

Ecotourism on Oahu

Spurred by economic growth and aggressive campaigns, tourism in the Asia-Pacific region is increasing rapidly. The downside, however, is the possible negative impact on ecosystems and local communities. What is the solution? Ecotourism can protect the environment and resources, improve local livelihoods, and stimulate the economy. The rich cultural and biological diversity of the Asia-Pacific has great potential for ecotourism. Increased business opportunities in rural areas and accumulated revenue can help governments conserve and regulate for natural resource protection and rehabilitation.

The APO, in collaboration with the US State of Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism and Hawaii Ecotourism Association, deputized a nine-country study mission to Oahu, 15–10 March, to observe the latest trends and developments in ecotourism in the Aloha State, which has developed its rural communities in an innovative, sustainable way. Participants attended presentations by Assistant Specialist Dr. John H. Cusick, Environmental Center, University of Hawaii, and Interim Associate Dean Dr. Linda J. Cox, Associate Director for Extension, University of Hawaii Manoa, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources.

Site visits began at the Kaala Farm Culture Learning Center, where participants toured ancient gardens, learned about early Hawaiian survival methods, and observed training for at-risk youths in the ways of their ancestors. Agrotourism, workforce development, and community building were demonstrated at the Kahumana Organic Farm and Café, which provides transitional homes for families. Outdoor activities, educational tours, and local hiring were underway at Kualoa Ranch.

Nearly three million annual visitors and neglect had damaged once-famed Hanau-

ma Bay. Crowd control systems protecting and preserving the marine ecosystem have now made it a prime ecotourism attraction. “Hanauma Bay’s nature preservation, visitor management, and education system were enlightening,” reported Taehoon Kim, East Asia Inter-Regional Tourism Forum Secretariat Specialist, Republic of Korea, noting the importance of cooperation between the private and public sectors.

Neb Samouth, of Cambodia’s Ministry of Tourism commented,

“I learned a lot of new things and discovered the scope of ecotourism. The experience will help greatly to develop ecotourism in Cambodia.” “It is useful and applicable to see the development of ecotourism in the modern-day USA, and how recovering lost pieces of history can shape ecotourism of the future,” enthused Weera Bumrungsee, Association of Thai Travel Agents.

“The study mission was an eye-opener for both participants and organizers,” stated Secretariat Agriculture Program Officer Muhammad Saeed, who organized the study mission. “Participants took home useful lessons and insights. As a follow-up, the Hawaii Ecotourism Association is planning to organize an Asia-Pacific Summit on Ecotourism in 2011.” 🌀



Dalani Tanahy, Executive Director of Kaala Farm, demonstrates making poi from taro, a staple of the native Hawaiian diet