

Trisha Kehaulani Watson: A Wave Of Entitled Tourists Shows The Need For Action

My husband worked in the hotel industry for 18 years. The stories he shares are hilarious.

- Tourists asking the front desk when the staff were going to pull turtles up onto the beach for them to see.
- Tourists asking the staff to “turn down the ocean” because the noise was too loud.
- Tourists demanding to get into their rooms nine hours early (often when the occupants from the night before were still there).

From tourists who harass monk seals to those who think it’s OK to poop in people’s yards after a hike (often illegal hike), the “reopening” of Hawaii has brought all of this back to the islands like one giant, sunscreen-covered, coconut-sipping, convertible-driving tsunami.



If this is “building back better,” better sucks.

The truth is tourists have been an inconvenience for a long time, like when a fly gets in the house. It’s not going to destroy anything, it’s just annoying. But let’s be honest, many of us were resigned to the fact that tourism is at least

better than other industries: coal, steel, factory work.

Slapping on a smile and handing out shell lei is certainly less environmentally and physically taxing than strapping on a helmet and going down a coal mine.

What's changed? Why the outrage now?

It's the fact that tourists seem to be less satisfied with enjoying a couple days sipping overpriced drinks and getting their obligatory sunburn on Waikiki Beach. They want adventure! They paid all this money! They're entitled to the experience they dreamed of. They want authenticity. They want "the real Ha-WHY-ee!"

Well, real Hawaii ain't here for it.

Our Backyards Aren't Your Playgrounds

I'm not one for book burning, but if wishing made it so, I'd burn every copy of those books that reveal "secret spots." I'd torch those apps that do the same, too. They're a menace, and the idea that people are profiting off of teaching visitors how to trespass and access dangerous sites is frankly appalling.

From Haena to Laniakea to Hana, the influx of tourism and the too-common belief of visitors that they've "bought" a vacation that entitles them to go anywhere they want in the islands really boils down to a fundamental disrespect for the place they're visiting. A disrespect that is fully enabled by authors and app developers happy to capitalize on visitors' desire to access "secret spots."

These authors and developers are nothing more than profiteers looking to benefit from the harm they cause others, whether communities now crippled by traffic and trespassers, or natural and cultural resources literally trampled under a stampede of visitors.



The recent return of tourism underscores the need for stricter management. Cory Lum/Civil Beat/2021

These apps and books are widely available in ABC Stores, Costco, Longs, at the airport. Communities fed up with tourists flooding their communities should lobby these stores to take these books off their shelves. Lobby app stores to stop carrying these apps.

If we're serious about stopping these constant floods of bad behavior, there needs to be a mass movement.

- Stop the distribution of apps and books that encourage tourists to engage in illegal activities, like trespassing.
- Require airlines to run a video on all incoming flights educating people about proper behavior. (I mean, if we can ask every single person coming into the state if they are carrying fresh fruit, we can do this.)
- Adequately fund the Department of Land and Natural Resources, especially for enforcement. We should have Division of Conservation

and Resources Enforcement officers everywhere. We should also have community steward programs funded through DLNR to help manage areas.

- Better visitor management. It's time to simply make areas entirely off limits and to monetize areas for visitors to fund management. (Residents should not have to pay — we pay enough taxes.)

We are beyond our carrying capacity as it is and inviting in hordes of tourists isn't helping.

I will say I'm slightly hopeful though – with new leadership at the Hawaii Tourism Authority – specifically, Native Hawaiian leaders who seem to embrace the need to manage visitors. There seems to be an unprecedented level of political will to make the changes we need to allow for sustainable tourism that doesn't adversely impact our communities and resources.

It's certainly long overdue.