

Thriving, Diverse, and Regenerative Economy – Visitor Industry

Public Comment Summary

County of Hawai'i Draft General Plan 2045

The public comment period for the Draft General Plan 2045 was held from September 18, 2023 to April 1, 2024. This comment summary contains the key themes derived from community feedback on the Thriving, Diverse, and Regenerative Economy – Visitor Industry section of the draft plan.

1. Social and Environmental Impacts of the Visitor Industry

Comments express concern about the sustainability and impact of tourism on Hawai'i Island communities. The feedback touches on maintaining local access to trails and questions the promotion of eco- and agricultural and eco-tourism without considering benefits to residents. There are suggestions to evaluate tourism's environmental impact. There is also a call for local-only access to certain areas.

2. Land Use and Tourism

Several comments discuss land use for tourism, such as managing short-term vacation rentals, preserving residential and agricultural lands, the use of technology over physical signs, and maximizing science or educational tourism opportunities.

Development and enhancement of visitor destinations

Comments propose revitalizing current destinations such as Banyan Drive, establishing places as 'wahi pana', and adding facilities to host larger activities. There is also a call for considering development that aligns with local goals.

3. Authentic Visitor Experiences

Comments emphasize the need for authentic visitor experiences that respect and include local communities, viewpoints, and culture. The importance of Hawai'i Island's brand or identity, traditional values, and stakeholder participation in shaping the tourism experience is highlighted.

4. Economic Diversification and Local Production

There is a focus on reducing reliance on tourism and increasing local production of necessities, along with considerations for agricultural tourism.

5. Policy Language and Clarity

Some comments point out jargonistic language and the need for clearer, more actionable terms in policy, and a call for better defining of terms such as 'regenerative tourism'.

Comment	Page Number (in the online Konveio platform)
in addition, a more nuanced approach to public access should be developed through this process as the current requirements do not differentiate between typical developments (ie; resort, commercial, residential) and resource management and stewardship activities seeking entitlements.	180
KS comment: This policy expands public access requirements for landowners and could result in an increase in costs and liability risk, making projects unfeasible. This guideline should consider and provide for balancing of a landowner's need to manage security to adjacent areas and the protection of cultural and natural resources.	180
KS comment: Such a facility could help the County achieve its goals surrounding economic development and lead to development activities in surrounding areas and growth in related businesses, furthering economic benefits.	181
KS comment (Actions 43.a, 44.f & Policy 44.4): These policies and actions directly aligns with Kamehameha Schools' goals and objectives and could help the County achieve its housing, energy, food production, economic, etc. goals.	180
KS comment: The inclusion of the definitions of Wahi Pana and Regenerative Tourism is a positive step forward for the county as these terms did not exist in the prior General Plan or vernacular of other county land use regulations or rules. Protection of culturally significant sites and positive economic impact through higher regenerative tourism activity.	177
Residential neighborhoods existed on the Big Island long before vacation rentals - which are businesses - came along. People managed to live in residential neighborhoods and work in the surrounding area without vacation rentals for many, many years. Definition of residential from Wiktionary: residential Of or pertaining to a place of personal residence or to a location for such places. They live in a residential neighborhood. Used as a residence or by residents. Of or pertaining to residency. Vacation rentals are businesses and as such should not be allowed in areas zoned residential.	180
As the primary driver of Hawai'i Island's economy, the visitor industry has played a pivotal role in economic development, providing employment opportunities, generating revenue, and supporting local businesses. p. 177 Tourist numbers can fall drastically and unpredictably due to economic downturns, strikes in the transportation and hospitality industry, pandemics, and many other factors. Tourism can have severe environmental impacts, and requires hefty investments in infrastructure (airports, harbors, roads) and services (police, water, sewer, garbage collection). The County should advocate for an Environmental Impact Statement (none has ever been done for tourism) to evaluate these impacts, determine what is costs to support tourism, and do a cost-benefit analysis. Our economy should depend less on tourism and more on local production of food and other necessities.	178
Integrate 'aina based and place-based values into Hawai'i Island's identity. Comment: "Aina based generally covers place-based. Maybe "'aina and community based'" instead of"' aina based and place-based.'"	181
Implement interpretive programs and stewardship at wahi pana. Comment: Need more specifics: Develop community based program to codify wahi pana status along with specific stewardship organization and processes.	180
Absolutely! This!!	180
While promoting local products and services in the visitor industry is positive, there are regulatory or logistical barriers that make it difficult for businesses to participate effectively in the tourist market.	181

