

## **Note Regarding “Experience Hawai‘i”**

The following paper was written in 1999 as a thought piece on possible new directions for tourism in Hawai‘i. While many things have changed in the intervening ten years, some things have remained the same, and many challenges continue to confront us. We’re republishing this piece because some of the ideas and concepts continue to have relevance to the conversations going on today, and in the hopes that similar, but more current, innovation will occur in the years ahead.

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# Experience Hawai‘i

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**PURPOSE:** To evolve the nature of the tourism industry in Hawai‘i to benefit both local residents as well as visitors

## **INTRODUCTION**

There is a serious need in Hawai‘i for a sustainable and beneficial economy. Many of the dominant economic industries since the arrival of the West has been either unsustainable or detrimental to Hawai‘i’s health, or both. From sandalwood to whaling to the military and on to tourism, nothing has adequately addressed the needs of Hawai‘i in terms of economic prosperity and environmental sustainability. Although there has been an enormous amount of discussion and commentary devoted to Hawai‘i’s economic future in recent years, none of the ideas put forth has moved beyond industrial-age ideas about economics and development. What is needed is an approach that takes into account the global trends leading us into tomorrow as well as the material and social needs of the people of Hawai‘i.

This paper proposes an evolution of what we now term “tourism”. Tourism is typically thought of as a lucrative industry in which visitors pay to step out of their daily lives to bask on our beaches and enjoy a prepackaged facsimile of our unique cultural heritage. Tourism has also been a “service” industry, where we produce nothing, and rather provide visitors with a range of controlled and often canned experiences. In the future, however, tourism can evolve into a beneficial and symbiotic relationship, within which we share something special with visitors, and they in turn share something important with us. In this change we can shift from being a “peripheral” and service economy, to a more self-sustaining economy that increases our cultural strength and economic stability.

“Experience Hawai‘i” is this evolution of tourism. We will reclaim part of what was once a vacation spot for ali‘i, and convert it into a cultural and educational center providing a beautiful space for the interaction between visitor and kama‘āina. While the kama‘āina inhabit this space for their own cultural experience and learning, they will share this space with the visitors, inviting them to enter our home and partake of food and fun with our ‘ohana. The visitors will no longer be passive observers of pre-packaged culture; now they will become friends as they immerse themselves in all that is truly beautiful and unique in our culture. We will have gained from their interest, participation, and of course their kālā, and they will have gained real experience in our culture and a deeper appreciation of our thoughts, concerns, and history. All of this will take place in a context that is explicitly about sustainability, respect, and sharing.

## **THE EXPERIENCE**

### **Kamoku**

The initial and main facility for Experience Hawai‘i will be *Kamoku*, and it will be built in Waikīkī. This area was once the place ali‘i went to vacation and surf, and it is likely to be forever connected with the very ideas of paradise and tourism. Kamoku will be constructed in

Waikīkī specifically to play off of these historical precedents, and also to reclaim a part of Hawai‘i that many kama‘āina no longer consider their own.

Kamoku will be designed from the ground up as an organic and sustainable structure. Deviating radically from the industrial age norm of right angles and gray concrete, Kamoku will mimic the land around it, with irregular “mountain” ridges, sloping mountainsides, and dark green “valleys”. The entire building will resemble a miniature island, something an observer from a passing airplane might mistake for a tiny volcanic remnant. No island would be complete without lush vegetation and distinct ecosystems, and so Kamoku will support a wide variety of plant life, each where it would fit most naturally.

Sustainability is a driving concern, and so Kamoku’s engineering will take advantage of decades of research and experience in construction using energy efficient and earth-friendly methods and materials. Drawing on successful experiments in the United States and Europe, everything from the lighting, heating/cooling and ventilation, and construction materials will be addressed. Experience has shown that buildings constructed along such lines not only enhance human living, they earn back their cost in energy savings.

