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# Marianas Visitors Authority

## Citizen-Centric Report Fiscal Year 2023

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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 Northern Mariana Islands 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 2023, the MVA had 27 employees: 18 full-time and one part-time employee in Saipan, four in Tinian and four in Rota. Three key managerial positions were also filled: HR/Administrative Services, Marketing, and Product Development.

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 2023, 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.

Taiwan office was closed in December 2022 due to lack of demand, and the office in China remained closed for a third consecutive fiscal year due to several factors: Chinese travel restrictions due to the pandemic (lifted late in the year), a lack of direct flights, and geopolitical concerns.

### MVA in FY 2023

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 our off-shore offices.

Fiscal Year 2023 (October 2022-September 2023) saw an exponential increase in visitor arrivals compared to the prior year founded on strong performance from South Korea and a slow but steady increase from Japan via 3x weekly direct flights from Tokyo-Narita started in September 2022.

Visitor arrivals from Korea increase over 200% compared to FY 2022 to 159,315 visitors in FY 2023 with 23 flights at week in the final month of the year and a 78% recovery of air seats compared to FY 2019. Visitor arrivals from Japan increased to 7,306 in the year, compared to 705 in FY 2022. Both markets were challenged by a strong U.S. Dollar and weaker domestic currency, while Japan market recovery was also hampered by a strong domestic travel incentive program and continued fears of COVID. China—which had comprised about 40% of visitor arrivals before the pandemic—registered only 4,309 visitors due to a lack of direct flights.

Along with daily flights from Guam, visitor arrivals grew steadily throughout the year. However, total visitor arrivals were only 46% of arrivals in FY 2019 before the pandemic. The Marianas received 194,662 visitors this year compared to 69,534 visitors in FY 2022, 5,365 visitors in FY 2021, and 215,125 visitors in FY 2020.

The priority of the MVA remains to fuel the fire of the tourism economy to generate funding for government services, keep businesses open, and have people retain or restart employment to help secure their financial security. The opening of a third major source market is essential to this goal.

# WHAT DID 2023 LOOK LIKE?

## MARKETING



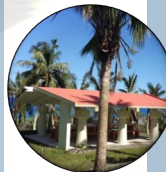
- For the CNMI Tourism Resumption Investment Plan (TRIP) and travel bubble with South Korea, the MVA was named on Oct. 7 as the global recipient of 2022 Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Gold Award for Tourism Destination Resilience, recognizing the best in marketing, creativity and innovation tailored for the Asia Pacific region and beyond.
- To enhance sports tourism the MVA signed a one-year MOU in Seoul on Dec. 1 with the Korean Professional Baseball Players Association.
- Golf variety show “Swing Star in Saipan” filmed in Saipan with 30 celebrities generated an estimated \$800,000 in ad exposure value.
- The Marianas was featured in February on one of Japan’s most popular and longest running television travel shows “Tabi Salad,” bringing the destination an estimated \$2.7 million in ad value.
- Japan video-on-demand channel CL released two episodes about The Marianas featuring the visit of members of Japanese hip-hop group DOBERMAN INFINITY.
- One of Japan’s up-and-coming girl groups, Sky Syllabus, recently filmed a music video in The Marianas for their new song “TOKIMEKI White Splash,” which has been selected as the theme song of Chiba TV for this year’s Japan National High School Baseball Championship.
- J-Pop girl group NiziU streamed an 8-part series on YouTube about their vacation in The Marianas, reaching over 2 million subscribers and generating about \$1.2 million in ad exposure value.
- High Priest Kosho Nakanishi of Shinsho-kai, a Japanese group that has been making memorial pilgrimages to The Marianas since 1982, was named Honorary Marianas Tourism Ambassador . Professional golfer Park Bo-Kyeom was named Honorary Marianas Sports Ambassador to help promote her childhood home, The Marianas.
- More than 100 tourism partners from South Korea and 20 partners from The Marianas participated in The Marianas Seoul-Busan Roadshow held in August 2023.
- Full-page ads featuring Saipan, Tinian, and Rota were placed in the October, November, and December 2023 print and digital issues of the award-winning National Geographic Traveller (UK).
- The MVA joined in the Adventure Travel World Summit on Sept.11-14, the leading global conference for adventure tourism with 700 adventure travel professionals from over 50 countries.
- The CNMI TRIP Program was gradually phased out as travel demand from Korea stabilized and funding under the American Rescue Plan Act was depleted.



