

## **The Kaua`i of the 21st Century**



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### **Kaua`i 2012: ONE FUTURE**

Kaua`i has many futures. The future described here, and a possible process necessary to achieve it, will focus on rediscovering a truly Garden Island where local culture flourishes, education is a serious pursuit, and visitors enjoy an enriching experience in a pristine natural environment. Kaua`i has always had a unique natural beauty, and was not overdeveloped to the point of no return. A transformation to a more natural state after the hurricane of 1992 was quite logical.

#### **The Garden Island**

By the year 2012 the University of Hawai`i has become a center for research in tropical agriculture and plant engineering. The major research facilities are located on Kaua`i where the rain is plentiful and the population density low. Kaua`i is now free of the fruit fly which infested the island twenty years ago. The Hanalei valley is ideal for research in taro, rice and other crops requiring large amounts of water and high rainfall. Research into commercial agriculture as well as methods of subsistence farming are carried out in lands once used to produce sugar cane. The climatic conditions of this small island range from almost 100 inches annually on the north shore to about 15 inches on the dry west area. The University currently has research and educational programs and contracts with both developed and developing countries world wide. This program has brought talent from around the globe to the Garden Island as well as providing employment and educational opportunities for many long time island residents.

The National Tropical Botanical Gardens, covering 176 acres near Kalaheo, has continued to gain prominence as an important research facility and visitor attraction. The Garden, started by Queen Emma in the 1870's, was originally designed for the enjoyment of residents and visitors, but has grown into a research center as well.

Prior to the introduction of research agriculture, almost 80% of Kaua`i was either under cultivation for sugar (44,000 acres) or owned by the state. Some sugar production still remains, essentially on the Lihue plantation. Macadamia nuts, coffee, seed corn, and especially tropical flowers are grown commercially. Revenues from these crops do not represent a major portion of the island economy since they are not grown in significant quantities. Kaua`i long ago quit trying to compete seriously in a world market because of its isolated location. Many of the island grown agricultural products are produced for local consumption by the visitor industry and the local residents.

Agricultural research has had a four fold advantage for the Garden Island. First, a new scientific industry has emerged to provide meaningful and well paying employment for many of Kauai's residents. Second, the presence of the university has provided an opportunity for residents to become involved in higher education and has raised the academic standards of the island high schools.

Third, the visitor industry has benefited. Several hotels were not rebuilt after the 1992 hurricane. Those that were renovated were done so with a focus on a more educated guest remaining for a longer stay. University programs have provided these guests an opportunity to enjoy the unspoiled beauty of the Garden Island. Hotel occupancy runs over 74% year round. The fourth and perhaps the most important benefit to Kaua'i has been the development of a modern and efficient infrastructure that has preserved the natural beauty of the island.

The major hotels are located at Princeville, Kapaa, Lihue and PoiPou. Approximately 6000 guest rooms/units are available on the island. This represents a mix of hotel, condominium, bed and breakfast and detached cabins. The visitor mix on Kaua'i is approximately fifty percent Western and fifty percent Eastern, Mideastern, and Asian travelers and students. Several south shore hotels were not rebuilt subsequent to the hurricane. These prime shoreline properties are now public parks and beaches. The south shore climate is ideal for all recreation, so on any given day there are groups of island residents and guests enjoying these areas.

Golf is still popular with all visitors to the island. Kaua'i has nine courses. This number has not changed in the past twenty years. It was determined in the long range planning that this number would serve the island without crowding. In addition, the water for this number of courses is not a major consideration on an island with the annual rainfall of Kaua'i. All courses are public, although the green fees on the resort courses are higher than the public courses.

Housing on Kaua'i is more affordable since land costs are more reasonable relative to incomes than in the past. Land reform has brought real estate costs in line with the economy. Materials and labor costs are still higher than mainland levels, but single family dwellings and condominiums are being constructed to meet the demands of the population. University housing is available for many faculty and staff. Hotels are utilized by university visitors.

The towns and villages of Kaua'i were restored to plantation style architecture after hurricane Iniki. Many pre-European structures have been constructed either adjacent to or separate from these settlements in order to focus on pre-colonial Hawaii. Early Hawaiian building techniques and cultural practices are actively studied and taught through the construction and use of these dwellings.

