

PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

IN DEPTH: ASIA-PACIFIC

Hawaii delegation to China aims at education teaming

Heather Tang

The latest trade mission to greater China led by the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism aims to bolster Hawaii as a place for overseas educational training.

What makes this trip different from previous journeys overseas, however, is that DBEDT was invited -- by the Chinese government -- to teach them about Hawaii business practices, including sustainable development, ecotourism and the latest environmental technologies.

For Hawaii, the short-term training programs could mean "a foot in the door" with new business contacts and potential projects, says DBEDT deputy director Sharon Narimatsu, who will be traveling with the group on the Dec. 3-15 trip to Hong Kong and Guangzhou province.

"Each trade mission builds upon previous missions. It's never just a one-time visit; you have to cultivate the relationships," she says, adding that should the training programs prove successful, they could be applied to other Chinese cities, particularly in the country's underdeveloped western provinces.

"The Chinese government is very aggressive in developing that part of their country. We hope that as they develop more, they'll look to us," she says.

The partnership between UH, DBEDT and the private sector is pivotal to the training programs, says Richard Bahar, investment promotion manager at the DBEDT business development and marketing division.

"We've become something of a model for a lot of other areas. People look at Hawaii and see such a pristine environment," he says.

Private sector gets involved

James T. Berdach, president of James T. Berdach Consulting Services, is one of many in the private sector who will share his environmental expertise with members of the Chinese government and private sector.

Berdach, like the others, will pay a nominal fee for airfare and other costs to attend the mission in hopes that it will spark new relationships and later a role for him in helping plan aspects of environmental resource management, providing environmental assessments or helping explore biodiversity conservation.

Whatever the case, Berdach believes much potential lies in matching Guangdong's, a province located above Hong Kong, fast-paced development with the city's significant natural areas.

"Everything depends on what kind of contacts are made," Berdach says. "It could be the type of things where someone has a project in mind and already has a present need for someone like me, in which case something could develop within six months to a year."

"However, it might be that it would be necessary to cultivate relationships started for a longer period of time," he adds.

On behalf of DBEDT, other presenters include Honolulu-based international consulting firm Pacific Management Resources Inc., local architectural firm AM Partners Inc., other members of the private sector and University of Hawaii officials.

Like Berdach, they're hoping the experience will lead to future projects with the Chinese, says Gordon Wood, project architect at AM Partners who will speak about sustainable development.

Although his firm is firmly entrenched in China with several projects scattered throughout the country, he says the extra exposure never hurts.

"Just being out there, it's not just straight research. We're spreading the word about us," Wood says.

Fellow presenter Puongpun Sananikone, president of Pacific Management Resources Inc., is also no stranger to China business but he hopes his talks will lead to more consulting opportunities. His firm first ventured into China 12 years ago, undertaking projects for the Asia Development Bank, various cities and state-based enterprises.

Ramsey Pedersen, provost at Honolulu Community College, also hopes to expand its Chinese teacher-training programs. Since September, 20 teachers from the Guangdong Labor Bureau has undertaken a four-month English and educational technology program at HCC; another group will arrive next year.

Pedersen hopes to expand the program to include training in topics as vast as aviation, construction trade, marine technology, boat building, automotive and transpiration, mechanics.

"The goal of the Chinese themselves is to be self-sufficient in these areas and to train people who are going to be trainers. We'd like to have a steady relationship which will send more people into our programs," he says. "The mission of the community colleges is to internationalize our programs to bring more people to Hawaii and serve as a technical resource of the Pacific Rim. This is a good economic engine."

Hawaii's role in growth

The southern Chinese city of Guangdong, also known as Canton, is the fastest growing and richest in China, says Reginald Kwok, University of Hawaii at Manoa professor of Asian Studies and urban and regional planning.

While Hawaii can offer the severely polluted Guangdong training in sustainable development, tourism, transportation and hotel management, and the global economy, the state would be hard-pressed to teach the Chinese about other topics they are seeking such as cultural tourism and economic sustainability, and professional and information services, Kwok says.

"In terms of economic sustainability, we have relatively little to tell them because Hawaii's economy is based purely on tourism," he says. "Guangdong is now aiming at the professional service sector and information sector, both we have relatively little experience to show them. Guangdong is also aiming at historical, revolutionary, cultural tourism. We have none of that."

And while the Chinese government hopes to improve its environmental policies and crack down on pollution, evident by its invitation to DBEDT to teach more about such practices, it could be several years before such projects actually surface, says Johnson Choi, president of the Hong Kong Business Association of Hawaii, contracted by DBEDT to help coordinate the mission.

"It costs a lot of money to clean up existing pollution and force industry to adhere to higher standards. It's always challenging in China to find the money to do it. A lot of times, there is a lot of discussion but implementation is very slow unless it is funded by the Asia Development Bank," he says. "The local, municipal and provincial governments don't really have a lot of resources."

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