

The Maui News

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Has Maui reached its tourism limit?

VIEWPOINT

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SEP 9, 2018

DICK MAYER



MOST READ

When the plantations mechanized in the 1950s, there were no jobs and Maui's workers had to leave to find employment elsewhere. Elected officials, government agencies and appointed commissioners facilitated tourist projects by minimally enforcing regulations. They entitled vacant plantation and ranch land for hotels, condominiums, golf courses and shopping centers.

Both unemployed agricultural workers, and recent graduates found on-island jobs. Construction companies benefited, while growing numbers of Realtors made money selling properties to tourists. The growing tourist industry saved Maui's economy.

However, the biggest beneficiaries were off-island investors. They exported their profits, instead of providing promised affordable workforce housing and paying higher salaries. Investors loved Maui's low property tax assessments with Hawaii's lowest hotel property tax rate.

Economic prosperity disguised negative and often unwelcome impacts to the environment, local traditions and culture. Tourists, not Maui residents, selected Maui as the "*top tourist-*

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destination island!”

Locals find that the quiet beaches that families previously enjoyed are congested with tourists, kayak rentals, scuba operations, weddings and beach chairs. Beaches lack parking and access. Tourist guidebooks and social media highlight our “*special secret places.*”

Tourist spots are overburdened. Twin Falls has hundreds of parked cars with visitors streaming to waterfalls. Helicopters fly over residential areas. Downhill bikers endanger local traffic. Hana residents cannot deal with the Hana Highway traffic. Haleakala National Park requires advance permits for sunrise viewing.

Overtourism results in long commutes, day and night shifts with unattended children, multiple jobs, overcrowded schools, a shortage of doctors, dangerous intersections, wastewater finding its way into the coral reefs, lost views, pesticides draining from golf courses, brown-water advisories, etc.

Tourist industry salaries do not keep up with housing costs; families have to co-habit residences. Second home “*McMansions*” are built for part-time tourists, while needed affordable units are neglected. Infrastructure for a quality community is not built because tourist facilities do not have to pay needed impact fees.

State bureaucrats and tourism champions advocate shifting Oahu’s tourism onto Maui by increasing Kahului Airport capacity, increasing short-term visitor rentals in residential

neighborhoods, and constructing even more hotels. Local residents suffer as off-island investors convert potential housing into vacation rentals.

Unfortunately, as Maui's quality of life deteriorates, political leaders do not acknowledge or even address the situation. Many politicians are stuck in the past thinking that they must promote a bigger tourist industry. Those days are over. Maui now has a mature tourist industry that needs to protect itself from overtourism. We need political leaders who will assist residents, not corporate investors, and who will enable affordable housing, not more hotels and gated communities.

The Hawai'i Tourism Strategic Plan recognized the change from 50 years ago when it warned, *"The relationship between the number of residents and visitors on the island at any given time cannot be overlooked as an important public policy discussion point. Resort communities . . . have grappled with the "golden goose" debate, whereby the tourism experience may be compromised by the very nature of the area's popularity."*

Fortunately, Maui's legal tools can promote a tourist industry that will protect jobs, and not disappoint future tourists with a deteriorating visitor experience. Our County Council in 2012 passed the Maui Island Plan (part of the General Plan), a legally binding county ordinance. The plan makes tourist industry regulation an important requirement to preserve and protect

Maui's quality of life.

The Maui Island Plan (Pages 4-14) states: *“Maximize residents’ benefits from the visitor industry”* and *“Promote a desirable island population by striving to not exceed an islandwide visitor population of roughly 33 percent of the resident population.”*

That means that if Maui island has 156,000 residents, as we now have, then we should not have more than 52,000 tourists on an average day. However, in July 2018, we had an average of 75,000 tourists each day! Obviously, we already have too many tourist accommodations, most legal, but enough illegal, to reduce housing availability for residents.

The plan (Pages 4-12) states: *“Increase the economic contribution of the visitor industry to the island’s environmental well-being and for the island’s residents’ quality of life.”*

We must elect leaders in November who will restore and preserve the high quality of life that Maui residents deserve, while carefully protecting our existing tourist industry from overtourism and killing itself.

* Dick Mayer is a retired, 34-year Maui Community College economics and geography professor, former vice-chair of the Maui General Plan Advisory Committee and former member of the Maui Planning Commission. He lives in Kula.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Abandonment of Kurds reminiscent of Vietnam

The recent spate of political turmoil surrounding President Trump's ill-conceived abandonment of our Kurd allies ...

Pursuit of truth not required when reporting at Fox News

Journalists come from all over the country. They go to colleges in all parts of the country. They are taught to ...

Where's the zero tolerance for bullying at school?

My son was physically injured by another student at lunch recess at the basketball courts of his school. A student ...

Kudos for all who made workforce housing possible

Much appreciation to Valley Isle Fellowship Church, West Maui Land Co. and Maui County for making the Waiale Elua ...

Using marijuana ironically leads to prison and relief

Maui Grown Therapies is a welcome relief for patients who no longer have to rely on the "black market." Their ...

Speeders in Ka Ono Ulu are endangering residents

I would like to bring attention to the speeding cars and trucks in our neighborhood, Ka Ono Ulu Estates in Kihei. ...