



*Summary of*

# **Reflections on Japanese Expectations of Hawai'i**

***2007 Hawai'i Tourism Conference***

*August 28th, 2007*

*Presented by Tim Sullivan*

***“The customer is God.”***

***Popular Japanese adage***

# Where are the Japanese visitors?

- **Japanese visitor numbers down**
- **Hawai'i is competing with lower-cost destinations in Asia**
- **Aging Japanese demographic**
- **Expendable income is shrinking**

# Where are the Japanese visitors?

- **A communication glitch: “Smoke Free”**
- **Airlines suspending flights from Japan (UA needs 120% capacity to break even)**
- **Rising fuel surcharge**
- **“Hawaii will always be there”**

# Silver Linings & Rainbows

- “Hawai’i” is a *brand* name in Japan
- Hawaiian/local culture is booming in Japan
- Japanese have an awe-inspiring love of nature and beauty
- Hawai’i *can* do better: but only if we are humble enough to reflect and improve

# Challenges for Hawai'i:

- **Emerging popular destinations in Asia offer cheaper options, closer to home, with outstanding service and brand new facilities**
- **Younger Japanese generation less likely to travel abroad**
- **Younger Japanese generation has less money/ savings than their parents & grandparents**
- **Service is falling short of expectations**
- **Japanese visitors “feel unwelcome”**

# Cross-Cultural Disclaimers:

- **Can't paint any group of people with a single brush**
- **Variation exists** within any culture/social group
- **Intercultural communication is concerned with *tendencies*, not absolutes** - exceptions prove the tendency
- The **bell curve** applies...



**What do Japanese visitors say  
about customer service in the  
U.S.?**



**Governor Lingle and a delegation from Hawaii received the follow feedback during the most recent visit to Japan:**

***“...It was again brought up that the level of service in Hawai’i is not up to Japanese expectations. Visitors feel un-welcomed and get frustrated with the way they are treated. The Japan side stated that if we do not improve service, we will lose our visitors to destinations in Asia which have superior service.”***

***Source: Hawai’i Tourism Japan  
Newsletter Vol. 38***

# Common Complaints by Japanese about Customer Service in America:

- We don't always keep our promises
- We don't apologize when we break a promise
- We make “excuses”
- Service is too slow
- We often speak in a disrespectful tone to customers
- Don't want to “accept responsibility”
- We lack “*kikubari*”



**Why do the Japanese think this way?**

**How do they expect to be serviced?**

**And what do they want when they visit Hawai'i?**



# The Art of *Kikubari*...

## ***“Anticipate”***

***“At ANA, service isn't just a reactive endeavor. It's steeped in centuries of Japanese culture. That's why our flight attendants take great pride in delivering outstanding service even before you're aware you need it. Whether it's a cold drink, a warm duvet or any other touch of Japanese hospitality, we'll be there faster than you can hit a call button. After all, we've been training for a thousand years or so.”***

