



CAPITOL CONNECTION

MAY 2021

Milestones for vaccines, intercounty travel and climate change

In this pandemic, every milestone counts. For Hawai'i, the good news is that we've opened vaccinations to anyone age 16 and up, we're making it easier for fully vaccinated residents to travel intercounty if they received their shots in Hawai'i and we're laying the groundwork in communities statewide for more mindful tourism as summer approaches. The state also took center stage for Earth Week as a global leader in fighting climate change — a top priority of the Ige and Biden administrations.



Gov. Ige announces the vaccine exception program.

Q. Governor, why is this the right time for vaccination exceptions for intercounty travel?

A. The mayors and I wanted to find a way for Hawai'i residents to see family and friends without having to quarantine or do a pre-travel test, at least between the islands. We felt it would be one way to help the local economy and at the same time prepare for trans-Pacific travelers. We know the majority of those coming from out of state have gotten a pre-travel COVID-19 test so if they want to travel interisland, it would be less of an issue. This first step in easing restrictions will help us when we can expand to more trans-Pacific visitors. Our goal is still to keep our community safe while we reenergize our economy.

Q. How do we balance tourism rebound and local resident concerns? How is HTA working with island communities?

A. We're embarking on a new Hawai'i 2.0 course for the visitor industry. We want visitors who respect our norms, our environment and our Hawaiian culture. The Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) and the rest of us in state leadership recognize the need to manage the number of visitors — especially for "hotspots" in our communities, as we've done at **Hā'ena State Park on Kaua'i**. We also need to do a better job of clamping down on illegal vacation rentals in residential neighborhoods and investing more tourism dollars in natural and cultural resources. HTA is taking a comprehensive approach to destination management based on the "four pillars" of its strategic plan: natural resources, Hawaiian culture, community engagement and responsible travel.



State and community leaders at Hā'ena State Park.

HTA has collaborated over the past 14 months with local residents and stakeholders to produce a **Destination Map Action Plan (DMAP)** for each island to manage tourism responsibly. The DMAPs provide a roadmap for how HTA and other state, county and community organizations can work together over the next three years to identify opportunities and solutions. The goal is to ensure that residents of each island have a voice in what a responsible, regenerative model of tourism could mean for their communities.

Q. What did the pandemic teach us about climate change, and how is Hawai'i leading future efforts?



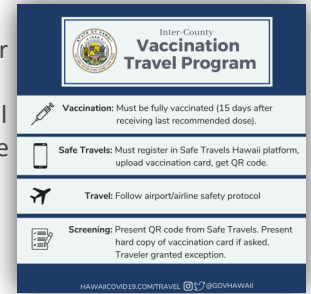
A. We've learned we can dramatically reduce greenhouse gases when we change our own behavior. During the pandemic, the air and ocean waters have never been cleaner. In Hawai'i, we're striving to accelerate green infrastructure, including better protection of watersheds and reefs, guarding against sea level rise and more clean energy solutions. We've also been working with the travel industry on reforestation to offset its use of fossil fuels. We're proud that we were the first state to commit to 100% renewable electricity by 2045. Now our goal is to be the first net-zero community or better — to capture more carbon than we release through greenhouse gases. These are all opportunities to restructure the state's economy and accelerate our long-term goals, and I'm heartened by the ambitious targets President Biden has set for the country.

Q. During the past year, we've asked a lot of everyone, especially moms in the community. For this Mother's Day, do you have a special message of appreciation? What did you admire most about your own mom?

A. We definitely want to send a special thank you to the moms across the state for the sacrifices they've made during this pandemic. My mom dreamed of becoming a nurse so she went to live with a host family in Colorado, where she graduated from high school and nursing school. When you think about it, it was a pretty courageous thing to do back then for someone so young.