## COMMUNITY PROJECTS

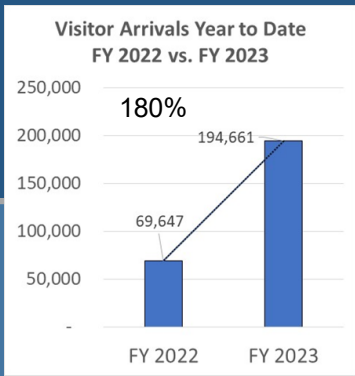
- The 18th Annual Christmas in The Marianas was celebrated with special events in Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.
- Due to funding uncertainties, the 2023 Tinian Hot Pepper Festival was spearheaded this year by the Tinian Mayor’s Office, although the MVA still assisted with construction of booths.
- The Saipan Marathon was not held due to funding uncertainties.
- Marianas Tourism Month was celebrated in May 2023 with a proclamation signing, clean ups, a student logo contest, social media photo contests, a 5K Fun Run, “Tourist for a Day” tours, and other activities.
- The 18th Annual Taste of The Marianas International Food Festival & Beer Garden was held for every weekend in June, featuring 23 food and beverage vendors and several contests, including the HANMI– Northern Marianas Technical Institute chefs competition. The event was moved from May to June this year to coincide with the 2023 Oceania Cup, allowing guests from throughout the Pacific to enjoy the largest food festival of The Marianas.
- The Marianas Experience, funded by the MVA, was launched in July 2023 in cooperation with T Galleria of Saipan, highlighting indigenous Chamorro and Carolinian displays, demonstrations, and performances.
- We cooperated with the Office of Planning & Development on the Garapan Revitalization Project.

## DESTINATION ENHANCEMENT

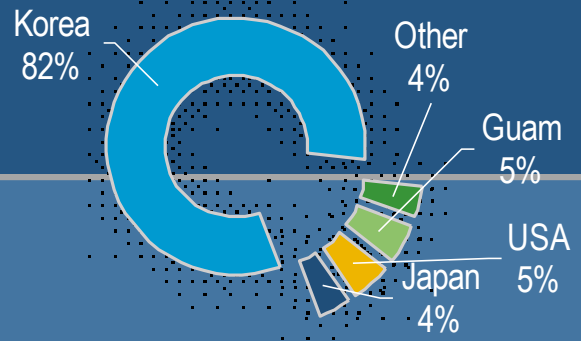


- Twenty-one tourist sites on Tinian and 17 sites on Rota were regularly maintained.
- On Saipan, Garapan Area Trash Collection was continued with daily trash collection and minor landscaping in the tourist district of Garapan. Flower and tree planters were replaced and repainted at Last Command Post, and signage was replaced with an updated map and legend. Safety railings at Banzai Cliff were repaired.
- Railing and baluster repairs were completed at I Chen’chon Bird Sanctuary in Rota.
- On Tinian, the historic Ginoza Trail and caves and Tachibana Trail were reopened. Site, directional, and warning signs were refurbished, and repairs and painting were conducted at Suicide Cliff, Tinian.
- Beautify My Marianas partnered with an average of three organizations a month conducting beach clean-ups in Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.

