

Marianas Visitors Authority

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Citizen-Centric Report Fiscal Year 2024

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Who We Are

Pursuant to Public Law 11-15 Section 5, Public Law 13-5, Public Law 13-9, and Executive Order 03-02 of March 10, 2003, the Marianas Visitors Authority shall promote the orderly growth of the CNMI tourism industry. It is our mission to promote and develop The Marianas as a premier destination of choice for visitors from throughout the world while providing a maximum quality of life for our people. We nurture and encourage cultural interchange and environmental sensitivity for visitors' enjoyment and for our children's children.

Headed by a 9-member Board of Directors, the MVA is led by a Managing Director and Deputy Managing Director, along with division managers in Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. As of September 2024, the MVA has 31 employees: 22 full-time and one part-time employee in Saipan, four in Tinian and four in Rota.

The MVA has 11 divisions:

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Executive | 7. Product Development |
| 2. Accounting | 8. Research |
| 3. Marketing | 9. Tour Guide Certification |
| 4. HR & Admin Services | 10. Rota Field Office |
| 5. Community Projects | 11. Tinian Field Office |
| 6. Procurement | |

The MVA operates representative offices in its major source markets. In FY 2024, the work of the South Korea and Japan offices included working with tour agents and media to create Marianas tour products, coordinating events to showcase The Marianas, generating positive exposure through media outlets and social media influencers, executing targeted ad campaigns, implementing digital media strategies, and more.

The MVA also organizes annual signature events through its Community Projects division to attract visitors and media to the destination. Product Development undertakes destination enhancement projects. Tour Guide Certification tests and certified Official Marianas Guides. Research compiles monthly statistics of visitors arriving into The Marianas.

MVA in FY 2024

The Marianas Visitors Authority supports tourism, the sole economic driver of The Marianas. It is our duty to aggressively promote The Marianas and attract visitors to our islands, primarily through marketing through our off-shore offices.

Visitor arrivals to The Marianas increased 22% increase in Fiscal Year 2024 (October 2023-September 2024) compared to the prior year, founded on continued strong performance from South Korea. However, due to the loss of direct flights from China beginning in FY 2019, total visitor arrivals in FY 2024 were 44% lower than FY 2019. The Marianas received a total of 237,498 visitors this year compared to 194,744 visitors last fiscal year and 424,858 visitors in FY 2019.

South Korea registered 75% market share with multiple daily flights from Seoul throughout the year. With 2x weekly flights from Hong Kong beginning in April 2024, China increased to 7% market share. Japan and USA both had 5% market share, with 3x weekly direct flights from Tokyo-Narita and daily flights from Guam.

Visitor arrivals from Korea increased 12% compared to FY 2023 to 177,943 visitors. Visitor arrivals from Japan grew 71% to 12,625 in the year. Both markets continued to be stymied by a strong U.S. Dollar, while Japan market recovery was also hampered by a strong preference for domestic travel and later in the year—a stagnant economy. China—which had comprised about 40% of visitor arrivals before the pandemic—registered 16,984 visitors; this compared to FY 2019 when five cities in mainland China had direct flights to Saipan. Visitors from USA (excluding Guam) registered 12,673 arrivals. Guam registered 10,771 visitors.

Due to the volatility of the tourism industry, the strengthening of a second major market and development of third major source market remains the top priority of the MVA as essential to the recovery of The Marianas economy.

WHAT DID 2024 LOOK LIKE?