New intercounty exception for fully vaccinated residents

A new **Vaccination Travel Protocol Program** will launch **Tuesday, May 11** to allow fully vaccinated individuals who received their shots in Hawai'i to fly between the islands without pre-travel testing or quarantine. "Fully vaccinated" is defined as being beyond the two-week period from the completion of a shot series. If a traveler arrives before they are fully vaccinated in Kaua'i, Maui or Hawai'i counties, they will be subject to mandatory self-quarantine for 10 days, unless they meet the criteria for other exceptions. The program is the first step to setting up a broader system for trans-Pacific (continental U.S.) travel, if logistics can be worked out for later this summer. "We decided to start with an intercounty travel program for those vaccinated in the state because we're able to verify the information," said Governor Ige, who was joined at an April 20 news conference by Lt. Gov. Josh Green, Maj. Gen. Kenneth Hara and county mayors.



Travelers will need to provide the **Centers for Disease Control (CDC) COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card** for each of the vaccine doses received by uploading a digital image to their Safe Travels Hawai'i online account, as well as showing the original vaccination card to airport screeners, if asked. Trans-Pacific travelers arriving in Hawai'i – both visitors and residents – will still need to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test result to bypass the state's mandatory quarantine. Travelers age 5 and under may bypass quarantine requirements, provided they are traveling on the same itinerary as a parent/guardian who has met vaccination verification requirements. Travelers over age 5 who are not yet eligible for vaccinations may participate in the pre-travel testing program.

Hawai'i among global leaders in fighting climate change

In a series of high-profile **U.S. Climate Action Week events** viewed around the world last month, Governor Ige highlighted Hawai'i's leading role in addressing global warming and transition to renewable energy. The sessions focused on the United States' renewed commitment under the Biden administration to take "bold action" on climate change and join with other nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The governor emphasized, "Hawai'i was the first U.S. state to commit to 100 percent renewable power by 2045 —and we're excited the Biden administration is looking to raise that ambition for the entire country."



Governor Ige joined special envoy John Kerry, energy secretary Jennifer Granholm and other global leaders for U.S. Climate Action Week.



Protecting our island Earth.

The governor also joined several other **U.S. Climate Alliance governors** for a discussion of how the states and the Biden administration can expand economic opportunity through collaborative climate action. "Addressing climate issues can and should play a significant part in our pandemic recovery," said Governor Ige. "Making the transition to renewable, indigenous resources for power generation allows us to keep at home at least \$4 billion currently spent out of state for oil. We save on electricity bills and generate jobs—in turn improving our economy, environment and energy security." He added, "As an electrical engineer and businessman, I understood (back in 2015) the future is 100 percent renewable. And even though we don't know exactly what that future will look like, we do know that putting out that North Star, making that commitment was important to drive how we transform Hawai'i's economy."

The national and international discussions included appearances by John Kerry, U.S. special presidential envoy for climate; Jennifer Granholm, Secretary of Energy; and Gina McCarthy, White House national climate advisor, as well as leaders from other nations taking their own action on climate change. In one session, Kerry noted that of 11 communities nationwide selected to receive assistance through the **Energy Transitions Initiative Partnership Project (ETIPP)**, two are from Hawai'i. They include a clean transportation plan on Kaua'i and a Hawaiian Electric hybrid microgrid mapping project.

Governor releases \$443 million for CIP across the state

More funds for affordable rental housing . . . modernization of the unemployment insurance system . . . major renovations for schools and UH system campuses . . . upgrades to public housing, airports, and emergency siren sites statewide — those are just some of the critical capital improvement projects (CIP) being funded with **Governor Ige's release of \$443 million in funding** over the past few months. "We're doing at the local level what President Biden has proposed for the nation: strengthening infrastructure, improving public facilities and delivering good-paying jobs for our state," said the governor. "Together, we are expanding opportunities and investing in the future of Hawai'i. It is now more important than ever to reimagine and rebuild our communities while ensuring that disadvantaged groups previously impacted don't get left behind."



President Biden's American Jobs Plan being debated in Congress highlights the need to invest in these projects. Biden's plan calls for upgrading highways, bridges, ports, airports, transit systems and affordable housing as well as delivering clean drinking water, a renewed electric grid and high-speed broadband. The plan also seeks to invest in more next-generation job creation and workforce training to combat climate change, especially for rural communities and those impacted by the transition to clean energy.

