

HOTELPAC – 2020 Candidate Questionnaire (County)

Jade Waialeale-Battad

Candidate for Kaua'i County Council

1) The future of tourism in Hawai'i

Despite tourism's status as one of our state's top economic drivers, the COVID-19 pandemic

has led some to call for our economy to diversify away from tourism. HLTA's longstanding

position has been that our economy should look to diversify within tourism, i.e., develop and

expand industries that complement tourism. Would you support this policy given the

challenge of identifying industries that could immediately replace the number of jobs and

revenue tourism generates for our state's economy? If not, what are your proposals for

diversification?

I am Jade Wai'ale'ale Battad of the Wai'ale'ale Boat Tour family operating boat tours up the Wailua River to the Fern Grotto. My

parents owned and operated this business for 42 years. I spent the bulk of my life in the tourism Industry which gave us a very nice life and taught my brothers and I invaluable people skills and hospitality.

Diversifying within tourism or alongside suggests to me sustainability. And let's be clear that industries that complement tourism are also likely to complement other parts of our economy, which enhances our community's resilience longer term. We're not going to replace tourism and we should not. The industry itself has already taken big strides toward reducing its environmental impacts, and it is best positioned to identify those aligned industries that will best support both tourism and the larger community.

As an aside, I believe it is important not to frame our relationship with the visitor industry as us and them. This is about "we." In the true spirit of ALOHA!

2) Tourism Management

HLTA has long maintained that we believe in the "quality" tourism model rather than the

"quantity" tourism model. Effective execution of this responsible management model takes

many forms, one being the establishment of user impact fees at popular visitor attractions

such as O'ahu's Hanauma Bay. Do you support user impact fees? Do you have other ideas

that would embrace this model?

Our best visitor destinations need care, that care improves the visitor experience and that care should be funded by the people using them. I do support user fees. They are not foreign to travelers, who willingly pay for access to resources like national parks. The improved revenue flow also has the potential to increase local employment opportunities, and may help fund expansions and development of new visitor sites, which can reduce congestion.

3) Real Property Tax

Hotels and lodgings historically have been among the highest real property taxpayers in all

counties, paying from \$10.70 to \$13.90 per \$1,000 of assessed value. In FY2019-2020 alone,

hotels were seven of the top ten taxpayers based on the amount of taxes levied. Due to the

COVID-19 pandemic, hotels have already come due on one installment of real property

taxes, even though many of them have not generated revenue since March. As our industry

looks to recover from the pandemic, will you oppose any increase in real property taxes over

the next three years? Five years?

We—our community, our visitor industry and our county government—will be facing unprecedented financial challenges in the next few years thanks to this epidemic. It would be counterproductive to try to tax our way out of this problem. Our businesses need help, not additional costs.

4) Transient Vacation Rentals

HLTA's position has always been one of fairness, i.e., legal TVRs such as those on AirBnB

or VRBO should be allowed to operate in areas that have been zoned for resorts so long as

the property owner pays the real property taxes associated with a resort property, as well as

the GET and TAT. Where do you stand on this issue? Would you support a measure to

increase enforcement to rein in the proliferation of properties that are operating illegally?

Moreover, would you support an increase in the amount of the fine assessed to illegal

operators?

It is plain wrong to force legitimate, law-abiding businesses to compete with illegal businesses. Our Kaua'i Planning Department has been among the most aggressive in the state in its prosecution of illegal

operators, and I support that activity. Enforcement and tough penalties are key to gaining control over this inequitable situation. Some operators have used the legal system to delay shutdowns while they continue to operate, stealing business from tax-paying legal accommodation providers. That needs to be addressed as well.

5) Homelessness Solutions

In recent years, HLTA has dedicated significant time and resources to address homelessness

in our community. In addition to funds generated through our Visitor Industry Charity Walk,

we secured \$1 million in State matching funds that we used to subsidize the efforts of

homeless service providers around the state. Please provide a detailed description of an

initiative that you would implement to address homelessness in your county.

