With a rich history and a bright future, Guam is stepping up its efforts to appeal to a new generation of travelers by celebrating the past and embracing the way consumers travel now. A first of its kind travel industry summit this August should help foster innovation, too.

— Guam Visitors Bureau

Ask an American about the iconic moments of World War II and most will likely think of the invasion of Normandy, which began on June 6, 1944. But as American troops and their allies landed on French shores, half a world away in the Pacific, U.S. forces were preparing for another momentous invasion, to recapture the island of Guam from the Japanese. Winning back the U.S. territory, which fell to the Japanese three years prior, would be brutal. What became known as the Second Battle of Guam claimed thousands of lives, both allied and Japanese. But the successful recapture of Guam would pave the way to other Pacific victories — including the Battle of Iwo Jima, site of that iconic flag-raising — and, ultimately, the end of the war in the Pacific in September 1945.

While many mainland Americans may have forgotten this slice of history, it’s a reminder of the resilience and courage of those who fought for our freedom.

— Guam Visitors Bureau
momentous piece of self-identity on the island of Guam. That’s one reason that
75th Liberation Day celebrations are going to be among the greatest ever held,
said Guam’s Lieutenant Governor Josh Tenorio, in an interview with SkiftX.

“World War II is a big thing in our history,” Tenorio said, “yet there’s a lot of
significant wartime history here that’s yet to be explored by U.S. travelers.”

The anniversary offers the chance for Guam to broaden its appeal, not just for those
who appreciate military history but also for those who hadn’t previously
considered visiting.

“Our Liberation Day marks a point in our history that shows how far we’ve come as
a community and the strength of our local people,” said Pilar Laguaña, president
and CEO of the Guam Visitors Bureau. “We want to share this iconic moment with
our visitor markets, especially those in the U.S. mainland, to witness firsthand what
75 years of peace and friendship looks like in the Pacific.”

**Highlighting Guam’s Unique Attributes**

Located less than four hours by air from Seoul, the U.S. territory of Guam has a long
history of attracting visitors from Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, for mostly
affordable package holidays. But as the world shrinks and the growing Chinese
middle class begins traveling by the hundreds of millions, Guam is now looking to
expand its brand awareness on the global tourism marketplace. (In the effort,
they’ve had some help from an unlikely source: President Donald Trump has
provided a significant boost for the island destination, as SkiftX has reported.)

But while geography works to Guam’s advantage in enticing leisure visitors from
the APAC neighborhood, tourism insiders on the island said in a series of interviews
that they’ll need to step up their game to get longer-haul guests to consider the
island.

“It’s important for us not to become a statistic destination for one particular
market,” said David Tydingco, the managing director of the Valley of the Latte
Adventure Park. “We need to be an international destination for all markets. The
ability to travel to Guam will, hopefully over time, get easier, and so the barriers to
visit will fall.”

Marketing of this summer’s significant 75th Liberation Day celebrations has been
one way to broaden the profile of Guam, said Laguaña. Meanwhile, other efforts
have targeted a variety of niche segments and traveler psychographics, she said.
Among the groups her agency is engaging are LGBTQ travelers; meeting planners
and the broader Meetings, Incentive, Convention, and Events sector; military history
aficionados; and scuba divers.

Cruise is another area of still-developing interest. “A small ship would be
The overall strategy is undertaking a transition to make Guam “a destination of choice rather than a destination of convenience,” said Mark Baldyga, the founder of Baldyga Group, which operates hotels, tours, and attractions in Guam, and a former board chairman of the Guam Visitors Bureau. “We have more tours and activities, I think, than any destination I know. From marine sports, scuba diving, submarines, all that kind of stuff, world-class golf courses. We have 19 dinner shows — I started the first one 27 years ago. Beaches, barbecues, hiking, ecotourism, skydiving, parasailing. You name it. There are hundreds of activities here, so that’s not the problem. We just need to message them better.”

Aligning the Destination with Today’s Consumer Reality

In its new efforts to target niche passions with a variety of specific offers, Guam is on the forefront of the latest tourism trends. And while it’s become a cliché to declare that travelers now value experiences more than things, consumers truly are embracing the concept. There’s “an increased preference for hyper-local, unique, and transformative travel experiences,” wrote Meghan Carty, in Skift’s U.S. Experiential Traveler Trends 2019 report. “Travelers are specifically looking for experiences that will change their world perspective,” she added. Indeed, more than four in five travelers agreed with the statement “I specifically look for travel experiences that give me a new perspective on the world.”

Travelers are also looking to show off while on their trips. More than half of survey respondents said they agreed that “It’s important for me to share photos of my travels on social media.” And when it comes to places with backdrops that look good on Instagram, Guam has it all, whether the evocative Valley of the Latte Adventure Park, gorgeous Sharks Cove Beach, or the infinity pool at Dusit Thani Guam resort.

Little wonder then that Guam is spotlighting its unique offerings with an upcoming event, right on the heels of Liberation Day celebrations. The #instaGuam Travel Talks: Digital Global Summit, on August 14, will be the first ever travel technology conference in Micronesia. Through the summit, the Guam Visitors Bureau aims to bring up to 300 attendees from the tourism industry, as well as disruptive technology companies such as Airbnb, Naver, TripAdvisor, and Zero Zero Robotics, together with global social media influencers like Sam Kolder to discuss digital trends and responsible tourism development.

“The summit will be insightful and innovative with topics that will benefit everyone.
including entrepreneurs, travel partners, influencers, and other participants,” Laguaña said. “It’ll be the first opportunity of its kind in this region for those who want to learn how to leverage the right digital content and strategies to reach a broad audience.”

For his part, Lieutenant Governor Tenorio sees the summit as a spark for future investment. “For us in terms of economic development and tourism, I think it’s incorporating technology, trying to maybe connect tourism with some of the social advocacies people have, some of the environmental movement that’s going on,” he said. “I think a high performing government, a high performing tourism sector, is going to be able to integrate those things.”

This content was created collaboratively by Guam Visitors Bureau and Skift’s branded content studio, SkiftX.

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