Visitors and residents glide quietly around the Garden Island in energy efficient and comfortable electric cars. A well utilized light rail system parallels the highway connecting the major towns. Conventional gas vehicles are still in evidence, but are lightweight, small, and energy efficient, designed more for utility than comfort. Commercial helicopters move the bulk of the supplies and materials on the island. Highway congestion is not a problem since people tend to live near their work, and shop and utilize services nearby.

The island of Oahu is a short ride by commuter helicopter or hydrofoil. Heliports are conveniently located at Princeville, Lihue and Port Allen. Hydrofoils glide in and out of Nawaliwali and Port Allen harbors. These

facilities were developed with a combination of federal and state funds earmarked for transportation facilities. Large quiet wide body aircraft primarily provide direct mainland freight service late at night to the Lihue airport. High lift configuration, jet aircraft are able to use the sixty-five hundred foot runways with complete safety. Fresh island grown flowers, fruits and vegetables are flown directly to mainland and far eastern markets. Food and supplies essential to the island economy are either brought in by air or barges. The barge configuration has changed little in the past twenty years. It is still an economical way to move bulk cargo between islands.

Native cultures have retained their identity and are perhaps more distinct than in the past. Traditional Hawaiian values are emphasized and practiced throughout the island society. Public schools encourage the expression of cultural difference and have modified many educational processes to accommodate these differences. Hawaiian language is a popular subject along with a culturally oriented history of Hawaii. History is relived in story, song and dance as well as through the sacred sites throughout the island.

The University of Hawaii, Hawaiian Studies Center now has a facility on the island. In addition to on-island classes, many subjects are available through interactive television classroom instruction in large comfortable facilities at the Community College. These facilities have been continually expanded since their inception in the early 1990's. In addition to instruction originating in Honolulu and other Hawaiian locations, international experts conduct classes from world wide locations on a regular basis. Bachelors degrees in many areas are available on Kaua'i as a result of these programs. Funds are provided in part by the United Nations Education Commission, private investors and co-operative university programs throughout the world. There is also considerable opportunity for advanced studies in many areas. Students are well prepared to participate in vocations of their choice while retaining an appreciation and understanding of their own culture.

In keeping with the emphasis on revitalization of Hawaiian culture, many types of non-traditional education are available on the island. In conjunction with the University of Hawaii, many persons with expertise in areas of Hawaiian culture provided enrichment experiences, either from their homes or small schools throughout the island community.

The Aloha spirit of the past dominates the behavior throughout the island. Hotel guests are aware of the ho'okipa or hospitality from the beginning of their stay. The guests are seen as equals by the hotel staff, not superiors to be waited on by servants. They are truly guests in the resorts and hotels. The introduction of Total Quality Management (Demming, 1991) in the resorts has given the employees a strong voice in management as well as making the service guest centered. Decisions are made at the worker level in most cases and communication between staff and management is open. Profits are shared in many cases, and every effort is made to provide the guest with the best possible experience. Since the hotel employees are better educated, better paid, and participate in daily management decisions they see themselves as professional hosts dealing Aloha not just rooms.

## **Master Planning for the Future**

Vital issues requiring study and consideration are:

\*Recognition of all cultures within the population

- \*Land reform and development models
- \*Economic base for the future
- \*Education systems and opportunities; Redefine education
- \*Redesigning tourism in terms of the culture and environment
- \*Design and construction of an effective infrastructure

## **Political:**

Planning for the future of Kaua'i began at the grass roots by people with a vision for a better future. It became evident after Hurricane Iniki that Kaua'i had an opportunity to move forward with more opportunities for all residents. Even before the hurricane work had been completed on looking at the future of Kaua'i. On November 15, 1991 the Kaua'i Economic Development Board in cooperation with the Office of the Mayor conducted a planning workshop looking at Kaua'i in the year 2000. The majority of the participants identified unspoiled scenery, open rural spaces and a stronger visitor industry as important components of Kaua'i's future. How could this be done?

A council and mayor with vision, planning and listening skills, and a willingness to cooperate were needed. Futures planning was undertaken seriously as evidenced by the selection and hiring of a professional consulting firm to assist in the process. One year dreaming, data gathering, and team building for all elected officials was carried out prior to actual planning activities. Total Quality Management processes were taught and practiced from the outset. This insured all participants received the education essential for the planning process, that statistical controls were developed to measure progress of the planning, and that team skills were developed. With this beginning, planning got underway.

Monthly town meetings were held at all the local neighborhood centers to get continual feedback from all residents, and visitors if they desired. The previous top down form of government was replaced with participation from the bottom up. Naturally, not everyone participated, but interest increased as time went on and people began to realize their ideas were being incorporated into the planning process. Many old zoning laws had to be reviewed and reworked to allow effective change to take place.

