

INSIDE: WHAT VISITORS WANT TO EAT * BIG ISLAND BUSTLE

HAWAII *hospitality*

LODGING & FOODSERVICE | MARCH/APRIL 2017

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Tourism Trends for 2017

Local hospitality market keeps pace with diverse tastes



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PHOTOS COURTESY HAWAII ECOTOURISM ASSOCIATION

The Modern Sunset Pool

PHOTOS COURTESY THE MODERN HONOLULU

BY BRANDON BOSWORTH

When it comes to Hawaii tourism, certain things remain constant. Visitors continue to flock to the USS Arizona Memorial, Waikiki Beach, the Polynesian Cultural Center and other well-known attractions. However, this doesn't mean the local hospitality industry is static. Travelers' changing tastes are reflected in three trends to watch in 2017 and beyond.

Beautiful Boutiques

Lodging is a big part of any vacation experience, and more travelers are

bypassing luxury resorts and generic hotels in favor of boutique establishments with more individual character.

"Boutique hotels are smaller and offer intimate, authentic experiences,"



Kelly Hoen

says Kelly Hoen, general manager of The Modern Hotel, a 353-room luxury boutique hotel. "A boutique hotel makes each person feel special. They're not lost in a sea of other guests at a mega-resort."

One of the oldest boutique hotels in Hawaii is the Travaasa Hana, which was opened in 1946 as the Kauiki Inn. "With 70 rooms and a staff of locals –

some of which are third generation workers to the resort – our people care a great deal about their community and sharing that with travelers staying with us," says manager

Marni Aina. "Being able to tell them about their favorite places to visit throughout Hana and how they spend their free time rather than hearing a list of suggested recommendations from seasoned hospitality workers is something I think that separates a boutique property like us from a larger hotel."



Marni Aina

Hoen believes people are looking for more from their hotels in 2017. "Consumers aren't settling for the

big box, one-size-fits-all approach," she says. "They're always looking to the new, latest, greatest in technology, culinary, nightlife, culture. Travelers have smart phones and do their research. They are more savvy and expect more than a nice room. They expect authentic experiences and want to be immersed in the local scene in a way that mirrors the values and vision of a boutique hotel."

Aina concurs. "The evolution of travel and corresponding trends is something that has continued to change with the times, but we are seeing a strong emphasis on quality over quantity for travelers to the Island," she says.

Beth Churchill, chief revenue officer, Aqua-Aston Hospitality, says that "in order for a boutique property to stand apart from other lodging offerings, the most important elements it can offer are an exceptional stay experience and a commitment to personalized service where the hotel's team will go out of their way to make guests feel at home."

Hoen sees further growth in the boutique hotel market in Hawaii. "We predict a rise in niche boutique lodging statewide as guests seek intimate, im-

mersive experiences and hotels see the benefits that boutique properties bring to Hawaii's hospitality landscape," she says.

Churchill also sees plenty of room for the market to grow.

"Hoteliers have noted the success of the boutique hotels Aqua-Aston manages in Waikiki like The Surfjack, Lotus Honolulu at Diamond Head and Hotel Renew, and this year, several larger brands are introducing independent boutique properties into the area," she says.



Beth Churchill

Culinary Curiosity

The rise of foodie culture means many tourists are no longer satisfied with eating most of their meals at hotels or familiar mainland chain establishments.

"Our guests, specifically, are looking for the best in food, fun and flavor," says Matthew Gray, owner of Hawaii Food Tours. "They want to see, smell and taste our world-famous aloha spirit. They wish to break bread in genuine, non-touristy settings." His company of-



PHOTO COURTESY SPIRITUAL TOURS HAWAII

Hawaii's Spiritual Side

Spiritual Tours Hawaii is a new company offering a unique service: tours of Hawaii's most spiritual and culturally significant sites. The company works with individuals such as *kahu* Mel Ho'ala and *kumu* Karen Leialoha Carroll to provide crafted tours of locations such as the Byodo-In Temple, Ulupo Heiau State Historic Site, the Hare Krishna Temple and Makapu'u Point.

The company's founder and owner, Simina Van Clief-Prohor, says she has always been a spiritual person, and felt there was something missing in the local tourism industry. "Hawaii has every kind of tour but nobody was doing spiritual tours," she says. Spiritual Tours Hawaii seeks to fill that niche.

For more info about Spiritual Tours Hawaii, visit spiritualtourshawaii.com.

fers clients the opportunity to learn about and taste a variety of local favorites at hole-in-the-wall establishments throughout Oahu. Gray sees food tours as part of a general travel trend towards "more socially-engaging tours and attractions."

The Big Island's Home Tours Hawaii offers an especially intimate dining experience for visitors. Owners Pat and Lisa Christian help clients experience Island hospitality first-hand by arranging meals at private residences.

"Most guests have the opportunity to go to many of our amazing restaurants and enjoy the food, but where else do they have the chance to eat in local homes and talk story," Lisa Christian says. "There is something magical that happens when people share food together in private homes; friendships and bridges are built."

Eco Encounters

While pristine beaches have long drawn people to Hawaii, some of today's more adventurous travelers want to experience other aspects of the

Islands' natural environment.

"You can tell ecotourism is fairly popular based on the number of companies offering tours," says Michael Walther, president and founder of Oahu Nature Tours, which offers tours on all four

major Hawaiian islands. "Lots of entrepreneurs are setting up great tours."

Linda Cox, Community Economic Development Specialist at the University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources and adviser to the board of the Hawaii Ecotourism Association, says the term "ecotourism" was coined in the late 1970s when mass tourism reached its peak. "It is a niche market that incorporates environmentally friendly and culturally protective techniques," she says.

With its unique environment and wildlife, Walther believes Hawaii is a natural place for ecotourism, and he notes that the industry has had significant growth in the past 10 to 15 years. He finds that ecotours are especially popular with Baby Boomers.

"They came of age with Earth Day and the environmental movement and are very focused on natural experiences," he says.

Younger travelers are also interested in ecotourism, but Cox believes cost is

more of an issue for them. "Young people are very interested in sustainable tourism," she says. "However, they do not have the income to pay for some ecotourism experiences that involve very

small groups and exclusive locations so they often use social media to guide themselves."

Author of the book "Extinct Birds of Hawaii," Walther sees bird-watching as a new potential ecotourism trend. He points out that the Big Island just last year held its first annual Hawaii Island Festival of Birds and is currently developing the Hawaii Island Coast to Coast Birding Trail (HICCBT), a 90-mile cross-island driving route from Kona to Hilo.



Lisa Christian



Linda Cox