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Editorial

Loss Of The 747.....

Despite the additional hotel rooms built on Guam over the past several years, we were surprised to find that some recent visitors, stateside types, couldn't get a room on the island.

All of the major hotels were completely filled up through March, traditionally a good month on Guam, and most report heavy booking throughout April and May, when it drops off a bit.

While all this sounds encouraging, especially in view of the energy crisis, and some worries in Japan, there is something in the wind right now that could deal Guam's fairly new tourism industry a set-back.

Starting this week, Pan American is going to chop off its 747 Jumbo flights from Tokyo to Guam, replacing them with the much smaller 707s. The difference is 350 seats to approximately 150 seats. It could mean that 200 people a day from Japan won't be able to find plane room to enable them to get to Guam.

It may not happen that way, but there is a potential tourism loss of 6,000 people a month. If you figure that the average tourist spends \$300 during his stay here, you've got a potential loss of \$1,800,000 in island income each month.

Cutting back on the big jumbo jet would be no real problem in June, when the business drops off anyway, but it could be a serious detriment to the Guam hotels, the tour bus operators, the restaurants--and to government taxes at this time.

That's not the only problem. Along with the decision to cut back to a 707 from a 747, Pan Am has set back the hours, totally disrupting schedules of tourism. They will be arriving instead of late afternoon, at 9:30 p.m. from Japan, and at midnight from Osaka. Moreover, they will be leaving at 8:30 a.m. in the morning. Since most of the Japanese tours are on a four day schedule, this means that the hotels will lose a supper, cocktail hour, and show the first night. And because of the earlier departure, the visitors will miss a breakfast on island, lunch, and shopping.

Instead of coming in relatively early in time to check in comfortably at the hotel, watch the sunset from the beach, enjoy a night "on the town," most tourists will arrive just in time to plop into bed. GovGuam's first reaction to the change was typical, they were happy about the fact that Pan Am and JAL planes won't be arriving at the same time, thus alleviating some of the crowded conditions at the airport in the late afternoon, without thinking about the possible loss of business to the hotels, and other tour businesses.

Since most tour operators in Japan work on an April 1 schedule, this change has left many of them confused and disoriented. They can sell the package, but are not sure that the tours can be produced.

It is impossible to slap anybody's wrist on this. The local Pan American people are probably just as unhappy about this re-scheduling as are the hotels. Certainly, the Pan Am headquarters in Japan aren't excited about it either. After all their job is to sell tickets, and cutting down the number of seats available isn't going to help their job. The decision was probably made at the New York level, based upon the availability, or non-availability, of crews and airplanes.

It may not be as serious as we're painting the picture. It could be potentially disastrous, though. It may be that Pan Am will fly even more charters to Guam to pick up the additional passengers, and it may be that JAL will get a heavy increase in business, which could compensate. We do know that Guam had a couple of good, near capacity months, and we hate to see anything disrupt that. We know that the hotel operators are disappointed in the Pan Am decision.

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