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HVCB CREATES FIRST-EVER CHIEF BRAND AND NARRATIVE OFFICER ROLE, NAMES TRAVIS WATANABE TO LEAD THE NEXT CHAPTER OF HAWAII'S GLOBAL STORY

Former Red Bull executive and Native Hawaiian leader joins HVCB as the organization strengthens its investment in brand leadership, global reputation, and future competitiveness

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau (HVCB) today announced the creation of its first-ever chief brand and narrative officer position and the appointment of Travis Watanabe to lead the organization's brand, reputation, and destination engagement strategy beginning 1 July.

The appointment marks the first major evolution of HVCB's executive brand leadership structure in more than two decades and reflects the organization's commitment to advancing Hawai'i's global reputation, long-term competitiveness, and meaningful engagement with audiences around the world.

As destinations navigate rapidly changing traveler expectations, evolving technologies, increased competition, and shifting community priorities, brand, reputation, and destination story have emerged as strategic assets that shape how places are understood, experienced, and valued.

The newly created chief brand and narrative officer role is designed to ensure that Hawai'i remains among the world's most compelling, differentiated, and respected destinations.

"The world has changed dramatically over the last twenty years, and destinations must evolve with that change," said Dr. Aaron J. Salā, president and CEO of HVCB. "Success today depends on much more than awareness. It depends on relevance, trust, differentiation, and the ability to build meaningful relationships, all while strengthening the connections among people, place, culture, and community that enable destinations to thrive over the long term.

"The destinations that thrive in the coming decades will be those that can clearly articulate who they are, why they matter, and the value they create for residents and visitors alike. Brand, reputation, and narrative are strategic assets in that work. Creating this position reflects our belief that Hawai'i's future competitiveness will depend not only on how many people know us, but on how deeply they understand who we are."

Watanabe joins HVCB after a distinguished career with Red Bull, where he most recently served as senior director of athlete marketing. Throughout his tenure, he led initiatives spanning global athlete

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engagement, mainstream sports franchise partnerships, brand strategy, storytelling, and audience engagement across some of the world's most recognized sports and cultural platforms.

As chief brand and narrative officer, Watanabe will oversee HVCB's brand strategy, marketing strategy, destination story, creative direction, audience engagement, and reputation management across domestic and international markets. He will work closely with the Hawai'i Tourism Authority, HVCB's island leadership, industry partners, cultural practitioners, and community stakeholders to strengthen how Hawai'i is understood and experienced across key markets.

"The strongest brands in the world are not built through awareness alone. They are built through participation, relationship, and shared experience," said Watanabe. "Hawai'i is one of the most recognized and emotionally resonant destination brands in the world. Very few places command the level of recognition, aspiration, and affinity that Hawai'i does across generations, cultures, and continents.

"The opportunity isn't to make Hawai'i more famous than it already is. The opportunity is to ensure that, as the world changes, the relationship people build with Hawai'i endures and deepens in meaningful ways. That requires clarity of purpose, authenticity, creativity, and a commitment to continually earning relevance with audiences from around the world.

"Throughout my career, I have had the privilege of helping steward and grow one of the world's most iconic brands by creating meaningful connections among people, culture, and shared experiences. What excites me most about this role is the opportunity to bring those lessons home.

"Hawai'i has the potential not only to remain one of the world's most admired destinations, but to influence what the future of destination engagement looks like globally. If we do this well, we will strengthen empathy, deepen engagement, and create enduring connections between people and place. Through that work, we will create lasting value for residents, visitors, businesses, and future generations alike.

"Returning home to contribute in this way is both a tremendous privilege and an incredible responsibility, and I am honored to join HVCB at this pivotal moment in its evolution."

The creation of the chief brand and narrative officer role reflects HVCB's broader strategy to strengthen Hawai'i's visitor economy through strategic brand leadership, destination education, innovation, and long-term value creation.

"As destinations around the world continue to evolve, leadership must evolve with them," said Sean Dee, chair of the HVCB board of directors. "The Board believes this role represents an important investment in Hawai'i's future and in HVCB's ability to strengthen the state's global position while creating value for residents, visitors, and industry alike."

The appointment represents an important step in HVCB's ongoing efforts to strengthen Hawai'i's position among the world's leading destinations while deepening the relationships that support long-term success for residents, businesses, communities, and visitors.

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PHOTOS

High-resolution images are available for media use [HERE](#). Please credit: Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau.

ABOUT HVCB

The Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau (HVCB) is a private, nonprofit, destination futures enterprise stewarding the future of tourism in Hawai'i. Grounded in cultural intelligence and community connection, HVCB builds global partnerships, crafts transformative visitor experiences, and leads with innovation to ensure tourism enriches local lives, protects island ecosystems, and advances Hawai'i as a model for the world. For visitor information, visit gohawaii.com. For more about HVCB, visit hvcb.org or follow updates on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

MEDIA CONTACTS

Lei-Ann Field
Senior Director, Public Relations & Communications
Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau
lfield@hvcb.org
808-924-0208

Taryn Pascua
Senior Manager, Public Relations
Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau tpascua@hvcb.org
808-924-0240