

Life-Altering Vacations



Photo: Guam Hilton Resort and Spa

by Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson

A Closer Hawaii

Approximately 3,700 miles west-southwest of Honolulu and just 1,500 miles southeast of Tokyo lies Guam, a footprint-shaped island placed diagonally in the South Pacific Ocean. Only 212 square miles in size, Guam is nonetheless the largest of the Mariana Islands. To the Japanese, this tropical island is a recently discovered, closer Hawaii. It comes complete with white sand beaches, world-class hotels, PGA golf resorts, dolphin watching, and all the water recreations of a tropical destination. Yet it is a mere three-and-one-half-hour hop from Tokyo—the equivalent of the road commute from the northeast side of Tokyo to southwest side of neighboring Yokohama during rush hour. Guam is close. And, as a U.S. territory with more or less relaxed entrance policies, it is also accessible: Japanese tourists can enter Guam sans visa for a short vacation of fifteen days or less. Add to this Guam's small tropical island charm, and you have a Japanese tourist magnet.

Guam's appeal to the Japanese is not lost on the Hilton Guam Resort and Spa. It is the island's premier international hotel with 687 guestrooms and suites and sits on thirty-two acres of tropical landscaped gardens on the waterfront at Ypao Beach overlooking Tumon Bay. Throughout the year, approximately 70 percent of the Hilton's guests are Japanese. During the Japanese holiday seasons of New Year's, Golden Week (end of April and beginning of May), and Obon (in August), the number inflates.

Because tourist agencies promote the island's sun and fun, Guam has maintained its image as a vacation spot for young working Japanese. But the industry is beginning to recognize families and older travelers as promising but largely untapped markets for all tropical destinations. In 1999, for example, Japanese tourist agencies launched an advertising campaign to promote the island of Hawaii as a vacation spot for these two groups.

The Guam Hilton Resort and Spa, too, has honed in on these markets, particularly older retired Japanese. Two characteristics distinguish this group: they are conservative travelers, preferring short-distance travel and minimal jet lag; and they want to preserve health and quality of life as they age.

"Hilton Guam Resort and Spa recognized that the demographic and social needs of our primary market (Japan) had changed. The Japanese had become conscious about their well-being, and a product to satisfy this need was required to maintain our leadership in the industry by fulfilling this customer need," explained Herman Ehrlich, general manager of the Guam Hilton Resort and Spa.

Ehrlich was central to the recent creation of a new vacation package offered by Hilton—a health getaway on the close and accessible island of Guam. For this market-driven package, Ehrlich envisioned a five- or seven-day stay in the plush Magahaga wing of the Hilton that included health and lifestyle education courses provided by a health expert, and massage/spa treatments at Mandara Spa.

When it came time to consider a health program partner to launch the program, Hilton Guam approached the local Guam Seventh-day Adventist Clinic. A partnership with the clinic "made sense," according to Ehrlich. "The SDA Clinic's asset is two-fold—its values and its network," he said. "The SDA organization is recognized worldwide for its values in wellness and medical well-being. It made sense that we partnered, therefore, as two organizations who could complement each other in their individual

endeavors."

The Guam SDA Clinic has an established presence of forty-three years on Guam, offering lifestyle intervention, NEWSTART, and individual preventive care programs. The clinic responded enthusiastically to Hilton's proposal, but also recognized that its staff was already fully occupied with existing responsibilities. Keith Horinouchi, Dr. P.H., a preventive care specialist at the clinic, then turned to a fellow Loma Linda University graduate and classmate, Edward Fujimoto, Dr. P.H., of Tokyo Adventist Hospital. Horinouchi saw Fujimoto as an ideal fit because (1), as director of TAH's Center for Health Education, Fujimoto had seventeen years of professional experience managing programs much like those proposed by Hilton; (2) he is an established lecturer, author, and health expert in Japan; and (3) he is a native English speaker, but also speaks Japanese fluently—a point crucial to provide a comfortable environment for the older Japanese clientele.