HTA, communities work to redefine Hawai'i 2.0 tourism

Rebuild. Redefine. Reset. Spend some time with **John De Fries**, new **Hawai'i Tourism Authority CEO**, and it's clear those are more than just words to him. "They reflect the shift in HTA's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan that puts more emphasis on addressing tourism's impacts in a sustainable way," he explains. De Fries is well aware that a surge of visitors seeking a safe destination like Hawai'i post-COVID could lead to an increase in negative resident sentiment and attitudes toward visitors. How to educate and manage the new wave of travelers tied to the state's largest industry with more than 216,000 employees and \$2 billion in state tax revenue—that's the challenge facing HTA and local communities in the months and years ahead.

The solutions aren't easy and they're unique to each island, but for the past 14 months, steering committees statewide have created **Destination Management Action Plans (DMAPs)** based on community input that reflect this major shift in HTA's approach. They include island-specific actions to be taken in the next three years and "hotspots" that residents are most concerned about. The result is a set of plans for **more responsible, "regenerative tourism," where the watchword is mālama — to care for and protect our islands.** That's why De Fries, HTA and Mike McCartney, director of the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism want to take a more comprehensive, mindful approach. That includes the Strategic Plan's interacting "four pillars" of natural resources, Hawaiian culture, community involvement and marketing for responsible travel that can be managed in partnership with other state, county and community stakeholders. "We have an obligation to mālama the visitor, but at the same time, we need to educate the visitor on how to mālama us as a place, a people and as a society," said De Fries. McCartney adds, "We're at a pivot point where we can redefine tourism for a Hawai'i 2.0 future."

De Fries calls himself a *keiki o ka 'āina* — a "child of the land," who grew up in Waikiki and fished its waters with his uncle. As a 40-year veteran of the visitor industry, he's determined to find ways that tourism and the local community can not only co-exist but also provide a win-win solution. "I don't see how you arrive at a model that's sustainable unless the community owns it," he adds. He also is the first Native Hawaiian to hold the position, which he says gives him an increased sense of accountability. "A close Hawaiian friend of mine said to me, 'Our children need to see you succeed,' says De Fries, who lives in Kona. "When he said that, the magnitude of it really hit me."



HTA CEO John De Fries lends his support for the Safe Travels program.



Polynesian Cultural Center CEO Alfred Grace describes safety protocols to the governor.

De Fries became CEO at HTA on Sept. 16, just before Governor Ige launched the **Safe Travels program** with COVID-19 pre-travel testing. Since then, he has joined the core group of state leaders helping the state navigate the pandemic. "What I value about the governor is that he's a critical thinker and he's highly principled. That's what you want right now in that office," says De Fries. **"Now we're seeing him shift into higher gear to revitalize the economy and bring back jobs,** which business leaders are welcoming in every sector. The increased vaccinations, the Safe Travels program and our own residents' precautions are all working. In the end, a safe and healthy community is a safe and healthy destination for tourism." De Fries also sees the pandemic as a chance to redefine the role tourism plays in economic diversification. "When the juggernaut of tourism stopped, carpenters, plumbers, carpet layers, arts and culture, graphic arts, IT—it became clear how all these areas we don't associate directly with tourism—along with the farmers, restaurants and hotels—lost business opportunities," says De Fries. "The industry can provide both on-the-job training and small business growth as well as a place for full-time employment."

As for tourism's future in a Hawai'i 2.0, De Fries says, "The visitor industry is going to be central to the state's economy for a long time because people will always be attracted to Hawai'i. **We need to educate our visitors and make them part of the solution.** We can lead the industry by building on a set of larger, sustainable goals that protect natural and cultural resources. The most responsible form of tourism is regenerative tourism where our economic future is coupled with our ability to keep our islands healthy and flourishing. Ultimately, I believe Hawai'i will be recognized as a place of healing—for ourselves and for the world."

HTA's Mālama Hawai'i initiative and Destination Management Action Plans (DMAP) 2021-2023

The Mālama Hawai'i program with local hotels, industry partners and volunteer organizations inspires mindful travel among visitors, allowing them to give back to Hawai'i through environmental and cultural projects. For a current list, go to <https://www.gohawaii.com/malama>.

The community-based DMAPs for the counties of Hawai'i, Maui and Kaua'i are available at <https://www.hawaii tourism authority.org/what-we-do/hta-programs/community-based-tourism/>. The O'ahu DMAP will be completed this summer.



