



A TOUCH ABOVE TRAVEL

Ken Kimi By Amy Charles

A Touch Above Travel was started fifteen years ago while owner Ken Kimi was working as an engineering manager in California's Silicon Valley. Many friends and colleagues expressed their desire to visit Hawaii, and approached him for guidance and input when planning their travels. Being part Hawaiian and growing up there, Ken gladly shared the "aloha" of the islands with first-time visitors. "I talked about the attractions and differences between the main Hawaiian Islands, and a little about the food and culture," said Ken, who also offered insight on non-tourist options.

Ken was born in Hilo, Hawaii. His father and brothers built and ran four hotels in Hawaii, bringing him up in the travel industry. Because the hotels were on different islands, the family moved around a lot. (Today, those hotels are owned and operated by the Kimi family's next generation.) Ken went off to college at the University of the Pacific, where he graduated as valedictorian of the school of engineering. He was awarded a full graduate school scholarship for Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and has a master's degree in electrical engineering and computer science.

Ken decided to start his own company, working part-time and primarily selling Hawaiian travel packages while continuing his full-time engineering job. After a few years, Ken's family moved to Hawaii, where he and his wife are raising their twin daughters in the culture in which they grew up. Business continued growing, by word of mouth. Over time, what had involved primarily inbound Hawaiian travel began including outbound excursions, too.

Hawaii has much to offer from a sales vantage, and Ken knows how to make travel easier on those traveling. "I always qualify my customers," said Ken, "learning whether they are looking for nightlife and lots of activity, or perhaps a very quiet and peaceful vacation." Armed with these factors, trip length and budget, Ken recommends an island or two—along with a few hotel choices—and creates two or three quotes for the customer. Occasionally, an interisland cruise might fit the bill.

Room occupancy rates continue to climb in Hawaii. Ken notes, "You wouldn't know we're in a recession, by the number of people in the streets of Waikiki or at Ala Moana shopping center." Yet he's finding

more visitors opting to bypass Oahu, Waikiki's home, thanks to nonstop flights from the U.S. mainland to neighboring islands. Maui is a visitor favorite, with great sand beaches, snorkeling and other water activities, sunny weather in Kaanapali and Kihei much of the time, and vast hotel selections. Day trips might include driving to Hana, with its lush vegetation, or seeing the sunrise and rare Silversword plants at Haleakala's summit.

Ken prides himself on ensuring a great fit and experience for his customers—providing insight and firsthand knowledge with each reservation. While things might not always go as planned, numerous problems have been solved via his connections to hotel and sales managers, and his wholesalers. And when agents from the mainland need a bit of advice, Ken is happy to help them, as well.

Ken worked in the high-tech industry for twenty-five years, and took early retirement to devote more of his time to travel. Still, he puts that background to use, incorporating technology into his business to simplify processes and save time. 🌺

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