



Activities & Attractions Association of Hawaii, Inc.

June 18, 2019

Aloha Chair King, Vice Chair Rawlins-Fernandez & Committee Members;

Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts regarding sustainable tourism. Council member Sinensi invited me to talk story with you today, regarding the current challenges being experienced on the Road to Hana. After reading the agenda, I realized this was a much larger subject and I've written on the broader subject as well as the road to hana. You are all very smart people, and I do not want to waste your time with my opinions about sustainable tourisms, without your permission. They are written in this document, which you have copies and you may review later.

Out of respect of your time – I speak on just the Road to Hana portion.

The opposite of sustainable tourism is over tourism, which, simply put is too many people visiting the same place at the same time. Essentially it is where a destination is run for the tourists at the expense of the residents.

The number of visitors vacationing in Maui is growing at a rate of 4%. At the same time, Maui residents are moving away at a rate of 1% each year. Last year the average percentage of visitors to residents was 40% or 1 visitor for every 2.5 residents. We are exceeding the 2012 Maui Island Plan's maximum ratio of 1 visitor for 3 residents or (33%).

Since most sane people don't fly to Maui without a place to stay, capacity has been managed through the number of rooms. Today there is a larger mix of places to stay which now include Airbnb, Vacation rentals, Home Swaps, etc.

If you are a landlord, renting a unit as a vacation rental vs. long term provides more money and flexibility. It's not a surprise that many landlords choose the more lucrative vacation rental. Many doing so still illegally.

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Providing visitors with different types of accommodations has been helpful to diversify visitors and keep Maui competitive. People staying at resort hotels have always been our highest spenders. Those staying in private vacation homes are a close second. We target higher-spending visitors as it is better to have 1,000 people that spend \$200 a day rather than 2,000 people who spend only \$100.

This diversity of accommodations has led to a housing shortage, loss of community in some residential areas, increased homeless, high rents, and an increased difficulty controlling the number of visitors coming to Maui. We must enforce the laws regarding illegal vacation rentals while continuing to promote Maui County's first-time home buyer loan assistance program. Build more affordable homes. Maybe consider providing an incentive to landlords which transition from vacation to long term rentals. Maybe promote the benefits of HUD to Landlords along with serving the community?

Travel is the fastest growing industry in the world. Over tourism is making headlines, as residents are taking to the streets in places like Venice, Barcelona, Indonesia, and Ireland. These places have hit a tipping point as their sense of community and identity is being lost. We should watch them and learn from their successes and failures.

Managing tourism is challenging due to the varying needs, wants, and desires of the many people and interests involved. Solutions must unite people and avoid an "us" vs. "them" antagonism.

One need is to educate visitors on the environment and culture pre-arrival and during their visit. Visitors in an unorganized, unsupervised capacity cause an increased conflict, detriment, and safety hazard. We should advise against free on your exploring of this place whether in the water or on the land.

Guided activities align with sustainable tourism. They serve our industry best when they incorporate best practices and the unique culture of this place. Create a government sustainability certificate program with oversight capabilities that educates tour operators, increases public awareness, and provides a bridge between communities,

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visitor industry, government agencies, and environmental partners, like what Hawaii Eco-Tourism currently offers.

* These small, locally owned businesses provide supervised entry into legal areas; rules are recited for guests and followed. These guides take the opportunity to teach and educate respect for the environment and culture. They pay usage fees & taxes – they contribute. These visitor dollars don't exit our county; they are reinvested. These businesses also act as stewards to the natural resources while assisting customers and noncustomers.

* Our county parks, which currently have many ranger vacancies. We need to fill these vacancies, possibly increasing compensation to attract viable candidates. These rangers should focus on enforcing current regulations and eliminating illegal operators while working together with legal businesses.

On the topic of the road to Hana, I had several incidences where people shared conflicts with me. Rocks were thrown through windows of a visitor and a tour operator vehicles. Visitors driven off the road and yelled at by local youths. County workers instructing guided van tours that they were no longer allowed to stop or even drive through any County parks. Vehicles of all sizes getting stuck on the road into Waianapanapa state park. PUC issuing licenses for an already saturated market. The road to Hana is experiencing over tourism.

Managing this situation is challenging, as it involves several different jurisdictions, state, county and private property. Here are a couple solutions that have been implemented in other "hot spots":

Hanauma Bay is an excellent example of a place being loved to death and then saved through smart management in 2002. Capacity is controlled and followed. Part of the conservation plan requires first-time visitors to watch a 9-minute video before entering the park so they can learn about marine life, preservation, and safety rules for the park. All visitors are required by law to refrain from mistreating the marine animals and from touching or walking on the coral. **Lesson Here:** Set a capacity and educate visitor.



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Another more recent example is Haena State Park on Kauai's North Shore, which recently reopening. They are limiting access by parking stalls: 100 stalls, 30 floating stalls for Hawaii residents, and 70 reserved stalls for visitors, which must be reserved online in advance. This intention is to limit the number of daily visitors to 900, where before the estimated visitors to the park was 3,000. The third alternative for park goers is a North Shore shuttle which provided round trip transportation. **Lesson Here**: set capacity and include all users.

Lastly is our own Haleakala National Park, which transitioned commercial operations to four concessionaires and required online reservations for all sunrise visitors. This has eliminated the overcrowding and also increased visitations during sunset. **Lesson Here**: set capacity and spreading out the use over time.

Here are some other suggestions:

- Set up a visitor center and website at the beginning of the Road to Hana where visitors are educated on the dos and don'ts
- Install signs instructing cars to pull over when safe and allow others to pass if there are more than ____ cars behind
- Support guide tour operators as they equate to controlled visitation and fewer vehicles if these same guests each drove on their own
- Build a new entrance to Waianapanapa State Park beginning at the Hana Airport
- Actively ticket illegally parked vehicles
- Work with legal guided tour operators to stagger the times of their tours

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my thoughts regarding sustainable tourism and specifically the Road to Hana,

Toni Marie Davis

Maui Mom

Makawao Resident

A3H Executive Director