Fujimoto accepted the challenge to direct the startup health program. In early 2000, the Wellness Center of the Guam SDA Clinic partnered with Hilton Guam Resorts and Spa and Mandara Spa to launch its new program called "Healthy Lifestyle Experience," and promotions in the Japanese tourist industry began. The project was approached in two stages, according to Ehrlich: minor capital improvements to accommodate the new market needs, and a project to extend an existing building with specific facilities for that market.

In addition to full-time preventive care specialist Fujimoto, Hilton, the SDA Clinic, and Mandara Spa also provided workers to staff the program's hospital-ity lounge. In March 2000, the facilities and staff on Guam were equipped and ready to begin. As of May 2000, they were standing by somewhere between concept design and realization, waiting for the first tour groups to arrive while tourist agencies in Japan were approached and package details were sorted out between the agencies and Hilton.

Why a Health Boom?

Hilton's interest in marketing a health tour attests to the current Japanese mindset. The tide is turning in the immoderately convenient and materialistic digital kingdom of urban Japan. In an information-driven society ridden with an excess of PCS phones, phone booth internet access, and digital

gadgets that would put Pacific Bell, Sprint, and Nokia all to shame, the population is burning out on the resulting complexity. So, in a country that rides trends like no other, health is now "in." Almost as an antithesis to man-made materialism, a wave of all things natural has swept Japan in recent years—everything from conventional health products like organic produce and Chinese herb teas to downright odd fads like natural horse shampoo purported to bring out the shine in the thick manes of Japanese women. Popular women's magazines advertise the newest trendy vacation: weekend-long spas at luxury hotels. True, the digital escalation continues, and urban Japan is not getting any less crowded or hurried. But the Japanese seem to have acquired a taste for serenity and better health.

Yet even as health products flood the economy, the health of the Japanese people stands in jeopardy. A nationwide Japan Health and Welfare Ministry study shows that roughly one-third of the population has symptoms of illness, whereas two-thirds of the population are receiving treatment for illness. Almost all Japanese companies provide their employees with "human dock" programs, or comprehensive annual health examination of all physiological systems. A nationwide survey of all of these "human dock" programs reveals the startling fact that only one out of seven participants receives normal test results. Unfortunately, being symptom-free or having normal results does not necessarily mean that one is healthy. Fujimoto emphasizes that health is "not just an absence of disease but a positive state of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being which allows a high level of functioning." By this definition, he estimates that less than 5 percent of the Japanese population could possibly qualify as being healthy.

The concern of the government, the older generation, and the thinking Japanese, is to correct a downhill spiral in the health of the aging population. The fact is, Japan's population is aging rapidly and there is an inadequate net to handle the projected bedridden population. Studies predict that by 2025 one out of every two Japanese women in their forties

will be a caretaker for a bedridden person. The centralized health insurance system is geared to gradually place more and more of the financial burdens on the family of the ill, a prospect with grave economic and societal impact. In order to avoid a system overload, Japan must limit the number of people who become bedridden. With this uncertain future ahead, the older generation, along with much of Japan, seeks health investments rather than financial assets.

A Personal Responsibility

Hyperlipidemia, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, smoking, and obesity are the major health problems

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that Japan faces. Recently, the Japanese Health and Welfare Ministry changed the commonly used term "seijinyo" (adult diseases) to "seikatsushukanbyo" (lifestyle diseases). And for good reason. In a country where healthcare is government subsidized, the Japanese tend to perceive that responsibility for individual health management lies in the hands of the government. However, these leading health problems are largely self-inflicted and the result of lifestyle choice—something for which individuals hold personal responsibility. Fujimoto asserts that if good health is a true personal quest, then the individual must take personal responsibility to obtain it.

