

Tourism and Demography

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Edited by

Ian Yeoman, Cathy H. C. Hsu,
Karen A. Smith and Sandra Watson

Micronesian Islands: Adapting to Change

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

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Micronesian Islands: Adapting to Change



Fred R. Schumann

Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- ◆ Provide an overview of the current state of the tourism industry in the Micronesian region;
- ◆ Focus on tourism in Guam, CNMI (Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands), FSM (Federated States of Micronesia), and Palau where a reasonably developed tourism infrastructure is already in place to welcome visitors from around the region;
- ◆ Identify the challenges facing Micronesia as they relate to demographic changes in Japan – one of its major source markets for tourism;
- ◆ Examine coming changes in the demographic composition of island communities and associated challenges in preparing for the tourism industry workforce;
- ◆ Offer recommendations for Micronesian island communities to prepare for the approaching trends.

Introduction

Micronesia is a name, meaning 'a region of small islands', for the Pacific islands extending from the Gilbert Islands, on the Equator, northwestward to the Marianas. The Micronesian islands are scattered over an area of roughly 7.8 million square kilometers and have a land area of about 2,600 square kilometers. Politically, Micronesia is divided into eight nation states and territories including Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (sometimes referred to simply as Micronesia, or abbreviated as FSM), Nauru, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, and Wake Island.

The early history of Micronesia involved European domination, with Guam, the Northern Marianas, and the Caroline Islands (what would later become the FSM and Palau) having been colonized early by the Spanish. Today, most of Micronesia – with the exceptions of Guam and Wake Island, which are US territories, and the Northern Mariana Islands, which form a US Commonwealth – consists of independent states. The political union between the Northern Mariana Islands and the United States recognizes US sovereignty but limits, in some respects, applicability of federal law. The Commonwealth accordingly enjoys a greater degree of autonomy than most US territories.

For many small island territories or nations, especially for those making up the Micronesian islands, they share a number of major challenging issues in the area of tourism. These include vast distances from source markets, foreign investment and the resulting leakage of revenue, over-dependence on tourism (mono-structured economy), dependence on imports, and an overburdened infrastructure, just to name a few (Gössling, 2003; Harrison, 2004; McElroy, 2006). Most island destinations rely on stakeholders from not only a single sector, but from both private and public sectors to tackle these issues (Buhalis, 2000).

The tourism and leisure industries are undeveloped in the majority of these islands. The focus of this chapter is on demography and the need for tourism stakeholders to adapt to change. This chapter highlights the destinations of Guam, CNMI, FSM, and Palau where a reasonably developed tourism infrastructure is already in place to welcome visitors from around the region.

Chapter extract

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