NEW INITIATIVES, MODERATE GROWTH

MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS



- “Shhhh. Between You and I” campaign In Japan aimed to familiarize Millennials and GenZ with the destination and transform perceptions by positioning The Marianas as a serene and genuine escape for those seeking true connection and enrichment. Exposure was digital on Taboola (3.6 million impressions), Meta, and Google and via ads at major trains stations including Ikebukuro, Shinjuku, and Shinjuku Kousha Kaido (39-million combined foot traffic).
- A media blitz in Seoul and Busan from October to January featured digital ads on social media platforms; high-visibility anamorphic ads at major Seoul streets in Gangnam, Hongik University, and Nam Dae Moon; and ads at 16 subway stations and 12 branded apartment elevators.
- The MVA supported the filming of popular variety show “Knowing Bros,” generating \$540-million with three episodes distributed via TV, Netflix, TVING, and YouTube.
- Partial travel funding was provided to fifty influencers who visited Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, making photo and video multiple posts to their collective 3.3 million followers and sharing copyrights to their material for further MVA use.
- The Marianas won “Most Popular Booth” at Seoul International Travel Fair, which attracted 42,000 attendees in March 2024.
- KidZania interactive city included a Marianas booth at Lotte World, Korea, from Jan. 18-March 21.
- Marianacation Tabitoku Campaign offered Japanese visitors travel vouchers and a chance to win one of three \$1,000 vouchers and other prizes.
- Promotions from local businesses were compiled and shared via a flyer with 3,800 passengers arriving on the MSC Bellissima in January.
- Key public relations campaigns included:
 - The Marianas Lucky Summer Campaign on LINE and featured by travel agency HIS Japan; Super Summer Sale offering ¥59,800 to 480 participating passengers; a six-page spread in ACT 4 magazine, highlighting Taste of The Marianas; \$70,500 ad value from andGIRLS magazine coverage in September; and posts by Japanese YouTuber Okajun generating 470,000 views as of October 2024



COMMUNITY PROJECTS

- The 19th Annual Christmas in The Marianas was celebrated with special events in Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. For the first time, Saipan’s events were held at T Galleria by DFS.
- The 1st Annual Rota Marathon attracted 83 registrants from Russia, USA, Japan, Guam, and The Marianas.
- The 20th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival in February was attended by mayors from Saipan, Tinian, Rota, Northern Islands, and Guam.
- After a hiatus due to funding uncertainties last year, Skechers Saipan Marathon 2024 made a strong comeback in March with 512 registrants from nine countries.
- Marianas Tourism Month was celebrated in May 2024 with a proclamation signing, clean ups, radio trivia, social media photo contests, “Tourist for a Day” tours, and other activities.
- The 25th Annual Taste of The Marianas International Food Festival & Beer Garden was held for every weekend in May, featuring 29 food and beverage vendors and several contests, including the OMG Oh My Grill International Food Challenge, Subway Sandwich Challenge, Marianas Chef Competition, and HANMI– Northern Marianas Technical Institute Chefs Competition.

DESTINATION ENHANCEMENT

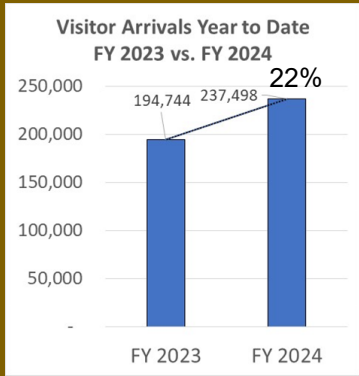


- Twenty-one tourist sites on Tinian and 17 sites on Rota were regularly maintained.
- On Saipan, Garapan Area Trash Collection was continued with daily trash collection and minor landscaping in the tourist district of Garapan. Hafa Adai & Tirow reflective sign was installed in Marpi, and the Saipan iconic sign was updated with flora and fauna artwork. Railings at Mt. Tapocahu were repaired in cooperation with the Dept. of Corrections. Last Command Post, Japanese Memorial, and the Korean Memorial were water blasted and the parking lot was repainted. Walkways and the parking lot at Kalabera Cave were water blasted. Main sections of Isley Field Historic District was re-cleared and re-cleaned. Architectural design was started for improvements at Last Command Post, Bird Island Lookout, and Suicide Cliff.
- On Tinian, the historic Ginoza trail was extended beyond the Ginoza Cave to include more challenging pathways to the cliff line and scenic ocean views. The Okinawa Memorial Monuments on Tinian were repainted and coconut trees were planted at Suicide Cliff. Landscaping was started at the MVA Tinian office.
- On Rota, solar lights were installed at Teneto Bridge, which was also water blasted and repainted. Songsong Village Lookout and the historic WWII Japanese Cannon were water blasted and repainted. The Japanese-era sugar mill train was repainted. Tables and benches at Rota Swimming Hole were repaired and repainted, as well as a table at Tonga Cave.

