

HAWAII NEWS

Economic recovery for Kauai likely to be slow going

By [Allison Schaefer](#) • Jan. 4, 2021

A monthlong shutdown of Kauai tourism ends Tuesday, but it's still too early to tell whether the changes are enough to make a difference for the Garden Island or the rest of the state, which is grappling with additional tourism challenges.

Kauai opted out of the Safe Travels program, effective Dec. 2, requiring all travelers to Kauai to undergo a mandatory 10-day quarantine with no option to test out.

Starting Tuesday, Kauai will allow interisland travelers to participate in Hawaii Safe Travels and avoid quarantine with a negative COVID test before arriving.

Also starting Tuesday, Kauai will begin running its own trans-Pacific entry program.

Trans-Pacific travelers can avoid quarantine on Kauai if they first go to another Hawaii island using the Hawaii Safe Travels pre-arrival testing program and spend at least 72 hours on that island before traveling to Kauai.

A second option to avoid the 10-day quarantine on Kauai is for visitors to stay in "resort bubbles." In this case the visitors must have a negative COVID test before arriving on Kauai. That test doesn't have to come from the list of trusted testing partners put out by the state. After they arrive, they must go directly to one of six properties designated as a resort bubble, for at least three days. While at the resort they can use swimming pools and walk the hotel grounds, but they aren't allowed to leave the resort, including using the nearby public beaches. After three days, if they take a second COVID test and the results are negative, they can leave the bubble.

Kauai Mayor Derek Kawakami said the newest Kauai travel entry programs are "an important first step" in allowing more incoming travelers to return to Kauai. From Nov. 1 to 30, Kauai welcomed 36,146 travelers as part of the Hawaii Safe Travels program, which allows travelers to enter with a negative COVID test. However, Kauai's decision to opt out of Safe Travels Hawaii on Dec. 2 contributed to a major drop-off: Only 6,295 passengers came to Kauai during December.

So far, feedback on the changes has been mixed.

The changes benefit the six properties that Kauai has already approved to serve as resort bubble hotels, including The Cliffs at Princeville, Hilton Garden Inn Kaua'i Wailua Bay, Ko'a Kea Hotel & Resort at Po'ipu, The Club at Kukui'ula, Timbers Kaua'i Ocean Club & Residences at Hoku'ala, and the Kaua'i Marriott Resort at Kalapaki Bay.

Gary Moore, managing director of Hoku'ala — A Timbers Resort on Kauai, said the resort, which has been running a "resort bubble" since October, has begun to see additional interest in the concept.

Moore acknowledges that "resort bubbles" won't appeal to all guests. But he said that the 450-acre Timbers resort is blessed with enough space and other amenities including the restaurant Hualani's, an 18-hole golf course and four pools across two pool decks to satisfy those who have come.

 **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:



Enter your email address

Sign Up

Moore pande × workforce during the government restrictions.

“Our occupancy had gotten back up to 75%, but it dropped to about 40% after Dec. 2, when Kauai exited from Safe Travels Hawaii,” he said.

News of this week’s changes has already garnered about 10 or 12 new reservations, Moore said.

“It hasn’t been huge, but the news is just getting out. We’ve also forming partnerships with property management companies to allow vacation rental guests to stay with us for 72 hours before moving to a vacation home,” he said.

The changes mean that Lisa Stevens Wegner, who owns Koloa Kai Vacation Rentals & Management on Kauai, can finally host visitors again. Short-term rentals on Kauai saw losses mount again in December when Kauai began requiring all travelers to quarantine as the county didn’t allow vacation rentals to be used as quarantine locations.

But Stevens Wegner isn’t very optimistic based on early response to the latest tweaks, which create additional costs and uncertainty for travelers.

“Things continue to devolve on Kauai, and with the most recent passage of the ‘resort bubble’ shortened quarantine idea, we fear it will not help, and will only embolden the Mayor to continue to keep the island shuttered. Businesses are going under or temporarily closing daily.”

Hawaii Lodging & Tourism Association President and CEO Mufi Hannemann said Kauai’s hotel industry isn’t anticipating enough business for shuttered hotels like the Grand Hyatt or the Sheraton Kauai to immediately reopen.

“I continue to hear from Kauai’s small business community that the changes aren’t working and that these latest tweaks won’t make enough difference,” Hannemann said. “(Kawakami) might be scoring points with doctors and the medical community and those that don’t want to see tourism come back, but I’ve yet to talk to a hotelier or small business person that thinks this is a good idea.”

Jack Richards, president and CEO of Pleasant Holidays, said the company isn’t selling “resort bubbles” because the rules are confusing and the company hasn’t seen enough guest demand.

“I’m not sure people want to spend \$10,000 on a trip to Hawaii knowing that they are going to be stuck for three days,” Richards said. “If they test positive, there’s also a lot of worry about who will pay for their confinement.”

Richards fears that the Kauai changes will add “even more confusion” to Hawaii’s travel entry program, which already took a major hit Nov. 24 when the state stopped allowing visitors to bypass the quarantine unless they had an approved test in hand before the final leg of their trip to Hawaii.

Keith Vieira, principal of KV & Associates, Hospitality Consulting, said Hawaii tourism is in a “booking malaise” that is likely to continue until travel rules are simplified and made clear.

“The Kauai situation doesn’t just harm Kauai; it harms tourism across the state. People don’t understand the geography, and they worry that the rules are going to keep changing,” Vieira said. “But the worst rule is still the one where you have to get the test results before you get on a plane. I came back from Seattle in December and was worried every night. People don’t want to worry when they are on vacation.”



Sponsored Content

One Simple Method To Keep Your Blood Sugar Below 100 [↗](#)

By [WeeklyPenny.com](#) - Do This Immediately if You Have High Blood Sugar

× [News tip.](#)



Star Advertiser

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](#)