## **Education:**

The critical need for an improved educational system was recognized. All major decisions were made at the state level. Funds were not available to upgrade facilities, increase teacher salaries, or purchase new equipment. These challenges and others had to be addressed by the planning commission and council. A Kaua'i education planning council was organized to include teachers, administrators, students, parents, business people and politicians.

It was soon discovered that many changes could be implemented without additional funds or approval from the state. In essence the new focus was on teaching style, recognition of and teaching to cultural differences, parent-teacher-student self help programs, and more active involvement by the business community. Change

came slowly, but ultimately small successes emerged. Basic math and reading skills improved, students were more interested in school, they focused on their own as well as the corporate culture, nontraditional programs tailored to individual students increased, and teachers began to participate more actively in the management of schools. At the dawn of the 21st century education had begun to enjoy a position of significant importance on Kaua'i and funds from private as well as state sources were more readily available for further innovation.

Interactive television facilities were chosen as the priority since they were seen as the most versatile. Experts could be available in a wide range of subjects and students could interface with the professor as if they were right here on the island. These facilities could be expanded as funds were available. In addition to conventional educational programs, these facilities would be available for cultural, non-degree, self-development and socio/political dialogue between groups on Kaua'i and elsewhere.

### **Land Reform:**

In 1985 Kaua'i had 44,059 acres of land in sugar production on five plantations. Four of these plantations were owned by Amfac, C. Brewer, and Alexander and Baldwin, three of "Big Five" of Hawaii. With the decline in profits from sugar production in the 90's it became more feasible to approach these companies with a proposal to return a percentage of these lands to the Hawaiian Sovereignty land trust, the state and private ownership. The Kaua'i Planning Commission was tasked with the responsibility of meeting with the owners to develop a plan for sale and transfer of lands no longer used for profitable sugar production. The state was finally petitioned to purchase the sugar plantation land owned by the Big Five on Kaua'i for approximately \$1,000 per acre for resale or conversion to University of Hawaii agriculture research.

Considerable quantities of the land were leased and those leases expired in the mid 90's. Individuals were permitted to purchase land at between \$2,500 to \$3,000 per acre for affordable homes, substance farming or small commercial agricultural businesses. A master plan developed in 1996 was followed in developing all aspects of Kaua'i so piecemeal building and haphazard growth could be prevented. Each segment of this plan was approved by the grass roots level boards and councils throughout the island before implementation.

### **A Marketing Plan for the Garden Island of Kaua'i**

It was recognized that both the Visitor Industry and the government of Kaua'i would benefit from attracting well educated, environmentally conscious visitors to the island. High occupancies would result in room and excise tax revenues and increased profits to the hotel owners, employees, and management companies. A world wide visitor base would insure a higher average occupancy rate since guest count would not be so sensitive to individual economies, weather and vacation trends. In addition, a wide cultural mix would enrich the experience for both the travelers and the residents of Kaua'i.

The Kaua'i Visitors Bureau was re-structured as serious future strategic planning got underway. Hotel companies remaining in operation on Kaua'i realized their future depended on a new level of cooperation between business and government. Total Quality Management became the norm for both business and government. As education improved and became more central in importance, more and more middle and top level hotel managers came from the population of Hawaii. They then became involved in the marketing sector of hotel management.

The new Visitors Bureau team, along with individual hotel management staffs, developed a long range master plan to market the island experience, culture and educational opportunities. They place primary emphasis on university and cultural centers, retirement communities, and environmentally conscientious travelers. Advertising to these target groups is a priority in allocating funds. Reliance on return visitors, educational and professional conferences, and seminars was determined to be the focus for the marketing effort. Satisfied guests are the best advertisement any business can have. Guest centered management and the Aloha spirit are major factors working for Kaua'i.

## **EPILOGUE**

This is Kaua'i of 2012. A future both achievable and realistic. It is only one future, however. The goal of this plan is to be as inclusive as possible, both in terms of the cultures participating in this future and the businesses and investors currently involved in the life of this community. Hawaii has become a multicultural state and will continue as such in the future. The rediscovery of Hawaiian culture and life styles can enrich not only the native Hawaiians, but all of us dwelling on the land in this special place.

And so the sun sets on this future day, September 11, 2012. Aloha and welcome to our ohana.

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