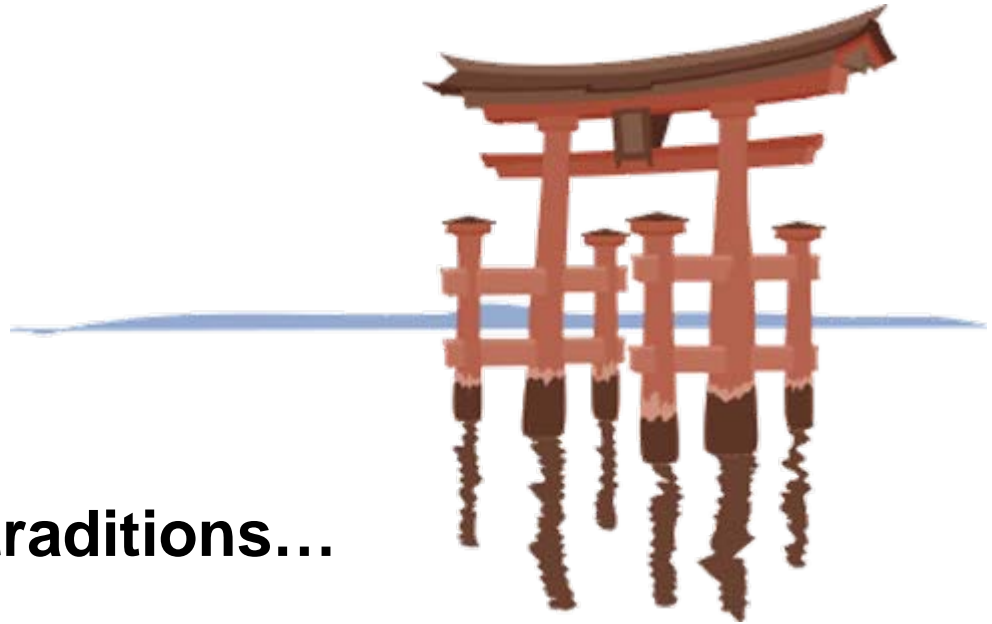
*Advertisement for ANA Airlines*

# **A story about *kikubari*...**

***...at the Otsuki Hotel in Atami, Japan***

# Inside the Japanese Mind: Ancient Traditions Still Alive Today

- Shinto
- Buddhism
- Confucianism
- And many other traditions...



*This portion of the seminar is key to understanding the enduring cultural values of Japanese visitors*

# Barriers to pleasing Japanese customers:

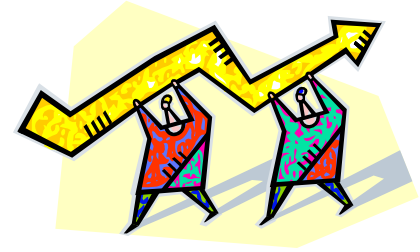
- Japanese often don't verbalize dissatisfaction
- Invisible culture gap
- Language barrier
- Negative stereotypes about American customer service
- Expectation by Japanese customers that you be a *mind-reader*

# Foundation for Success

- **A humble heart and genuine respect for the customer**
- **An understanding of Japanese customers' mindset and expectations *throughout* your organization**
- **Make solving customer problems the responsibility of ALL employees**
- **Develop and structure your organization to quickly respond to customer needs and requests (a long-term management challenge)**



# Simple Ways to Improve



- **Make every effort to honor commitments you've made**
- **Learn to apologize in a culturally appropriate manner when you break a promise or a customer is inconvenienced**
- **Act immediately to resolve customer problems**
- **Make Japanese negative preconceptions of American customer service work in your favor.**
- **Provide Japanese language reading materials**
- **Be authentic:** continue to promote and nurture Hawaiian culture
- **Learn the art of Japanese "kikubari"**
- **Cultural training for employees** at all levels of your organization

# Final Reflections

- **Hawai'i has the people, natural assets and brand recognition to continue attracting Japanese visitors**
- **Hawai'i can only improve what is within its control: customer service, product quality & making visitors feel genuinely welcome**
- **Hawai'i can only be Hawai'i: "Where are the Hawaiians?"**
- **Hawai'i must continue to explore creative new ways to connect with the Japanese market**
- **If you can please the Japanese, you can please anyone!**
- **Understanding the values of your customer is the key to understanding your market, and providing services and products that exceed expectations.**
- **Hawai'i can do better: humility, education and training are the keys**



What is ***JAPAN INTERFACE?***



# Who are we?

We are a cross-cultural business consultancy dedicated to connecting Japan and America. We help U.S. businesses understand the subtleties of dealing with the Japanese market. Our Japanese clients rely on us to help them get the most out of their stay in the U.S. To achieve these ends we offer clients customized services and training programs in both Japanese and English.

Like our new logo? The palm trees are there for a reason. We are pleased to announce that **JAPAN INTERFACE** is now serving the Hawai'i market! Hawaii's cultural diversity and spirit of aloha provide a strong foundation for developing cross-cultural relationships. Our mission in Hawai'i is to promote Japanese tourism and help local Hawaii businesses connect with the Japanese market through training, education and hands-on consulting services.



