The Subaru Telescope is now offering public tours within its telescope enclosure. Positive feedback from tours for VIPs led to both internal and external pressure to give the Japanese public an opportunity to see the telescope they fund through their taxes. Despite difficulties of access, approximately 40 people from around the world make it to the summit of Maunakea each month to participate. Although this number is smaller than we had anticipated, the intangible benefits have been substantial, as measured by an increase in positive local press, while tangible drawbacks have been minimal. Providing tours may not be innovative, but it represents a radical change in our attitude towards the public.

**Success and Access:** The Subaru telescope enjoys wide name recognition and support from the Japanese public. The success of tours for VIPs in generating enthusiasm for the telescope and greater expectations of openness in all national institutions led to a demand, both inside and outside NAOJ, to provide an opportunity for all to see the telescope.

**Culture Clash:** Without substantial architectural modifications, visitors must enter work areas of the enclosure to see the telescope. Those who felt that allowing the public to see the telescope was a moral obligation and/or a political necessity had to convince those who felt that the public would be better served if observatory staff could concentrate on operating the telescope without distraction.

**Mauna Kea:** Difficulty of access and environmental and cultural concerns about the use of the summit area of Mauna Kea create several operational hurdles. The cost and permission process for building new structures in the summit area are prohibitive. Despite the remoteness of the summit area of Mauna Kea, observatories are not allowed to provide transportation. The high altitude poses potentially severe health risks to visitors.

Despite the challenges Subaru Telescope began offering tours on October 1, 2004. During the first half year of the program, we welcomed approximately 350 guests.
A potential visitor reserves a place on a tour by submitting a web form a month in advance, and confirms the reservation by signing and mailing a liability waiver form. The tour schedule is released two months in advance. The visitor is responsible for transportation, and for taking the necessary precautions to ensure their own comfort on the summit.

We try to offer tours at least twice a week. On each day that we offer tours, there are two tours in English and one in Japanese. Each tour can have up to eight visitors - the number of people a single staff member can safely usher through the enclosure. If a group of visitors arrives with an experienced tour guide who works for one of the nine tour operators licensed to operate on Mauna Kea, we increase the number limit to fourteen.

Two part-time staff guides conduct the thirty minute tour. The tour begins at the bottom of the telescope enclosure where we house mirror re-coating facilities, and leads to a balcony with a view of the telescope at the level of the tertiary mirror. The guide carries oxygen tanks throughout the tour, and there are wheelchairs available if necessary.

After an initial peak, the number of actual visitors is now settling at around 40 per month. This represents approximately 15% of the total number of “places” that we have been offering each month. Only two thirds to half of the people who begin the reservation process actually go on a tour. Although over half of the people making requests for tours are Japanese, only one third of the actual visitors are Japanese.

Several other numbers are important in interpreting these statistics: Approximately 100 thousand people visit Mauna Kea each year (8500/month). Up to 90% of visitors come on tour packages offered by one of nine tour companies licensed to operate on Mauna Kea. A third of these visitors are estimated to be Japanese. In addition to the public tours, Subaru Telescope continues to accept over 800 visitors each year in the VIP category. These include people with links to NAOJ and its staff, including any educational organization.

The number of people visiting the telescope through our public tour program has been smaller than our initial expectations. We had not anticipated the full consequence of the intersection of our own operational limitations and those of visitors, tour companies, and the authorities responsible for the stewardship of Mauna Kea. Fortunately, the quality of the visitor experience appears to correlate positively with
the difficulty of visiting. Unfortunately, these are difficult to quantify. Nonetheless, visitor response and media coverage has been uniformly positive. We are enjoying the goodwill generated by the symbolic significance of allowing the public to enter into the research facility, even though in practice few have the desire and persistence to do so.