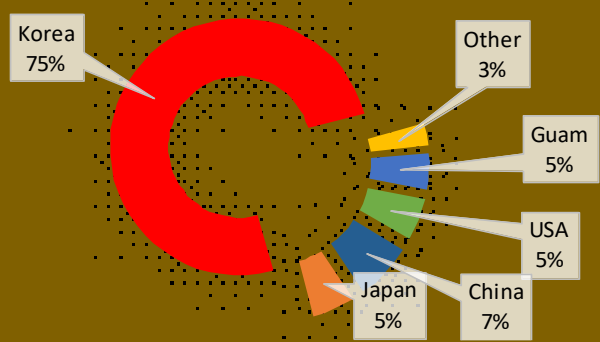
IMPROVING TOUR EXPERIENCES

- The Tour Guide Certification Program— providing certification for tour operators and Official Marianas Guides and suspended since the pandemic - was rebooted in September to help ensure visitors receive a quality experience learning about the sites and cultures of The Marianas. This lite version of the program welcomed formerly certified members to become Official Marianas Guides once more.

Visitor Arrivals



Market Share FY 2024



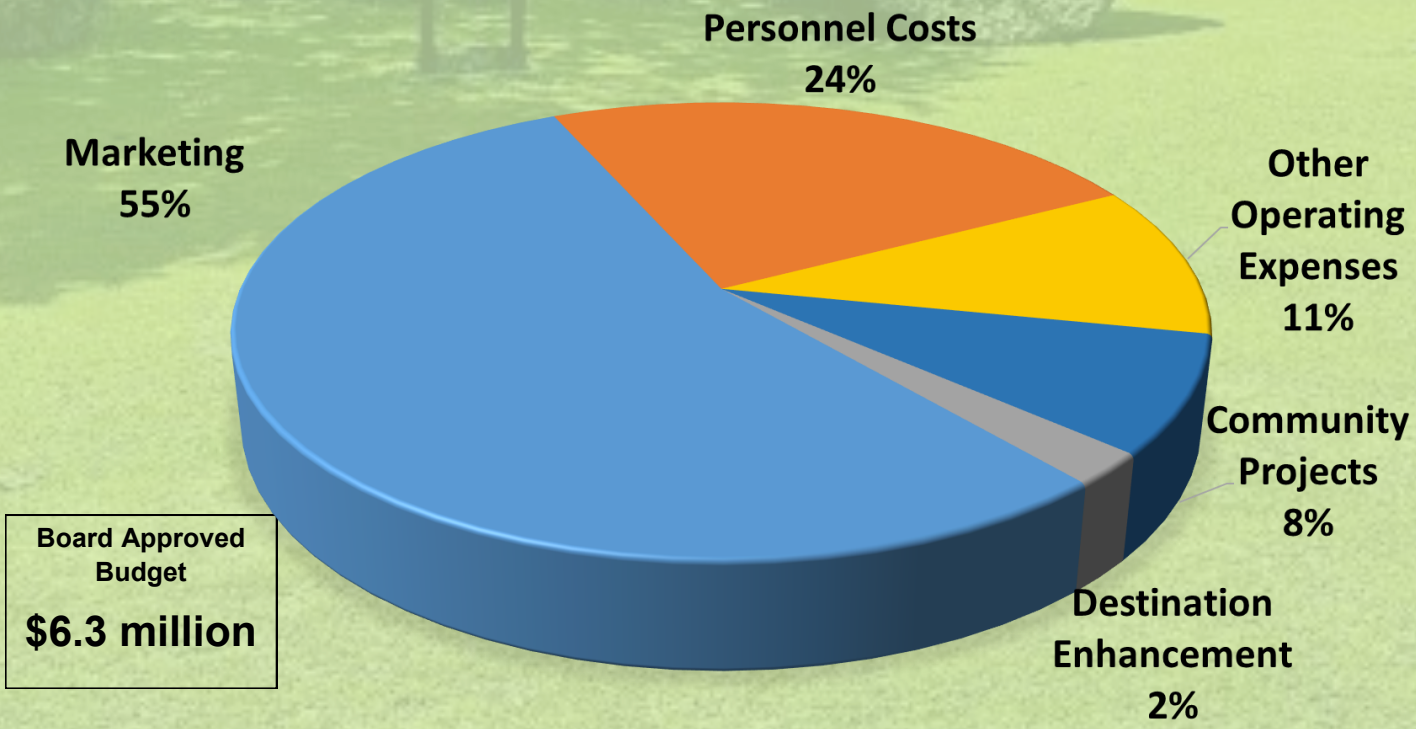
OPERATING BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024

