

Hawaii Governor To Tourists: Stay Away

August 23, 2021

Hawaii Gov. David Ige said airlines have agreed to “amplify the message” that Hawaii has no aloha for tourists right now.

Hawaii Gov. David Ige on Monday called on tourists to steer clear of Hawaii, as Covid-19 cases continue to surge, overtaking the state’s health care system.

Ige stopped short of imposing the sort of travel restrictions that effectively shut down Hawaii’s tourism industry when he put them in place in March 2020. Instead, the governor called on people to voluntarily postpone non-essential travel to and from Hawaii until after October.

“They would have a much, much better experience” if tourists wait until the late fall to visit the islands, Ige said on Monday.



Waikiki Beach was packed with people enjoying the beach as Hawaii was experiencing a spike in Covid-19 cases statewide. Cory Lum/Civil Beat/2021

The governor said the administration is asking tourism companies to let would-be travelers know Hawaii is simply not fully prepared for them. Restaurants are operating at half capacity, for instance, and there's a severe shortage of rental cars, he noted.

Ige acknowledged asking tourists not to come could seriously hurt small businesses that have only just begun to recover.

"Certainly our call to reduce travel to the islands to only essential business will have an impact on the numbers that come here," he said.

But he said the bigger risk is to do nothing and let hospitals become overwhelmed.

"As a community that's a risk we have to take," he said.

Tourism industry executives expressed general support for Ige's call. But it wasn't clear how much the companies would be willing to discourage customers.

Jerry Gibson, president of the Hawaii Hotel Alliance, a hotel trade group, said the organization supports the governor's message. But Gibson declined to say whether the industry would take steps to reduce demand for leisure travel, for instance, by raising rooms rates so high that people would not want to come.

Instead, he said, travelers already were beginning to shy away from Hawaii, as the delta variant dampened the appetite for travel.

"Organically it's already happening," he said.

In a written statement, Gibson elaborated, saying: "With Hawaii's hospitals on the brink of disaster and the Delta variant raging through the unvaccinated community throughout our islands, the Hawaii Hotel Alliance stands with Governor Ige and our four county Mayors reemphasizing the need to tackle this pandemic head-on. For everything there is a season, and in this moment in time the hotel industry is focusing our efforts on supporting our city, state, and federal leaders, first responders and our medical community in dealing with this pandemic."

Ige said he met with some airlines on Friday and that they agreed to consider conducting what amounts to a reverse marketing campaign: sending the message that tourists aren't wanted, at least for now.

"I did ask, and all the airlines said they would look into doing what they could to amplify the message," he said.



Crippled by Covid-19 for much of 2019, Hawaiian Airlines and other carriers are now being asked to tell travelers not to visit Hawaii for now. Cory Lum/Civil Beat/2021

Ige declined to say which airlines he had met with but said he understood that the industry was still reeling financially from the Covid-19 crisis that grounded many fleets for much of 2020. Ige's 14-day quarantine for travelers to Hawaii, which is now 10 days and can be sidestepped if a traveler is vaccinated or provides a negative Covid test, largely shut down the visitor industry for much of 2020.

"Certainly I'm fully aware that all of the airlines continue to struggle," Ige said.

The governor said he couldn't talk to the airline executives about fares, schedules or flights because doing so could be a violation of antitrust laws.

Alex Da Silva, a spokesman for Hawaiian Airlines, which is the state's dominant air carrier and one of its largest employers, said the airline

supports keeping Hawaii safe. But conspicuously absent from the company's statement was any mention of amplifying Ige's message that tourists should stay away.

*"Is a lockdown on the table? Yes, it would be." —
Gov. David Ige*

"We are acutely aware of the stress on our health care system imposed by new COVID-19 cases, and our hearts go out to those affected," the airline said in a statement. "We continue to believe that the single most valuable measure to address this crisis is increasing the vaccination rate in our community, which is why we have announced our intent to require our employees to be vaccinated."

Hawaii House Speaker Scott Saiki was more blunt, noting that public health statistics show residents, not tourists, are mainly responsible for spreading Covid-19.

"The governor did not say anything today that will improve Covid numbers in Hawaii," Saiki said. "On travel he should have been more specific."

Saiki noted that public health data shows that tourists in general aren't responsible for Hawaii's Covid-19 spread.

So instead of rolling up the welcome mat in general, Saiki said, Ige should have said Hawaii wants all visitors to be vaccinated, or that residents shouldn't travel to Covid-19 hotspots like Las Vegas.

"I'm afraid we're headed for another complete state shutdown," Saiki said.

Ige declined to say what would trigger more severe restrictions but

acknowledged it could happen if cases keep growing exponentially.

"Is a lockdown on the table?" Ige said. "Yes, it would be."

Not a subscription

Civil Beat is a small nonprofit newsroom, and we're committed to a paywall-free website and subscription-free content because we believe in journalism as a public service.

That's why donations from readers like you are essential to our continued existence.

Help keep our journalism free for all readers by **becoming a monthly member of Civil Beat today.**

[Contribute](#)

About the Author



[Stewart Yerton](#)

Stewart Yerton is the senior business writer for Honolulu Civil Beat. You can reach him at syerton@civilbeat.org.

Top Stories