

# HiCom Pledge: Tourism Won't Smother TT

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Declaring that it is necessary that there be "somewhere in the world to get away from the concrete jungle," the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory affirmed in a speech here yesterday that he will fight to "insure that tourism does not wipe out what is Micronesian."

In saying that, Edward E. Johnston pledged that the TT government and its districts will keep a lid on the tourist boom which hovers around the corner. "There is," he said, "a limit to the number of tourists who can be handled as human beings. We want visitors and residents to see each other as living persons, not objects."

The speech was delivered before a tourism seminar at the Guam Hilton Hotel, sponsored by the Pacific Islands Development Commission. The High Commissioner's remarks were in sharp contrast to the if-you-want-to-make-a-buck-you'll-play-along-with-us speeches of some representatives of financial institutions and the aviation industry made elsewhere at the conference.

"Some regions of the world appear so intent on increasing numbers of visitors and their dollars that the quality of tourism has been sadly neglected," Johnston said.

In TT districts, where the number of visitors has tripled in the last five years but is still small by Mainland or even Guam standards, tourist commissions have been created jointly by the district administration and the district legislature.

"These are bodies of concerned citizens in whose hands lies the development of tourism," Johnston said, and he said they are even now discussing "proposed goals to determine how much and what kind of tourism best meets" their needs.

Those goals, he said, "will attempt to set an upper limit so that tourism will not overflow an island's saturation point...It is vitally important for us to protect our environment and prevent overcrowding.

"The tourist commissions are seeking answers to 'How much is too much?' and 'What types of visitors should be attracted?'" Johnston said.

The commissions, he said, are also studying the possibility of

-Restricting commercialization of historic, cultural and "even some scenic" sites.

-Spreading the business of tourism "among as many Micronesians as possible through restrictions on individual business size and scope of operation."

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And he outlined, as "an example of possible goals for Micronesian tourism" a tough, 16-point statement drawn up by the Yap District Tourist Commission and recently approved by the Yap District Legislature. The statement, among other things, declares that commercial development will be restricted to certain areas, that buildings must stay in style with the Yapese environment, and that Yap will specifically seek out the kind of tourists it wants.

Yap has in recent years emerged as one of the most conservative of the districts in development plans, and has turned down hotel plans as being inconsistent with what it wants.

Johnston acknowledged in his speech that, even without the tourist trade, the cultures of Micronesia are in for a shock as modernization creeps in.

And though he said at the outset of the talk that "we don't want to be another Waikiki," he took pains to add: "Not that this is bad—I just spent a week there myself." The Waikiki kind of development simply would not be appropriate for Micronesia, Johnston said: "We know we should not devote our attention to imitation, but to assuring there will always be a distinctive Micronesia.

"We offer distinctive opportunities for a real-life adventure. Simple thatch cottages are proving to be among the most popular tourist accommodations. A visitor can now join with Micronesians in paddling a canoe from village to village. A sunken fleet of 60 vessels is turning Truk Lagoon into one of the world's leading scuba diving sites. Monuments and relics of World War II are being put in trim to help visitors relive history."

Johnston cited with some pride the fact that of 38 hostels in the Trust Territory, 33 are Micronesian owned and 29 are managed by Micronesians.

The figure he gave in his speech for TT "visitor entries" in the last fiscal year was 47,000, but officials do not know how many of those truly represent "tourists" in the traditional sense. The 47,000 includes large numbers of "commuters" on business among the islands, or between the islands and Guam.