

## Maui is 'Best Island' again

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*By HARRY EAGAR, Staff Writer*

NEW YORK CITY – As has been the case for years, Maui finished atop the Conde Nast Traveler magazine “Best Island in the World” poll this year. But the Valley Isle surpassed itself this year, also capturing “Top Travel Destination in the World.”

Terryl Vencl, executive director of the Maui Visitors Bureau, was in New York Monday collecting yet another “Best” statuette.

“This is an amazing run, and we are simply thrilled,” she said. “To win ‘Best Island’ during any given year is remarkable. To capture the title for a dozen years running is nothing short of extraordinary. This is a proud moment for the people of Maui.” Mayor Alan Arakawa voiced some thoughts about Maui’s success during welcoming remarks at a groundbreaking for Pflueger Acura in Kahului Tuesday. He called Maui’s “one of the best economies in the U.S.,” with a “close-knit community.”

But he added that “one major problem is our success.” The island’s citizens “have to know how to grow it smartly.” He noted that, as an organized county, Maui is just a century old and is “only 5 percent developed.” “We are a young community.” He urged businesses coming to the island to get involved in local issues.

Tourism is by far the dominant business of the island, accounting for billions of dollars of revenues through hotels, retailers, restaurants and activities providers. The biggest single employment category in the county, retail sales, is related to the visitor industry, directly from purchases by visitors as well as indirectly through the income the industry generates for residents.

By any measure, 2005 is a boom year for tourism. Unemployment is as low as anyplace in the country, hotels are solidly booked, managers are raising room rates and prosperity is luring in new products and services – like Acura.

If the island is experiencing growing pains, with busy roads and scarce rental housing, the tourist readers of Conde Nast Traveler do not seem to have noticed. “Paradise began as a garden,” write the magazine’s editors in the November issue, “but if you ask travelers to name a paradise today, you can bet it’ll be an island.

“No wonder that Maui emerges for the twelfth year – ever since islands were added to the poll – as not only the top scoring island, but also the top scoring destination.”

Maui’s numerical score was 91.6, better than Sydney (Top Pacific Rim City, 88.8); Phuket (Top Asian Island, 87.3); San Francisco, (Top U.S. City, 86.8); Florence (Top European City, 86.0); or Bangkok, (Top Asian City, 85.9).

Arakawa, who only learned about the Conde Nast award after his remarks at Triangle Square Tuesday morning, cautioned later that “the reality is, there is a lot we have to be careful about.”

Winning “really does say something about what we’re doing with our community . . . Everyone can be proud,” he said.

The challenge of success, he says, will be twofold. One is to continue the policies and promotions that propelled Maui to its top status with visitors. Two is to seize “the opportunity to truly shape our destiny. We can because we’re a young community.”

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