Where does the money come from?

The CNMI Budget Appropriations Act in FY 2024 reinstated Public Law 18-1, providing a majority of the MVA’s budget through Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT). From the tax collected, 80% is given to the MVA and 20% to other agencies. Other funding sources in FY 2024 included the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery grant from Northern Marianas Housing Corp.

What are Our Funding Priorities ?

MVA FY2024 Expense Distribution



Board Approved Budget
\$6.3 million

WHAT IS NEXT?

CHALLENGES AND PLANS

PROMOTING THE MARIANAS

- Marketing offices in Korea and Japan will continue to represent The Marianas for travel trade and consumer promotions, public relations, and more. The development of a strong third source market will remain a top priority.
- Currency exchange rate remains one of the many variables that make tourism a volatile industry. The beginning of FY 2025 opens with the continued challenge of a strong U.S. Dollar and weaker Japanese Yen and Korean Won.
- A new contractor will be hired for Phase II of global branding, the development of a comprehensive global brand and related marketing strategies, creating a clear and unique identity for The Marianas that resonates with the worldwide travel community.

ENHANCING EVENTS

- Continued enhancement of annual signature events will be undertaken, and MVA will lead the reorganization and expansion of a Sweet Potato Festival in Rota.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

- Community engagement will be enhanced through various channels, including expanded social media, continued close cooperation with Marianas Tourism Education Council targeting students, continued monthly engagement with the public through the series “Making Tourism Our Business” in local newspapers, distribution of our monthly e-newsletter to MVA members and the Northern Marianas Legislature, and other on- and off-line outreach.

IMPROVING TOUR EXPERIENCES

- The Tour Guide Certification Program will continue in partnership with Div. of Coastal Resources Management and others to help ensure visitors receive a quality experience learning about the sites and cultures of The Marianas. The re-establishment of guide classes by Northern Marianas College Community Development Institute will be explored.

BEAUTIFYING OUR ISLANDS

- Groundbreaking on enhancement projects at Last Command Post and Suicide Cliff, as well as Bird Island Lookout, which will include stationary binoculars and cement tables.
- Installation of new iconic signage around Saipan, Tinian, and Rota airports
- Begin Mt. Tapochau Observation Deck project
- Renovate Sabana Peace Memorial
- Repair restrooms at Rota Swimming Hole and I'Chen'chon Bird Sanctuary.
- Plant more flowers and trees to enhance Rota tourist sites.
- Open up new hiking trails on Rota.
- Undertake improvements to Suicide Cliff in Tinian.
- Create a Botanical and Limestone Garden in Tinian to include endemic trees, Chamorro and Carolinian medicinal plants, and ornamental trees.
- Re-opening the Long Beach Interpretive Trail and other nature trails.
- Enhance the WWII-era Kastiyu Caves with grounds clearing and new signage.
- Renovation of the MVA field office and shop and refurbishment of the office plant nursery.



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