



Wednesday, March 3, 2021 | Today's Paper | 70°

## HAWAII NEWS

# Kauai to open doors to more tourists

By [Allison Schaefer](#) • Today • Updated 12:40 am

Lisa Stevens Wegner, who owns Koloa Kai Vacation Rentals & Management, is closely following Kauai's quest to rejoin the state Safe Travels Hawaii program, as the result could determine whether her tourism-dependent business lives or dies.

Kauai Mayor Derek Kawakami said Tuesday that he is seeking to rejoin the Safe Travels Hawaii program, which would make it unnecessary for Kauai's out-of-state visitors to stay in a resort bubble or spend time on another Hawaiian Island to qualify for a quarantine exemption.

"We have been hanging on by a thread, just having secured a Small Business Administration loan and put in an application for a second Payroll Protection Program loan," Wegner said. "It has been difficult for us as small-business owners to blindly assess how far and how long to leverage our assets in order to hang on. This is much-needed relief."

Kawakami's request, which is under review by Gov. David Ige, marks the first glimmer of hope for many tourism-dependent businesses on Kauai. Travel to Kauai plummeted after Kawakami opted out of the Safe Travels program Dec. 2, requiring all travelers to Kauai to undergo a mandatory 10-day quarantine with no option to test out.

Starting Jan. 5, Kauai ended the monthlong tourism shutdown by allowing interisland passengers to participate in Hawaii Safe Travels and introducing its own trans-Pacific entry program. But those changes did little to help Kauai tourism, which in January was down more than 90% with only 3,987 visitors and \$10.2 million in visitor spending.

Gov. David Ige said during a Tuesday news conference that he is reviewing Kawakami's request. Ige also marked this week as one year since the first case of COVID-19 in Hawaii. He said Hawaii continues to have the lowest case rate and the lowest death rate in the country over the course of the pandemic.

That's especially true of Kauai, where the state's most severe travel restrictions have kept case counts to a minimum.

State Department of Health officials Tuesday reported 35 new infections statewide, including 18 on Oahu, 12 on Maui, three on the Big Island, none on Kauai and two residents diagnosed outside of Hawaii. That brought the state's total since the start of the pandemic to 27,623 cases. Only 182 of those cases were on Kauai.

The statewide death toll stood at 439 Tuesday, including 349 fatalities on Oahu, 53 on Hawaii island, 33 on Maui, one on Kauai and three Hawaii residents who died outside the state.

Ige said Tuesday that he had spoken Monday with Kawakami, who "certainly felt like the mitigation measures that they had taken have helped reduce the spread of the virus on Kauai."

If Ige approves Kawakami's proposal, beginning April 5, trans-Pacific travelers who test negative before arriving in Kauai can avoid the island's mandatory 10-day quarantine.

### STAY INFORMED ABOUT COVID-19

By clicking submit, you agree to Star-Advertiser's [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply.

### Get free email updates:

Star Advertiser

“Kauai reminded residents of our community-

Kawakami said more than 24,000 doses of vaccine have been administered on Kauai, and he's confident that employees in the hospitality and food service industries will be offered vaccines by April.

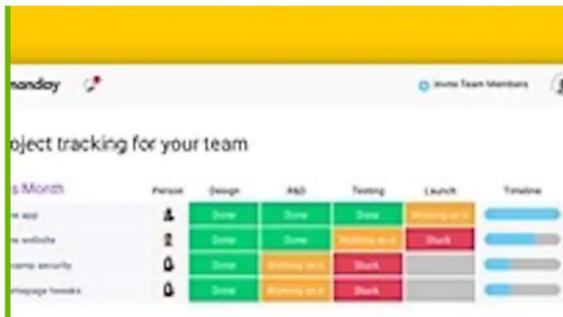
“Case counts across the state and on the mainland are stabilizing. Our local hospitals are working closely together and have surge plans in place for additional ICU capacity, if needed,” he said. “They have also obtained more equipment and have COVID testing and treatment options available to respond to any increase in COVID-19 cases.”

Fred Atkins, general manager of Kilohana Kauai, a tourist attraction with a restaurant, train ride and luau, said it's looking brighter on Kauai. Kilohana Kauai has been closed since the pandemic dropped travel demand and made gatherings complicated.

Atkins is hopeful that Kauai's latest travel-related proposal will allow Kilohana to reopen its train by the middle of May as well as offer some seating at Gaylord's restaurant. He's also hoping to get the luau reopened for the typically stronger summer season.

Katy Britzmann, sales and marketing director for the still-shuttered Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort & Spa, said the resort is meeting today to talk about setting a new reopening date. Britzmann said the resort had reopened Nov. 1 for approximately five weeks but closed about five weeks later due to the quarantine-related drop in travel demand.

“We've had about 70 to 100 employees working while we've been closed — that's down from 850 before the pandemic,” she said. “We are looking forward to ramping up as occupancy returns.”



Sponsored Content

### Start planning your week with monday.com

By Project-Management.com - monday.com helps teams work more efficiently to execute projects that deliver results on time.

[Click here](#) to see our full coverage of the coronavirus outbreak. [Submit](#) your coronavirus news tip.



#### Be the first to know

Get [web push notifications](#) from *Star-Advertiser* when the next breaking story happens — it's FREE! You just need a supported web browser.

[Subscribe for this feature](#)

