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Opportunity knocking for that hotel job

- [It's the attitude that's important](#)

By [Lynda Arakawa](#)
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Brandon Kaya and Stefanie Schroeder are feeling good about their job prospects in the hotel industry after they graduate from the University of Hawai'i's School of Travel Industry Management in December.

"It's the perfect situation; it's a good time to graduate right now," said Schroeder, whose goal is to become a hotel general manager. "It's always good when the industry is prosperous and it's successful — to get into this industry and learn as much as you can."

Kaya agreed.

"It looks like it's just going to go up," he said. "It's really about being at the right place at the right time."

As Hawai'i's lodging industry is thriving, so are opportunities for current and aspiring professionals in the business.

Large chains such as Marriott International and Starwood Hotels & Resorts plan to grow in Hawai'i and elsewhere in the Pacific, which means there will be more positions — including management — that will need to be filled during at least the next few years.

At the same time, hotel management trainee positions aimed at grooming young college graduates for management careers have also been increasing.

"Throughout the summer and the semester I get a number of calls and e-mails from employers looking for entry-level management trainees (and) full-time line-level positions, and I just can't keep up," said Kawehi Sellers, Internship and Career Placement Coordinator at the University of Hawai'i's School of Travel Industry Management.

Marriott hopes to add three to five properties in Hawai'i and Guam over the next few years, creating about 100 more management-level positions, said Stan Brown, Marriott International's vice president for Pacific islands and Japan.

Starwood Hotels & Resorts' hotel and time-share divisions in Hawai'i will also need about 20 to 30 more managers a year for the next couple of years, said Keith Vieira, senior vice president and director of operations for Starwood Hotels & Resorts in Hawai'i and French Polynesia.

While these positions obviously won't be filled only by recent college graduates, the growth signals an opportune time to enter the industry.

"The market has bounced back and certainly '05 was very strong, and there's no reason to think that '06 and '07 won't be as well," Brown said. "So it is a positive time. In general terms, the occupancies have gone up, and certainly in hotels the demand to the Islands has increased, so it is a good time to be coming in."

Specific locations for additional Marriott properties in Hawai'i and Guam have not been decided, he said. But the company is already preparing for the increased demand for managers.

This month Marriott launched its first mentorship program with the UH School of Travel Industry Management in hopes of attracting students to the company after graduation. The program match-ed more



Brandon Kaya, a human-resources intern at the Doubletree Alana Hotel, says he's in "the right place at the right time" in terms of finding a position in the hotel industry.

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Sources: *University of Hawai'i School of Travel Industry Management (Neighbor Island properties

than 50 Marriott executives in Hawai'i with students.

"We've had such significant growth within not just Hawai'i but the Pacific islands overall, so we know we're going to need leadership positions as these folks graduate the end of this year and next year as we move forward," Brown said.

Opportunities at Starwood in Hawai'i are also growing, Vieira said. Between the company's hotels and timeshare division, Starwood will grow by about a property a year over the next few years, he said. That includes the recently opened second phase of the Westin Ka'anapali Ocean Resort Villas and the Westin Princeville Ocean Resort Villas, which began construction this year.

The company also plans to expand in French Polynesia as well. Some managers here will be tapped to oversee those properties, ultimately creating more openings in Hawai'i, Vieira said.

"Certainly hotels are currently in growth mode," Vieira said. While other segments of the visitor industry like the airlines and travel agencies are facing challenges, "when you look at the hotel and resort industry, there is tremendous growth."

Starwood Hawai'i revived its management trainee program in 2003 and has since expanded it to most of its hotels. In addition to Hawai'i universities, the company also has been working with a handful of Mainland colleges, and are targeting students from Hawai'i who want to return to the Islands, Vieira said. The response from Hawai'i and Mainland students has been great, he said.

Vieira said he has been seeing better-prepared students in the past couple of years, thanks in part to more hotel internship opportunities coordinated with schools.

"When I was at UH business school, there were minimal internships," he said. "It was very hard to get an internship. Now we almost can't find enough interns. And we end up hiring about 30 to 40 percent of our interns into our work force."

Hotels are facing challenges in hiring people for not only management positions but line-level jobs as well, said Murray Towill, president of the Hawai'i Hotel & Lodging Association.

"People are constantly looking for good employees, and there are jobs sort of at all levels that are unfilled at the moment," he said, adding that it's a community-wide issue. "It's across the board, but it's certainly true in our industry. ... We've certainly had increased conversations with trying to build the work force in terms of the (Department of Education) and training. Companies are more aggressively going out and trying to find people, like attending job fairs and contacting schools."

In the meantime, UH's School of Travel Industry Management has been actively recruiting students to enter the program, and is seeking additional money through the visitor industry, the state and UH to expand classes and add more faculty, Sellers said. About 100 to 120 students graduate from the school annually, she said.

While it's not new for the demand to outpace graduates, she said the number of student internship and management trainee opportunities has been growing.

Lianne Maeda, Hawai'i Pacific University's director of career services, has also noticed an increased demand for graduates and has been fielding more calls for hotel positions that need to be filled immediately.

"We're getting more of these urgent, we-gotta-fill-this-right-away sort of thing," Maeda said.

"It appears as far as the general visitor industry is concerned — from the cruise lines to hotels to the food-service area — we've been noticing an increase not just in entry-level positions, but there has been a lot of employers out there who are willing to take on new graduates and actually put them through a management training type of program to meet their hiring needs," she said. "Before, the trend basically was to hire seasoned people and bring the new graduates into more entry-level service type of positions, and have them work through the ranks within those particular organizations.

"There's just a lot more optimism from all parties, from our perspective here at career services to the employer to the students. It's good energy all the way around. We're going to ride this wave until the next cycle comes around. It's just a really nice thing to be seeing."

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tend to offer higher salaries to attract recent college graduates.) **Hawai'i Hotel and Lodging Association (General manager salaries are linked to the size and complexity of the property, and compensation packages often include performance-based bonuses.) ***Starwood Hotels & Resorts Hawai'i

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