



## More trips planned for Flight of Friendship alums (03/21/2005)

By Arnie Weissmann

PORTLAND, Ore. -- Participants in the Flight of Friendship, the travel industry initiative that brought 61 travelers to Thailand last month in an effort to assist tsunami survivors, have planned follow-up activities to further help the region.

These efforts involve bringing additional travelers -- and tourist dollars -- to the resort areas of Phuket and Krabi.

Travelers on the first trip, which was inspired by an opinion piece in Travel Weekly, met with Thai officials and assessed the condition of properties and infrastructure in the resort areas.

"The regions are viable, but the people are suffering because tourists haven't returned," said Sho Dozono, president of Azumano Travel of Portland, Ore., and the organizer of the Flight of Friendship. "Now, participants are following through on commitments to get more people traveling there."

I felt personally challenged by the pleas of the people we met in southern Thailand last month," Eckford said. "This trip is an attempt to keep our promise not to forget them."

Dozono said there will be more leisure time on this trip than the first, which was filled with official functions and meetings with government officials.

The planned itinerary has the group flying to Bangkok from Portland on April 9. Phuket and Krabi are both on the tour, and participants will celebrate the Thai New Year in Phuket. Details are at [www.flightoffriendship.com](http://www.flightoffriendship.com).

The other Flight of Friendship alum to organize trips to Thailand is Benjamin Brigham, a graduate student at the University of Washington. He, too, is coordinating through Azumano Travel and hopes to send 1,000 students to the area. The goal is to inject \$1 million into the local economy.

Brigham, who is doing his master's thesis on the effects of the tsunami on the travel industry, said the trip is "a tremendous opportunity for students to study the effects of a natural disaster while expressing their solidarity with the victims." He hopes to send groups weekly until June 30.

Information can be found at [www.springbreakrelief.org](http://www.springbreakrelief.org).

"These are trips for people who want to keep their hearts focused on those still living with the aftermath of the tsunami," Dozono said.

Azumano Travel said it is not profiting from these trips.

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