

Hawaii Lodging and Tourism Candidate Survey
Due 8/25

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?

We must not only continue to expand and diversify our tourism industry, but also diversify Hawai‘i’s economy more broadly. The two goals are not mutually exclusive. Tourism will continue to be a cornerstone of our economy for the foreseeable future. Industries like film complement our tourism industry by advertising our beautiful scenery. We should continue to expand industries like renewable energy and housing construction, but such efforts should not come to the detriment of our tourism industry.

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?

I agree with Tourism Management HLTA’s assessment that Hawai‘i should support user impact fees, especially at natural and cultural sites like Hanauma Bay. We need to find ways to protect our state’s resources while concurrently promoting tourism as an industry for those millions of visitors who visit our islands on a yearly basis.

3) Funding for the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority In FY2019, the State collected \$600.3 million in TAT revenue, of which \$79 million was allocated to the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority. The severe decline in TAT revenues means that future funding is in jeopardy for vital visitor industry marketing and support, public services provided by the counties, and other recipients of that money. With tourism-derived revenue expected to remain low or non-existent for many months to come—at a time when HTA marketing support for the industry will be most needed—would you be in favor of reallocating other State revenues to the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority and mandated recipients of TAT funding to enable the visitor industry to reopen and rebuild?

Yes. Reopening the tourism industry will be a lengthy and costly endeavor. While the State’s tax revenue has declined drastically, I believe the State should prioritize aid to our workforce and our small businesses in allocating federal and other sources of funding, especially those targeted at pandemic relief.

4) Homelessness Solutions In recent years, HLTA has worked with the HTA and Legislature to administer and allocate \$1 million in State matching funds to address homelessness. Would you

support a similar measure that would provide funds for this initiative? Moreover, how would you work with the visitor industry to address homelessness statewide?

Yes. I have championed increasing funding for homelessness relief since my days on the City Council, when we appropriated \$77 million for shelters and facilities. I continue to support initiatives like ohana zones and mental health care to address the root causes of homelessness. The most direct cause of homelessness, and the most pressing issue facing the district and the state, is the housing shortage. The most visible manifestation of the housing shortage is the large homeless population statewide, including in Hawaii Kai, Kahala, Diamond Head, and other neighborhoods that may not be considered traditional hotspots for homelessness. I look forward to working with the visitor industry to ending the housing shortage and addressing all the other causes of homelessness in our community.

5) 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?

Climate change already presents a fundamental threat to our tourism and lodging industry. To that end, combating climate change is among my top priorities as State Senator. King tides of ever greater frequency and severity, shoreline erosion, and record coral bleaching events are just the early symptoms of this crisis. Industry is recognizing that they will need to adapt to higher sea levels and larger storms.

I believe in a fundamentally different approach to urban development--high density mixed use developments near rail stations, all emphasizing walkability--that would essentially eliminate car transportation, the only other major local source of carbon emissions. These initiatives will not only invigorate our tourism industry as it heads into the twenty-first century, but make O`ahu an easier place to travel for our island's visitors.

I also have consistently supported taxes on carbon emissions, real estate disclosures of inundation risk due to sea level rise, and other bills designed to address climate change's impacts on our communities. Disclosures of inundation risks, in particular when it comes to those buildings along our coastlines, will prove critical to planning over the next few decades, if not altogether.

6) 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.

[HLTA Health, Safety & Security standards - Click to view](#)

Yes. I believe that these standards are important to reestablishing the safety of our visitor industry. I also believe that proper ventilation is an important, but under-discussed, safety measure that will help protect staff and visitors alike from the coronavirus.

7) Aloha Stadium Development There appears to be ample public and legislative support for the replacement of aging Aloha Stadium, in which the State would use a public-private partnership to construct a new stadium and transit-oriented development to create opportunities for housing, commercial, and/or industrial growth. With the State government facing an austere financial future, do you support proceeding with the public-private partnership to replace the stadium and develop the site, including authorizing a State investment in this project? If not, why?

I support a plan to develop a public-private partnership to replace the current Aloha Stadium and redevelop the site with a significant amount of affordable housing. While the state's revenue situation has changed drastically with the pandemic, I support efforts to have private partners take a greater share of the cost of construction. I see this project as a means towards (a) guaranteeing economic growth in our state while (b) providing its residents with affordable housing.

It is an inconvenient truth in Hawai'i that most young people will not be able to find good jobs, buy homes, start families, and live good lives comparable to previous generations of local people. For the past three straight years, Hawaii has lost population--the first time since statehood. The exodus of our young people to the mainland now greatly exceeds migration from the mainland to Hawaii. Hawaii is becoming affordable only to the few, and the very few. However, I believe projects like the re-development of Central O`ahu through the replacement of the aging Aloha Stadium and its surrounding area offer the opportunity to promote more affordable housing and greater opportunity for our state's young people.

8) COVID-19 Response State officials have been roundly criticized both for the efficacy of their efforts to quell the spread of COVID-19, as well as the way in which they have communicated with the public during this crisis. Do you agree with this criticism? If so, how would you have handled this public health emergency differently? If not, please explain.

The State of Hawai'i is still grappling with the COVID-19 crisis. Only a few months ago, I (along with state and national commentators, experts, and leaders) might have praised the state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the lowest rate of virus infection in the nation. Today, with triple digit daily new cases for weeks, the inadequacies of the response are clear.

As I have stated previously, one thing I would have done differently was to redeploy workers more quickly to the Unemployment Insurance Division. Clearly, the division was not prepared to handle the avalanche of claims that it faces today, and daily, our office

receives messages from constituents who still have not received a dime in payments, months after they lost their jobs. Another would be to work to make the maximum amount of federal coronavirus funding available for individual relief.

In addition, it is evident that the State Department of Health should have more adequately applied those federal funds made available to invest in a stronger network of contact tracers. We should have been over-prepared for the likelihood of a second wave of cases. As we still deal with this crisis, now is the time to investigate and implement new formulas to enhance transparency within state government.

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.

In these challenging, difficult, and frankly unprecedented times, I will remain committed to solving our housing crisis in the first year of my new term. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the extent of the crisis and has only made it worse to several degrees. Families that were already being pushed to the edge before COVID-19 have now been pushed over the line. As a result of the pandemic and the subsequent economic downturn, I expect that only more local families will need to leave Hawai'i forever because they can no longer find the employment necessary to even live paycheck to paycheck.

The ALOHA Homes proposal I have developed over the past four years is one solution to the housing shortage. ALOHA stands for Affordable, Locally Owned Homes for All. The State would take existing lands that it owns near rail stations, such as parcels already slated for redevelopment or other underutilized parcels, and build high density housing. Such projects might even include the proposed redevelopment of Aloha Stadium referenced in a previous question.

These developments would be highly walkable, and their residents would commute via rail instead of in cars on the road. They would be sold at cost, as little as \$300,000, which means a monthly mortgage payment of \$1,500. There would be no taxpayer subsidy, and only Hawaii residents who would be owner-occupants and own no other real property could buy them. These projects would be built on existing urbanized lands and would involve not one inch of agricultural, conservation, or otherwise undeveloped land.

In these economically uncertain times, I perceive infrastructure and housing development as an available guarantor of economic growth. Such projects not only create local jobs, but they also provide affordable housing for local residents that flows well with our desire to re-imagine the future of our state and its tourism industry in the next few decades.

10) Please share with us one fun fact about yourself.

I am the 881st person on Facebook.

