

## Sustainability and Economy Top of Mind at Eighth Annual Resort Conference

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The themes of economic downturn and corporate social responsibility ran prevalent during the 8th Annual Resort Conference held at Hotel Del Coronado April 16-18, 2008 and presented by the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIAI) and the University of Denver's School of Hotel, Restaurant & Tourism Management.

Chip Conley, founder and CEO of Joie de Vivre Hospitality, opened the conference with a general session on ways to build loyalty among travelers and employees. 'In the era of the internet, customers have a lot more choices available to them so they are less loyal,' said Conley, 'Hotels and resorts must find a way to connect with consumers on a deeper level to build loyalty.'

The conference boasted record attendance of more than 250 resort industry professionals and included sessions on sustainability practices, travel industry research and the use of social media for marketing.

'I was happy to see the significant focus on sustainable development in this year's agenda,' said Bruce Hutton, dean of Daniels College of Business at University of Denver. 'Sustainability is not another fad that will go away and it's important for our industry to understand the need to incorporate green practices not just for economic prosperity, but for environmental integrity.'

Resort executives shared ways they incorporate sustainability practices into their properties at a breakout session during the conference on the topic of 'Embracing the Power of Green to Market Your Resort.' The session included case studies on Mauna Lani Resort in Hawaii and Tiamo Resorts in the Bahamas.

'It's important to spread the word about your green efforts and continue to raise the bar within the industry to set an example,' said Mark Glickman, director of sales and marketing at Mauna Lani Resort. 'When you set an example, green efforts will spread out to the community beyond your resort.'

However, the panelists noted that resorts must make sure they are following true sustainability standards and not just 'greenwashing' their efforts. Mike Hartman, owner of Tiamo Resorts added, 'being green has to be authentic, no matter whom the customers are, if a resort makes the claim that they are sustainable, the guests will want to participate in those green practices.'

Although travelers want to frequent resorts and destinations that are 'green' they won't pay a premium for sustainable travel, according to Peter Yesawich, president and CEO of YPartnership who presented findings of the 2008 National Leisure Travel Monitor at a general session during the two-day conference. He also stated that although consumer spending has slowed due to a slumping economy, many Americans are still planning to travel.

'Consumers are more pessimistic in their travel attitudes, especially about the money they have for travel and its affordability,' said Dr. Suzanne Cook, senior vice president, research at the Travel Industry Association. 'However, despite all the bad news, consumers are still planning to take a summer trip in the next six months.'

In order to attract the consumer dollars, resorts will need to differentiate themselves in the market. 'As prices become more transparent,' said Yesawich, 'brand clarity becomes more important.'

Alan J. Fuerstman, founder and chief executive officer of Montage Hotels & Resorts, a Laguna Beach-based luxury hotel and resort management company, was also honored at the conference as the 2007 Resort Executive of the Year. The Resort Executive of the Year Award is sponsored by Ypartnership, Orlando, Fla., the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIAI) and The University of Denver's School of Hotel, Restaurant & Tourism Management.

### **About HSMIAI**

HSMIAI is an organization of sales and marketing professionals representing all segments of the hospitality industry. With a strong focus on education, HSMIAI has become the industry champion in identifying and communicating trends in the hospitality industry, and bringing together customers and members at annual events, including HSMIAI's Affordable Meetings(r). Founded in 1927, HSMIAI is an individual membership organization comprising more than 7,000 members worldwide, with 39 chapters in the Americas Region. For more information on HSMIAI, contact the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International, 8201 Greensboro Drive, Suite 300, McLean, VA 22102, phone (703) 610-9024, fax (703) 610-9005, or visit the website at [www.hsmiai.org](http://www.hsmiai.org).

### **About HRTM**

Established in 1946, the School of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management (HRTM), part of the Daniels College of Business at the University of Denver, prepares both graduate and undergraduate students for senior management positions in the fast-changing and competitive hospitality industry. As one of the most prominent hotel programs in the nation, the HRTM program enjoys a superb reputation for innovative educational programs. The student-oriented faculty members are internationally recognized for their contributions to teaching, research and publications in various hospitality fields. For more information on the HRTM program, visit [www.daniels.du.edu/HRTM.aspx](http://www.daniels.du.edu/HRTM.aspx) or contact Barb Pemble at (303) 871-4473 or e-mail: [bpemble@du.edu](mailto:bpemble@du.edu).

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