# Our Products

All programs are customized to the specific needs of each client.  
Educational Themes include:

- **Japanese Expectations of Customer Service**
- ***KIKUBARI* Workshop: reflect, brainstorm and prioritize to generate high-impact-low-cost improvement ideas that fit the unique needs of clients serving the Japanese market**  
*(Note: workshop must be combined with JAPANESE EXPECTATIONS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE)*
- **Lean Hospitality**
- **Teaming Up with Japanese Co-workers**
- **Teaming Up with American Co-workers (in Japanese)**
- **Other themes based on client input**

# Japanese Expectations of Customer Service



For companies wishing to attract and satisfy Japanese customers, this seminar will get your staff "Japan-friendly" in half a day. Combined with our **Kikubari Workshop** this training jumpstarts improvement implementation initiatives. Follow up consulting services are also available to assist clients in converting education into action and sustaining it: **Topics covered include:**

- *Who are the Japanese?*
- *What ancient cultural traditions still influence the modern Japanese traveler?*
- *What level of service are the Japanese accustomed to receiving in Japan?*
- *How does U.S. service measure up against the Japanese standard?*
- *What are some negative pre-conceptions the Japanese bring with them when they travel abroad?*
- *How can you use this information to improve your service?*
- *What offends the Japanese?*
- *How do you know you've offended them?*
- *What's the best way to handle an inconvenienced Japanese customer?*
- *How can you use a mistake to actually strengthen the relationship with your Japanese customer?*
- *How important is it to keep promises?*
- *What are some simple ways to improve right away?*



# *Kikubari* Workshop

Learn to anticipate the needs of your Japanese customers and exceed expectations! This workshop is designed to build from the cultural foundation established in *JAPANESE EXPECTATIONS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE*, but takes it a step further: real-world development and application of improvement ideas that customized to fit clients' specific needs.

Our facilitators guide structured reflection activities combined with a brainstorming session. The session ends with a prioritization exercise to ensure selection of **high-impact, low-cost measures that can be implemented quickly** for raising levels of customer service that will make even your finicky Japanese customers smile!

*\*Note: Follow up consulting services are available to facilitate implementation of ideas developed in this workshop.*

# Lean Hospitality



1-day introductory course for companies in the hospitality industry committed to growth and improving quality at minimal cost. **Topics covered include:**

- *What is "lean thinking"?*
- *Where did it come from?*
- *What does lean have to do with hospitality?*
- *What are the benefits?*
- *The philosophical basis?*
- *What guiding principles form the basis of lean management?*
- *How do you get employee buy-in to continuously improve?*
- *How do you evaluate processes? What is a "method improvement"?*
- *What method-improvement techniques can be used to simplify jobs?*

*This course is intended to get your employees looking at their jobs in a different way through education and practical exercises. By focusing on "picking the low-hanging fruit", results are immediate. Follow-up consulting services are also available for clients wishing to sustain improvement efforts.*

# Teaming Up with Japanese Co-workers



A one-day seminar designed for Americans committed to strengthening teamwork with Japanese coworkers.

**Topics covered include:** *What ancient cultural traditions influence behavior in the Japanese workplace today? What are the hidden dynamics of a Japanese team not apparent to most non-Japanese? What negative stereotypes do Japanese bring with them to America? How can this information be used to improve individual and team performance? How do you "persuade" a Japanese person to consider your point of view? How important is it to keep promises? And what basic etiquette do you need to be aware of when socializing with the Japanese?*

This seminar can be arranged as a stand-alone event or done in conjunction with training for Japanese counterparts to promote cross-cultural dialogue, interaction, reflection, and relationship-building.

# Teaming Up with Japanese Co-workers



A seminar (in Japanese) for Japanese managers seeking a leadership edge in their overseas subsidiaries. A half-day course, this seminar is aimed at getting Japanese managers on assignment from Japan comfortable and "America-friendly" as quickly as possible.

**Topics covered include:** *Who are "the Americans"? What ancient Western traditions are alive in the American workplace today? What values influence how Americans solve problems and make decisions? What negative stereotypes do Americans have about Japanese managers/Japanese companies? How can you use this information to improve your company's performance? How do Japanese and American team dynamics compare? What drives an American team to excellence? How do you build relationships with American co-workers? What are some useful etiquette tips on socializing with Americans?*

This seminar can be arranged as a stand-alone event or done in conjunction with training for American counterparts to promote cross-cultural dialogue, interaction, reflection, and relationship-building.



## Contact Information

If you know of any organization in Hawai'i committed to reaching, serving and *delighting* Japanese visitors, we would appreciate you passing on our contact information:

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Mahalo!

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