Feeding Hawai'i's children and honoring moms

Childhood hunger isn't a problem just for Third World countries. It's a stark, new reality for many of Hawai'i's children in the wake of the pandemic. For the first time, Hawai'i is among the top 10 states with the highest child food insecurity, according to Feeding America projections. One recent UH study reported that nearly half of Hawai'i families are still struggling to put food on the table — despite the state's expansion of federally funded programs such as SNAP and P-EBT, as well as community efforts.

First Lady Dawn Amano-Ige has made food insecurity one of her top issues and led a recent discussion of the problem among First Spouses for the National Governors Association. "The challenge is reaching families who need it the most," she said. "We want people to know about the connection between SNAP, EBT cards and the free and reduced lunch program through the schools." The number of children in SNAP households can also help a school extend free school meals to all students. "If someone knows a family who could be eligible, they can get help through the schools to apply," she explained. Although the school year ends May 28, there are multiple school sites that will continue summer food service programs, thanks to U.S. Department of Agriculture funding. Other community organizations with summer programs also provide meals to children.



For her May book choice, Mrs. Ige will be reading **"A Chair for My Mother,"** which will air May 19 on 'Olelo Channel 53, then repeat on May 23, June 6 and 13. It tells the story of a girl who saves money to buy her mother a comfortable chair so she can rest after her shift as a waitress. Mrs. Ige said the book reminded her of her own mother who worked long hours as a Campbell High School cafeteria baker. "Maybe that's where my interest in providing food through the schools comes from," she said. "I always admired my mom's strength and commitment to her job." As a former teacher, the First Lady added, "I look for books with a message I want to share and words that paint a picture. I want children to get lost in the story. That way they can truly appreciate the literature."

'Go for Broke' stamp to honor WWII Nisei soldiers

A commemorative **"Go for Broke" U.S. postage stamp** with special meaning for Hawai'i will be issued nationwide **June 3**. The recognition is based on the "Go for Broke" motto of the 100th Infantry Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team who defied all odds during WWII to become the most decorated unit in U.S. military history. The stamp honors the contributions of some 33,000 Japanese-American soldiers at a time when some members of their own families were sent to internment camps. The veteran pictured on the stamp is Shiroku "Whitey" Yamamoto from Hawai'i island, who served in the 442nd unit. Yamamoto passed away a few years ago after decades of volunteering at the Army Museum at Fort DeRussy.

The fathers of both Governor and Mrs. Ige served in the 442nd unit — two-thirds of whom were Nisei from Hawai'i. "I truly believe their generation was the greatest because they had to fight prejudice while the U.S. government was incarcerating 110,000 individuals of Japanese ancestry," said Governor Ige. "In spite of that, they decided to sign up to fight for freedom and democracy and prove their loyalty to the United States." Both the governor and First Lady said their fathers never talked about the war or the suffering they endured. In fact, the governor and his brothers always wondered why his dad referred to Oct. 30 as his "lucky day." "My dad was in the battle to save the Texas 'Lost Battalion' under German attack in France," said the governor. (In that battle, 211 men were rescued. The 442nd suffered over 800 casualties.) "We learned after he passed that Oct. 30 was the day he was injured in that battle, survived and earned his Purple Heart."



Governor and Mrs. Ige with photos of their dads.



One Million Doses Given
in Hawai'i & Counting!

"Congratulations Hawai'i! Together we've reached the million shot milestone. Let's keep the momentum going."

Dr. Elizabeth Char,
Director of Health

ONE MILLION . . . AND COUNTING

"Congratulations, Hawai'i! Together we've reached the million-shot milestone. Let's keep the momentum going," said state Department of Health director Dr. Libby Char when the state hit that milestone last month. With COVID-19 vaccine eligibility now expanded to all Hawai'i residents ages 16 and older, 300,000 more people will be able to receive protection. The state Department of Health says the biggest challenge is making sure vaccine supply keeps up with demand.

Contact Us: Executive Chambers, State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
Phone: (808) 586-0034 Fax: (808) 586-0006
Hilo Office (808) 974-6262 | Kona Office (808) 323-4542
Maui Office (808) 243-5798 | Kaua'i Office (808) 274-3100

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