Advocate for a review and potential relaxation of STVR regulations to ensure they are fair, reasonable, and do not unnecessarily restrict property owners' rights.	179
Short-term Vacation Rentals Regulation (STVRs) (Trends in Visitor Unit Inventory): Lets keep the rhetoric out of the commentary. The 7% increase to state visitor plant inventory is described as 'slight' while in the same paragraph the 7% increase in VRU's is described as "significant"	179
What about if there were policies and programs created to provide access to locals - establishing either certain places for locals only (ie: waipio) or parking for locals only - for specific hours? I think this policy is a good one and makes sense to be placed here in the GP.	181
By adopting regenerative practices, our island can not only mitigate the negative effects of tourism but also ensure the long-term wellbeing and resilience of its communities and ecosystems. General Comments: 1.The emphasis on Regenerative Tourism came as a result to the mounting criticism of the numbers of visitors and intrusion into the social fabric that the numbers of visitors was creating. The numbers of visitors is the basic problem - not that the visitors are disrespectful of the historic and current cultures. The catchphrase of 'Regenerative Tourism' is an effort to divert attention from the real problem of numbers. It is likely that for 90+ % of visitors there has been no change of plans or behavior from before the term 'regenerative tourism' was fabricated. There has been no diminishing of numbers of visitors. 2.By far, the most 'negative effect of tourism' is the associated Greenhouse Gas emissions from air transport of visitors. As we see more and more the social effects of rising temperatures such as climate migration, civil unrest and food shortages and the climate disasters such as fire, flood, hurricanes, sea level rise etc. the more clear it will be that leisure travel must be eliminated. Hawaii tourism, as leisure travel, is perhaps the worst offender on the planet, Hawaii being the most distant archipelago from any inhabited continental land mass. 3.In 2021 I presented a paper to the Honolulu Climate Change Commission indicating that Greenhouse Gas Emissions from air transport of Visitors to Hawaii accounted for 1-1/2x Hawaii's total domestic GHG emissions. The Honolulu Commission requested that I present the paper to the State Climate Commission. Dr. Makena Coffman, UHERO researcher, presented a critique of the paper a year later indicating that the correct figure would be equal to all Hawaii's domestic emissions. However her analysis did not count any connecting flight emissions, but only the two Hawaii legs of an itinerary. This is resultant from her use of the Hawaii State Greenhouse Gas Inventory, of which she was an author, for visitor data. My findings were based on the Hawaii Tourism Authority's eight 'Global Regions of Origin' visitor data and thus counted 'connecting flights' in the itinerary {which has its own problems}. 4. Also subsequent to Dr. Coffman's presentation, the IPCC designated as 'best science' on Aviation emissions a method which calculates the global warming potential of 'non-CO2 emissions' as twice that of CO2 emissions themselves. Whereas myself and Dr. Coffman had calculated these 'non-CO2 emissions' as equal to the warming potential of CO2 itself, using the IPCC endorsed method would bring her calculation of visitor air transport GHG emissions to 1-1/2x the state's total domestic emissions, and my calculation, including the multiple legs of any visitor itinerary, to 2x the state's total net domestic emissions.	178
"regenerative tourism" needs a common definition	180
Capitalize on educational tourism (e.g astronomy, tech, marine science, etc.) -E.g former HCC conference center program that supported conferences and meetings; japan super science fair -need more of these opportunities and greater diversity -lack of facilities to host larger scale activity -work with partners to build capacity	181
Good policy but why is it under Tourism banner?	180
'its' instead of 'the'	180
Please consider adding Agricultural Tourism and Farm Stays here as its own category	179
44. 8 In order to preserve our residents' quality of life and discourage conversion of residential housing of transient uses, the development of new short-term vacation rentals shall be located within Visitor Districts or Resort Nodes.	181

Aina based generally covers place-based. Maybe "aina and community based" instead of " aina based and place-based."	181
Need more specifics: Develop community based program to codify wahi pana status along with specific stewardship organization and processes.	180
How is this priority action related to "Increase authentic visitor experiences?" Seems out of place here.	181
What is "place-based education in this context? For residents, or for visitors? Is it education about "places" or education in easily defined, differentiated places? What is the objective of this priority, whatever the clarified meaning of "place-based" is, in the context of "Increase authentic VISITOR experiences? Please connect the dots.	181
replace "prevent" with "often make it impractical or costly for visitor industry companies to buy.."	181
It would be more helpful/instructive to replace "prevent" with the real issue types, e.g., "..reduce economic, supply scaling and logistical barriers..."	181
a bit too jargonistic. Who are the "stakeholders" regarding "authentic visitor experiences?" What is "Hawaii island's brand?" How many readers, community leaders know who and what is being said there? And, as Yoda famously said to Luke Skywalker, "There is no 'try.'" There is only 'do' and 'don't do.' " Reword to something more like, "support and facilitate dialogue among community groups, tour operators and industry leaders to ensure traditional place-based values and labeling are respected and maintained by this form of visitor experience."	181
This policy is out-of-place; irrelevant to VISITOR experiences. As it sits here, it' is an oblique way of trying to make us think that promoting eco-tourism and ag tourism is for the GOOD for residents (other than the tour operators cashing in it). A little bit, carefully considered and limited, IS good, but it's already getting to be too much in multiple locations, both in natural areas and ag areas. Instead, create a policy that says, "Carefully guide a sensitive, locally respectful growth of eco-tourism and ag tourism that ensures that Aloha will be part of an authentic visitor experience."	181
There's more than a few of us residents who think enough is enough. And we're at enough. We want trails and parking at favorite trailheads uncrowded by visitors so that WE can enjoy them. Eco-tourism is more and more become penetration tourism. I suggest rewording this to delete "encourage" and replace "carefully guide...to ensure access and use opportunities for residents are not reduced by tourism in these locations."	181
If this is the goal, the GP needs to take a well-articulated position on the use of residential and agricultural/rural lands for house-by-house "vacation rentals." Let's confront and deal with this serious controversy right here, before additional STVR/TAR legislation is introduced (imminently expected). This draft ignores the problems, as well as the benefits, of "vacation rentals," and that is an oversight that must be addressed in its revisions.	180
Why are we pushing STEM students to work in the visitor industry? wouldn't they be better served working in the STEM industry?	181
consider utilizing technology in addition to or instead of physical signage. Tech can provide for more information transfer to the visitor vs a physical sign.	180
Develop science/educational tourism for families. We have a lot of science education opportunities already established on island.	180
Revitalization of Banyan Drive and increasing hotel rooms in Hilo.	180