# Visitor Arrivals



## Market Share FY 2023

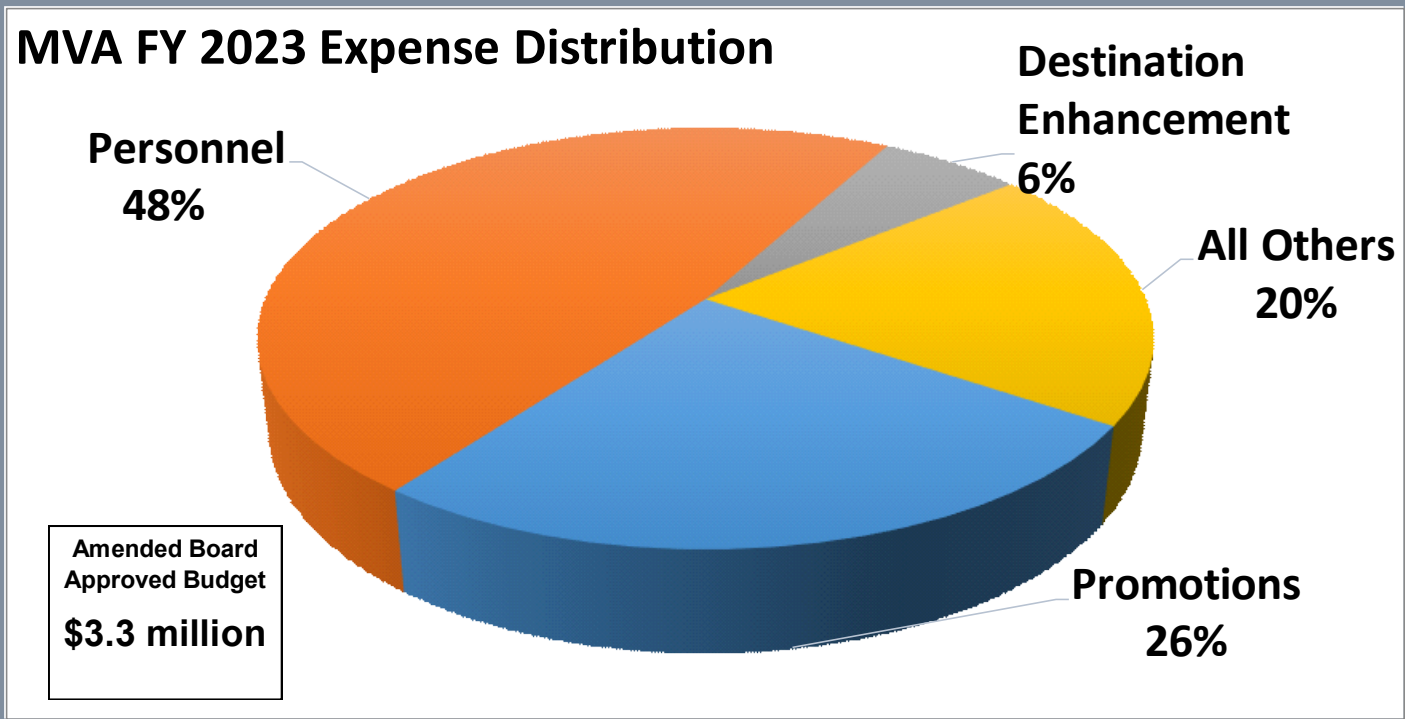


## OPERATING BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2023

### Where does the money come from?

Pursuant to Public Law 18-1, Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) normally constitutes a majority of the MVA's budget. From the tax collected, 80% is given to the MVA and 20% to the NMI Retirement Fund. However, due to low visitor arrivals, the CNMI Budget Appropriations Act in FY 2023 suspended MVA's entitlement to the HOT and Alcohol Container Tax. Major funding sources in FY 2023 were the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery grant, American Rescue Plan Act, reserved funding, and local appropriation.

### Where does the money go?



# WHAT IS NEXT?

## CHALLENGES AND PLANS

### PROMOTING THE MARIANAS

- Marketing offices in Korea and Japan will continue to represent The Marianas.
- Currency exchange rate is one of the many variables that makes tourism a volatile industry, and the beginning of FY 2024 still presents the challenge of a strong U.S. Dollar and weaker Japanese Yen and Korean Won. The Korea media blitz through December 2023 will collaborate with major online media outlets such as Naver, Google, Kakao, and Skyscanner; include billboard ads in major areas such as Gangnam, Hongdae and subway stations; and launch a social media promotion. New initiatives will be implemented in Japanese market to entice hesitant Japanese to overseas travel to The Marianas.
- The MVA will prepare industry partners for the anticipated independent restart of charter flights from Hong Kong in early 2024.
- 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 identity for The Marianas that resonates with the worldwide travel community.

### ENHANCING EVENTS

- Adding to its lineup of annual signature events, MVA will inaugurate a new event—Rota Marathon—on MLK Jr. Day holiday weekend, Jan. 13, 2024. The initial run of the event will include a full marathon and 5K courses.

### AUSTERITY MONDAYS

- Due to limited funding, the MVA offices in Saipan, Tinian, and Rota will be closed every other Monday beginning Oct. 3 until further notice. Austerity Mondays that land on a legal holiday will be observed the next day, Tuesday.

### IMPROVING TOUR EXPERIENCES

- The Tour Guide Certification Program—providing certification for tour operators and Official Marianas Guides and suspended since the pandemic—will be full reinstated in cooperation with Northern Marianas College Community Development Institute to help ensure visitors receive a quality experience learning about the sites and cultures of The Marianas.

### BEAUTIFYING OUR ISLANDS

- Enliven Saipan's main tourist of Garapan with a holiday illumination project during Christmas and New Year's.
- Construct and install additional iconic signs in Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.
- Enhance the natural aesthetic of Garapan planting more flora and fauna in downtown Garapan.
- 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.
- Renovate of the MVA field office and shop, refurbishment of the office plant nursery, and purchase a new vehicle for media production tours.

### ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

- Community engagement will be enhanced through various channels, including 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 offline outreach.



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