The infrastructure of Kamoku will take every advantage of emerging technologies. The world is rapidly becoming wired, and Kamoku will feature broadband access to the internet and its own intranet, with access connections and terminals in every room. Many of Kamoku’s administrative processes will be automated, such as room reservations, room service, transportation, laundry, and Activities scheduling. Vendor ordering and communications will also be done largely through electronic means, relying on web-based applications to allow vendors, visitors, and tenants to access the necessary services. In addition to administrative functions, Kamoku will require ubiquitous broadband connections to enable the intense communication, downloadable multimedia and streaming media applications envisioned for the Experience. We also want visitors and kama‘āina to be able to connect with other outside activities and (Heaven forbid!) work.

The facilities within Kamoku will provide spaces for both visitors and kama‘āina. For kama‘āina, there will be meeting rooms, small auditoriums for classes, practice rooms outfitted for music and dance, and rooms designed to practice and learn la‘au lapa‘au. There will also be at least two computer access centers dedicated and staffed for individuals to learn about and gain access to the internet. There will be gardens throughout Kamoku, and it is intended to experiment with lo‘i within the Kamoku grounds. Restaurants and performance areas will also be available.

For the visitors, the Experience will be both relaxing and pleasantly challenging. Due to Kamoku’s irregular construction, the hotel rooms will not be the typical cardboard cut-out squares with drab furniture and curtains. Each room by necessity will be different, both in contour and in décor. High speed access to both Kamoku’s intranet and the internet will be available in every room. Significantly adding to the Experience, the staff of Kamoku will speak in Hawaiian. In addition, all of the signs, brochures, and materials be printed in Hawaiian with small font English translations. Visitors will be encouraged to join ongoing Hawaiian language

classes in Kamoku, but for those who find the language immersion aspect of the Experience unappealing, translator/guides can be hired at extra cost.

### **Activities**

The focus of Experience Hawai'i is on the *experience*. To this end, Activities will be designed and structured to join visitors and kama'āina in mutually beneficial experiences. Kama'āina gain free use of Kamoku's facilities and services in exchange for opening their activities to visitors who wish to learn. Visitors will be joining in on activities that kama'āina do for their own benefit, thereby taking part in bonafide cultural activities rather than sipping Mai tais and watching staged performances. This benefits both parties. Kama'āina gain access to state-of-the-art facilities and services and the benefits of tourism dollars, while visitors gain hands-on experience and a first-hand understanding of the culture and issues native to Hawai'i. While the list of potential Activities is infinite, the following represent those Activities that Experience Hawai'i will initially focus on:

- Lo'i
- Environmental restoration
- La'au lapa'au
- Mo'olelo (both fiction and what English terms "history")
- Mele
- Arts
- Hula
- 'Ōlelo Hawai'i
- Cooking

As is apparent in the listing, many of these activities will take place outdoors, which is where they naturally and best take place. Additionally, it is anticipated that by sharing in these Activities, visitors will often have their own wisdom or experience to add, thus contributing to shared learning, enhancing the experience for all involved.

### **Services**

Experience Hawai'i will offer a wide variety of services, including translators, computer and internet instruction and access, customized memorabilia for visitors (traditional forms as well as multimedia), and limited transportation services. In addition, Experience Hawai'i will connect visitors with knowledgeable kama'āina to assist in planning vacations in other parts of the state. Experience Hawai'i will also offer corporate membership, extending discounts to employees of companies that provide expertise in the form of guest speakers, technical support, sponsorship, internship programs for kama'āina, or invitations to experience their companies and work.

### **WWW**

Experience Hawai'i will make the most of emerging technologies to automate and enhance the experience for all. Through its website, accessible through both Kamoku's intranet and the internet, individuals have access to live streaming media coverage of activities and performances, virtual tours of Kamoku, online reservations and Activities scheduling, bill payment, bulletin boards and suggestion boxes, as well as The Experience Shop, where individuals can purchase online a variety of books, multimedia, memorabilia, and crafts.

## **CONCLUSION**

The need for a new model of economic development and cultural and environmental sustainability is readily apparent. Rather than clinging to outmoded ideas in the hope that the mystical economic cycles will swing back to our favor, we need to envision a new industry that will sustain both our cultural needs as well as our economic needs. Rather than selling the promise of paradise and a caricature of our heritage, we should be focused on our real culture, in ways that benefit both kama'āina and visitor. Experience Hawai'i is such an answer.

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