

Fantasy Island: New Ads For Bermuda Show Hawaii

By Vanessa O'Connell

The island nation thinks so. While it concedes that non-Bermuda locales are featured in its new ad campaign, mixed in with photos of its own local attractions, it says it's proud of the TV and print effort, launched in late January. "Our call centers have been buzzing since the campaign started," says Renee Webb, the minister of tourism for Bermuda. "We're not pulling the ads."

Others, though, think the Bermuda episode raises some thorny issues for ad agencies, especially Havas SA's Arnold Worldwide, which created the ads, and the publishers that have agreed to run them.

"Obviously, this is a cardinal sin," says Hayes Roth, vice president at Landor, a unit of England's WPP Group PLC, who thinks the episode is a major blow to the Bermuda brand.

"It's misrepresentation," adds Allen Kay of Korey, Kay & Partners, an independent agency in New York that has handled ad campaigns for Virgin Atlantic and a major cruise line. Mr. Kay, a veteran ad executive, recalls that France once nearly used a stock photo of a Swiss ski resort to promote itself, though somebody at France's then-agency discovered the mistake in time.

But others are more forgiving. "If this were a pharmaceutical ad, that would be one thing. But this isn't harmful," says Ellen Asmodeo, vice president and publisher of American Express Co.'s *Travel & Leisure*, where one of the ads has already appeared. "We don't have a policy that's strict and hard for advertising, though our editorial-side policies are strict."

Bermuda also has good reason for wanting to continue the promotion. Tourism has been falling for nearly two decades, government figures show. About 500,000 people visited Bermuda last year, down 8% from 2000 -- a year when the nation's tourism was already at a 20-year low.

To develop the new campaign, Bermuda and Arnold Worldwide hired five photographers, including Anne Menke, a fashion specialist from the U.S. The move angered some local photographers on Bermuda, an archipelago of about 360 small islands 580 miles east of North Carolina. One of them noticed that the photos in three print ads didn't appear to be the Bermuda he knew. He complained to a local newspaper, forcing tourism officials on the island to come clean.

The photo taken in Hawaii features a shapely woman in a hat, shot from behind (the agency added a bathing-suit top). Another shows a diver surrounded by a circle of barracuda. In the third, a woman swims very close to a dolphin. The "stock photos" were taken from a variety of sources and cropped so they appeared to be Bermuda scenes, says Rochelle Klein, chief creative officer at Arnold New York. "The mounting of original commissioned work is getting cost prohibitive." The agency thinks one of the pictures may have been taken in Florida.

Bermuda's Ms. Webb contends the images represent the spirit of island. "They were intended to create a mood," she says.

Bermuda isn't the only offender. One of the less appealing truths of advertising is the fact that exaggeration often works. "Sunshine on sale," blares a current online ad for US Airways, a unit of US Airways Group Inc. The promotion features a scrolling ticker that shows the weather forecast for more than a dozen holiday destinations.

But the ticker shows fictional forecasts. Bermuda, for instance, has a forecast of 88 degrees and sunny. In reality, the weather on the island Wednesday was 63 degrees and rainy.

"The ad says 'your vacation weather forecast,' " says Amy Kudwa, spokeswoman for US Airways. "We hope our customers are smart enough to know that this isn't the real forecast."

The Bermuda ads are expected to appear soon in *Conde Nast Traveler*, *Departures*, *Elle Decor*, *Golf Digest*, *Golf Magazine* and *W*. So far, no publishers have said they will pull them, Bermuda officials say.

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