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LARRY YANG is a graduate of Georgetown University Law Center with a master's degree in Law and practices before California State Courts, United States District Courts, the California Appeals for the 9th Circuit and U.S. Bankruptcy Courts.

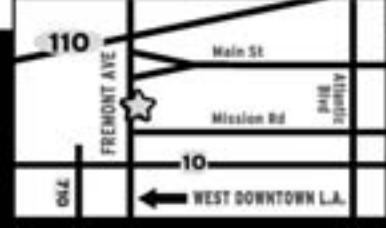
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## DESPITE RECESSION, FLU SCARE

# US travel sector remains upbeat

by ALEX VERGARA  
Inquirer.net

WITH the number of foreign visitors to the United States in 2008 still down by 633,000 compared to pre-9-11 figures, these days may not be the best of times for the US travel industry.

As if the global economic downturn isn't enough, a recent spike in the number of swine flu cases in as many as 30 states is scaring away untold numbers of potential tourists.

But for US travel and hospitality executives who took part in the recent annual International Pow Wow in Miami, these days aren't the worst of times either. After minor delays, for instance, several Las Vegas high rollers were looking bullish as they resumed work on several shopping, hotel and entertainment complexes due to open late this year and in early 2010.

"There have been some readjustments," said Alicia Malone, PR manager of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. "The Harmon, for instance, was originally envisioned as a condominium for short as well as long-staying guests. It's now strictly a hotel."

After unforeseen delays, MGM, one of Manny Pacquiao's preferred addresses on the Strip, has also found financing for its MGM Mirage project due to open this winter.

Even CityPass, the pioneer and the biggest provider to sightseers of discounted booklets (offering as much as 30 to 50 percent savings) of actual tickets to the most popular museums and attractions, remains upbeat. It recently added Houston, Texas' premier city, to its growing list of featured destinations.

"We look at 2009 as a year of opportunity," said Mike Gallagher, CityPass founder and co-



US travel industry leaders Jonathan Tisch, chair and CEO of Loews Hotels; Caroline Beteta, president and CEO of California Travel and Tourism Commission and Roger Dow, US Travel Association president and CEO

CEO. "We're not cutting back. In fact, we'll be more aggressive than ever."

### Largest meeting

More than 3,000 supplier delegates, 1,200 international and domestic buyers and 350 members of media within and outside the US gathered here for five days in May in what was dubbed as the largest meeting of travel and travel-related industries and organizations in America.

Under the helm of Roger Dow, president and CEO of the newly formed US Travel Association (USTA), the US has taken a more pro-active stance as it fights back on several fronts to regain its place in the lucrative but extremely competitive global travel market.

The USTA is the result of the merger of the Travel Industry Association (TIA), which Dow also led, and the Travel Business Roundtable early this year.

"It has really increased our

voice inside the Beltway, around the country and with media," said Dow. "There's a very clear image of who we are, which has given us more visibility and opened up more communication."

The merger has so far helped USTA marshal \$6 million to fund such areas as communications, public affairs and research. In line with the merger, USTA also launched and continues to beef up discoveramerica.com, a more comprehensive and user-friendly website.

Promoting the US to top markets such as Canada, Mexico, Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom remains a top priority, but Dow and his colleagues have begun laying the groundwork for more aggressive promotions to huge emerging markets such as China, India, Brazil and even Russia.

### Private sector

It's interesting to note that while other countries, including the Philippines, have their respective government-funded tourism offices to articulate, promote and direct tourism efforts, the US government doesn't spend a single cent to promote tourism.

Instead, it relies on private sector initiatives from the likes of USTA and hundreds of convention and visitor bureaus spread out all over the US.

Dow hopes to remedy that

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