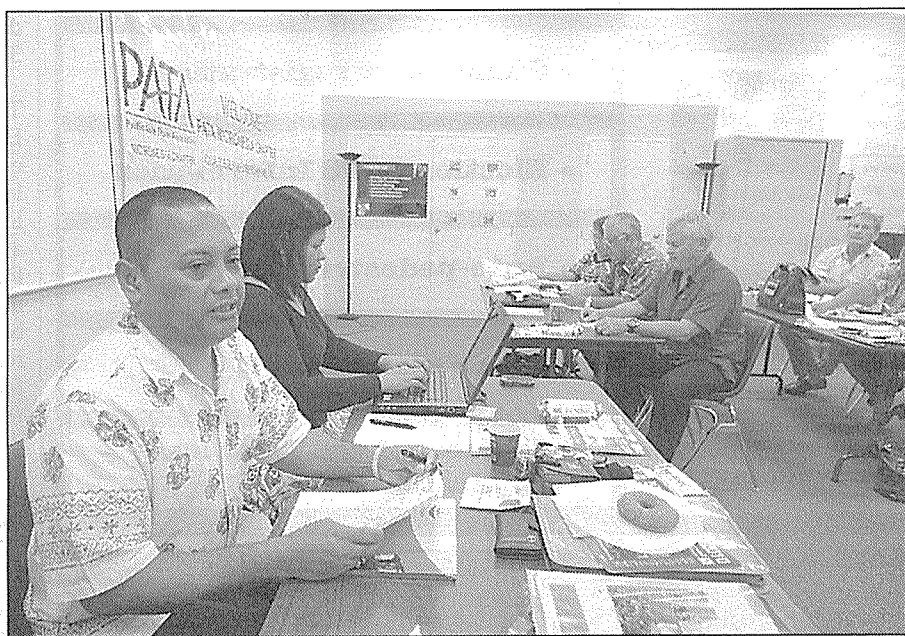
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An island-hopping cruise liner and community-based geo-tourism initiatives are among some of the tentative projects the Pacific Asia Travel Association Micronesia Chapter is working to bring to fruition, with the support of the chief executives in the region, said the chapter's chairman, Darin De Leon.

PATA members from Guam, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands have been meeting this week to discuss ways in which to brand Micronesia as a single destination to promote tourism within the region, De Leon said.

"We find that it's more effective when we're marketing and promoting that we do it at a regional level. It's much easier than spending so much time and effort explaining each of the individual islands and where we're located," he said.

He said the challenge will be in marketing Micronesia as the umbrella under which all the separate islands come together. For now, he said, the chapter's plan is to play up the eight distinct cultures within the single region of Micronesia. The problem is that many foreigners don't even know where some of the islands are located, De Leon said.



Masako Watanabe/Pacific Daily News/mwatanabe@guampdn.com

Single destination: Pacific Asia Travel Association Micronesia Chapter Chairman Darin De Leon, left, starts the group's tri-annual meeting at the Continental Micronesia office in Tiyan yesterday.

"I have to promote Micronesia first, and then Palau," he said, adding that this is the approach PATA has taken at international trade fairs including the JATA World Travel Fair: the group first promotes Micronesia as a single region, and then identifies each of the specific islands as possible tourist destinations, said De Leon, who is also the managing director of the Palau Visitors Authority.

ON THE NET

▲ Pacific Asia Travel Association:
www.pata.org
▲ Magnificent Micronesia:
www.magnificentmicronesia.com

Thus far, the PATA Micronesia Chapter has launched a Magnificent Micronesia Web site, hosted by the Pacific Daily News, De Leon said. It was formerly hosted at www.Hawaii.com, but the PATA Micronesia Chapter members thought it was best for Micronesia tourism to have its own URL, De Leon said. All eight jurisdictions — Guam, CNMI, Palau, Yap, Kosrae, Chuuk, Pohnpei and the Marshall Islands

— are represented on the site, he said.

Additionally, the chapter is pushing for all of the Micronesian islands to jointly market the Guam Micronesia Island Fair. Although several of them take part in the event, De Leon said it will benefit all of the islands to be more actively involved in publicizing the fair.

"We all respectively do our own fairs, but we find that the GMIF is more exposed and draws more participation from all of the islands," he said.

The organization's long-term initiatives include the

push to launch a Micronesian cruise liner. De Leon said the various islands' tourism directors are working with chief executives to figure out how to chart a possible course such that all of the islands benefit, and so that tourists can experience the local cultures at leisure.

According to Monte Mesa, the Port Authority of Guam's Board chairman, an average of nine cruises pass through Guam's commercial port each year. While the Port can support cruise ships that pass, he said the facility still needs to go through improvements to make it more welcoming for tourists who may stop on the island for longer visits.

Meanwhile, the chapter is also working on establishing geo-tourism, in which the local community identifies and explains the sites on their island that are of significance to them. De Leon said the local community members come up with points of interest, write up the histories of those places and market the site themselves. Then it becomes a tourist site, he said.

"Visitors would like to experience like a local," he said.

The PATA Micronesia Chapter will make a presentation to the chief executives of all of the islands later this week during the Micronesian Chief Executive Summit on Guam.