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## Business and county efforts aim to offset loss of tourism

**They have some plans but the  
outlook is generally gloomy**

Star-Bulletin staff

Government and business leaders from all four counties say they are bracing for the worst but are discussing ways to offset an expected loss in tourism resulting from last week's terrorist attacks on the mainland.

Mayor Jeremy Harris said he met with business leaders yesterday.

"We have a number of ideas for improving the product to provide new attractions," Harris said.

The city will step up efforts to draw residents to Waikiki. One idea is to couple kamaaina room packages

with the city's monthly "brunch on the beach" program, he said.

The city is also looking at other types of marketing programs it can coordinate with private industry, but he declined to give specifics.

The mayor was scheduled to give a major speech on Waikiki initiatives last week, which was canceled after the Tuesday attack. Harris said he those plans, which he expects to reveal in the coming weeks, should be able to help keep visitors coming to the area.

The mayor added that the city has asked Hawaii's congressional legislation to ensure that any programs designed to aid the airline industry come with provisos guaranteeing no loss of flights to Hawaii.

"If we lose our load capacity, it doesn't matter what kind of marketing we do," he said.

Gov. Ben Cayetano was to meet with all four mayors and other business, political and community leaders this morning to discuss the effects of last week's events on Hawaii's economy.

The outlook on the neighbor islands is gloomy:

>> On Kauai, government and business development leaders are anxiously awaiting the results of marketing surveys now under way.

County Council Chairman Ron Kouchi said rumors of layoffs are already rampant and many tourist industry employees have canceled their own vacation plans because they may need to use vacation time to pay their bills if they are furloughed.

"It's so out of our hands that I feel pretty helpless," said Kauai County Economic Development Director Gini Kapali. "I think by next week we'll have some solid information to use for planning."

All are predicting hotels and travel wholesalers will be offering lower prices and "value added" attractions such as free helicopter tours and Kauai vacation packages.

But they also are concerned about the proper time to promote travel to Kauai.

"How much do we want to celebrate our island when we still see all the flags at half-mast?" Kapali asked.

"We are in very troubled times in the short run," said Gary Baldwin, a consultant to the Kauai Economic Development Board and Kauai's representative on the Hawaii Tourism Authority. "I personally believe for at least the next eight weeks we are in serious trouble."

Baldwin pointed to at least one silver lining in the clouds: Kauai is the time-share capital of Hawaii -- 25 percent of the island's visitor accommodations are time shares -- and time-share owners are likely to use the weeks they've already paid for.

>> Hawaii County Deputy Managing Director Peter Young said the Big Island is returning to normal, but a "new normal," unlike before.

"Life's going to be different," he said.

To get a handle on the situation, Young has been holding meetings with the University of Hawaii and Big Island Business Council, and plans meetings with visitor industry officials and financial institutions.

Despite reports of as much as a 40 percent drop in hotel reservations, Young noted that something similar happened in January and February 1991, during the Gulf War.

"Then, we had a summer that beat all summers," he said.

The visitor industry is finding that more people are rescheduling their reservations to later in the year than people canceling outright, he said.

>> Maui Mayor James "Kimo" Apana has been getting daily updates from Valley Isle visitor industry leaders, among them the tour wholesalers, said Maui County spokeswoman Carlyn Kawahara.

"So far it doesn't look too bad for Maui County, so we're pleased with that," Kawahara said. As is the situation on the Big Island, many groups have postponed their Maui trips rather than cancel entirely, she said.

Apana will likely wait 60 to 90 days, to gauge the long-term impacts, before launching promotional efforts.

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Star-Bulletin reporters Gordon Y.K. Pang, Anthony Sommer and Rod Thompson contributed to this report.

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