

**TODAY'S FOCUS | TOURISM**

## Regenerating a Hawaiian sense of place

**Taum**

**BY ROBBIE DINGEMAN**  
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Cultural and environmental expert Ramsay Taum works to promote the concept that preserving native values and sharing them sets Hawai'i apart from other warm-weather vacation spots in the ever-competitive global tourism market.

"Aloha doesn't show up on the budget line on anybody's spreadsheet," said

Taum, who works at the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa's School of Travel Industry Management as special assistant to the dean on host culture.

This month, Taum spoke to the Native Hawaiian Chamber of Commerce about why Native Hawaiians should really be focusing on their assets, not their liabilities to help shape a better fu-

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**Hubennette**

## Taum

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ture in the industry and the community.

He also announced the TIM school's new partnership with the Marriott Foundation — a scholarship program of \$100,000 to encourage Native Hawaiians to enter the visitor industry.

While hotel managers generally embrace the idea that they should be sensitive to the values of the host culture, it can become more difficult to build on that understanding when one group of managers leaves and another comes in.

It's one thing to persuade managers that "a warm and fuzzy host relationship is fine and well," Taum said. "But at the end of the day they need to find a way to measure that."

Taum said one way to maintain the continuity through management changeovers is to have each hotel develop a team that is committed to promoting the value of the host culture. "This is what we do here. You can take the canoe out of the lobby but you still recognize this as Hawai'i."

Marriott Resorts Hawaii sought out Taum to help train nearly 5,000 employees or "associates" in Hawai'i at every level at the nine Marriott International brand resort hotels and vacation ownership resorts in Hawai'i.

The company recognizes the

importance of keeping alive the culture of Hawai'i that makes it unique, said Ed Hubennette, vice president of North Asia, Hawai'i and South Pacific. "If it's only sun and beaches, it's just like other sun and beaches."

Marriott has pursued a training program that engages its workers who then engage the visitors as well, Hubennette said.

"We're not just teaching Hawaiian history; we're trying to ingrain and teach the principles of the way Hawaiians interacted with each other."

Taum said the training aims to re-establish a "Hawaiian sense of place" for associates and "remind them that while the physical appearance of our work environments may change, the spirit of aloha and ho'okipa (hospitality) is an inside job and that the art and spirit of hosting is too."

He said tourism can help preserve Hawaiian culture if thought is given to how to use the industry to maintain the culture, including Hawaiian music, hula and crafts. "Much of the Hawaiian culture lives today because someone wanted to pay and see it."

Problems occur when the culture is commercialized into something without meaning, Taum said.

"Any time we're giving a paper lei and taking it back when we're done taking the photo, we need to stop that," he said.

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