Many of our homeless are local families down on their luck, temporarily unemployed or adrift because of family divisions. The overall problem is larger than that, but for this segment of the homeless population, our community would benefit from distributed (not centralized but located in our communities) development of micro-housing solutions. Innovative design can create a livable space

in a few dozen square feet, providing our resident homeless with a secure, lockable, safe space with room to sleep, prepare food and a restroom with shower. Perhaps not where you would live your life long-term, but it would be a refuge far superior to a leaky tent or the back of a car. There are plenty of models for this concept, but none here. I would propose an immediate pilot project to identify the best designs and locations.

6) Sustainability in the Visitor Industry

Hawai'i's visitor industry has gone to great lengths to make its businesses more "green" and

eco-friendly. What government incentives would you propose or support to help our industry

bolster these initiatives?

These initiatives, in my view, are best left to the private sector. One role of government is to sit down with industry and ask how it can support the efforts of our community. That may result in legislation to ensure industry-wide standardization to simplify and reduce costs. Draconian government mandates are best avoided.

7) Visitor Industry Health, Safety & Security Standards

As the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread throughout our state, it became clear that

establishing health and hygiene standards would be critical to restoring trust in our industry.

As such, we developed the HLTA Health, Safety & Security Standards. These were created

after reviewing the latest information from the CDC, WHO, and EPA, as well as input from

industry stakeholders. Our standards were submitted to the State Department of Health for its

review. After receiving DOH approval, we shared our standards with the governor, HI-EMA,

State Attorney General, and all the mayors. Please answer yes or no: Would you support the

adoption of our standards as statewide policy for lodging properties? If not, please explain.

Please see my answer to Question 6, above. This is precisely the kind of approach we should follow. The answer, of course, is yes.

HLTA Health, Safety, & Security Standards – [Click to view](#)

8) Public Safety

To date, HLTA has held two highly successful Visitor Public Safety Conferences on O‘ahu.

These conferences have brought together hotel management, security professionals,

lawmakers, law enforcement, social service providers, and other stakeholders to discuss

possible solutions to issues such as late-night cabarets and the need for more security

cameras throughout Waikiki, the homeless population in Chinatown, and a spike in

shoplifting around the island. Each conference led to significant progress in addressing these

community issues.

Neighbor Island Candidates Only: Would you support HLTA in convening a Visitor Public

Safety Conference in your county in 2021? If so, what specific public health and safety issues

would you like to see discussed?

Absolutely. Our visitor industry understands the problems better than the larger community does, and is more likely to have identified

solutions. The industry contains our best experts and most likely the best solutions. One need in our rural community is to determine how best to manage deployment of security cameras in remote locations with or without cell coverage and power. Security cameras in areas with high crime rates can help enforce the law and reduce the threat. Cameras in areas with safety issues for visitors and residents can save lives. Cameras in any of these locations can help us better understand the issues, so we can develop solutions.

O‘ahu Candidates Only: For O‘ahu’s third Visitor Public Safety Conference, to be held in

2021, what specific public health and safety issues would you like to see discussed?

9) If elected, what do you hope to accomplish during your first year in office, which will

undoubtedly be one of the most challenging and difficult times the state and counties have

ever faced.

This is not the time to be developing new programs, although we must not use this crisis to avoid continued progress on affordable housing and homeless solutions. Those issues have been made worse by the crisis. If anything, I want to initiate a new era of collaboration between government, private industry and the non-profit sector. We

need to use the best ideas, to avoid overlap and to find synergies—ways to multiply the effects of our efforts.

10) Please share with us one fun fact about yourself

I was a United States Coast Guard Licensed Captian for 17 years on the Wailua River yet I am prone to severe motion sickness and would often get sick while captaining boats especially on holidays and weekends where there was alot of small boat activity. Its just what you do when your boss (your father) tells you that you are going to Captain school and gives you no choice. After the business closed, I did entertain thoughts of working for other boating companies not on the Wailua River briefly and then thought better of it!!! I retired my sea legs HAPPILY!!!