

Visitor Studies Group Bursary Report – Emily Dawson

In 2010 I used the VSG bursary to attend the Association of Science and Technology Centres (ASTC) conference. The conference was held on O’ahu in Hawai’i, you can find out more about it here: <http://www.astc.org/conference/>. Highlights of the conference included listening to presentations from the ASTC Equity and Diversity group, whose innovative work in museums in the US has tried to address social justice issues. Meeting people from this group was also inspirational in terms of how much museums and science centres can do to address issues of prejudice, cultural imperialism, heritage and representation. I was also impressed by their network and commitment to improving practice through research, sharing projects, ideas and attempting to work with communities that were far from ‘typical’ visitors.

I also enjoyed Jon Millers presentation about how science centres and museums cannot rest on their laurels. He argued such institutions were at risk of becoming irrelevant, missing their audiences and being outstripped by competing sources of scientific information and education. This provoked some debate amongst the audience who ranged from those equally critical of science centres and whether their futures were sustainable, to those who were die-hard science centre supporters.

Finally, of course, I should mention that I was in Hawai’i, which was a truly amazing place to visit, so I leave you with a picture of the beach by the conference centre. Aloha!