Modern immunizations, pasteurization, public sanitation, and antibiotics have largely eliminated the outbreaks of those feared infectious diseases that historically caused deadly epidemics. The human race has made spectacular progress in medical care and

treatment. However, growing confidence in the accomplishments of modern medicine sometimes leads human beings to disregard sensible health measures. Because an individual is protected from the dreaded diseases of the past, he/she may not feel susceptible to diseases of the present. He/she eats nutritionally poor food, smokes tobacco in spite of related dangers, drinks alcohol and caffeine to feel better temporarily, gets inadequate exercise and sleep, is overstressed, overworked, and overweight.

Fujimoto's philosophy is simple: To attain good health one must do whatever facilitates good health and eliminate whatever hinders it. Specifically, this means practicing good habits that include: (1) eating healthy foods; (2) getting physical and mental exercise; (3) getting proper physical and mental rest; (4) maintaining physical and mental cleanliness; and (5) having a positive support system, such as good social and spiritual relationships. The Healthy Lifestyle Experience is designed to enable guests to adopt a healthy, responsible alternative lifestyle with good health habits, and to help them refocus on personal total health that includes not only the physical but also the spiritual and mental.

Financial or Health Success?

On a typical day in the Healthy Lifestyle Experience, a guest awakens to the music of wind chimes and the gentle rhythm of waves breaking on the coral reef just below the ocean-view veranda. After sipping one of the healthy herb teas provided in the room, he/she selects a self-guided walk or jog on the trails of the thirty-two acre property, a historical tour of the grounds, or exercise at the fitness center for mental and physiological awakening. A healthy buffet-style breakfast at the Garden Terrace follows. Wellness, Nutrition, and Cooking School, a vegetarian cooking class taught by Chef Sakata of Roy's Restaurant, fills out the morning—with tennis, aquarobics, step aerobics, full-course spa, and massage treatments on alternate days. In the early afternoon, the guest chooses from a curriculum of specialized arts and crafts classes, an internet familiarization class, and sessions on smoking cessation, weight management, stress management, and individual consultations. These activities are arranged so that the guest may spend the cooler late afternoon and evening hours outdoors. Between activities, he/she stops in at the plush, program-exclusive spa lounge to study, receive

health advice, and visit with other program participants.

Hilton's objective in offering the Healthy Lifestyle Experience is largely financial. According to Ehrlich, Hilton wants to "create a new market product to satisfy a genuine need in [Hilton's] primary market as a result of demographic changes—and therefore, change in travel patterns."

Fujimoto's personal objective, however, is somewhat different. He has aimed from the outset not only to fulfill Hilton's goal but also to initiate lifestyle change. Specifically, he emphasizes that "If nutritional *lifestyle change* is the goal, the program must offer menu selections that are Japanese, near-Japanese, or easily adopted by Japanese. Otherwise, the changes will not be adopted on return to Japan. Exercise should be age-group oriented, and adaptable, and adoptable in Japan."

The leaders of Healthy Lifestyle Experience expect eventually to serve four groups per week with fifteen to thirty persons per group, or approximately 4000 persons annually. If true to typical hotel/tourist industry product development, it may be a year before full capacity is reached.

Will the program succeed? The answer may rely partly on whether success is judged on financial or health gains and where those two objectives meet. As a preventive care specialist, Fujimoto's goals will be fulfilled if the program successfully empowers individuals to make positive and permanent lifestyle changes. After all, one week of healthy living is only a fling with a better lifestyle if it lasts only that long. However, in order to sustain this program that gives participants a chance at a healthy life, Fujimoto's program must also fulfill the financial goals of Hilton Guam, the SDA Clinic, and Mandara Spa. Finding a balance between the short-term, exciting vacation that will draw crowds and a long-term and perhaps challenging lifestyle change for a few people in Japan's aging population will undoubtedly be a challenge. One must not overlook the fact that the program's success also relies partly on how ready Japan's older generation is to receive Guam as, not only a tropical destination, but also a starting point toward a health destination.

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