



It Takes a Village

Sandra Estornell takes the helm at the reinvented Kona Village, A Rosewood Resort.

text GINGER KELLER

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As the sun meets the sea beyond the horizon, the ocean is glistening and reflects the sky’s pastel hues. Palm trees sway with the wind and waves kiss the shore. Phones are silenced, chatter from real life becomes whispers, and Mai Tais have never tasted sweeter. Here, in Kailua-Kona, life seems to slow down, and visitors from all over the world travel to Hawai‘i Island’s Western coast to experience a taste of this paradisaical bliss.

Peer behind the curtain and you’ll find a team of diligent workers who strive to

keep it that way. Take, for example, Sandra Estornell, who’s at the helm of Kona Village, A Rosewood Resort’s reopening this summer. Built in the 1960s, the luxury vacation destination was illustrious in its heyday until it was forced to close due to a tsunami in 2011. As managing director, Estornell plays a vital role in the reinvention of one of the island’s premier resorts.

A native of Spain, Estornell boasts an impressive résumé that includes resorts in Chile, Panama and, most recently, San José del Cabo, Mexico, but names this project as one she’s most proud of.



Estornell may originally be from Spain, as well as have an impressive résumé of resorts in Cabo and Mexico, just to name a few — but she names the new Hawai'i Rosewood Resort the one she's most proud of (all photos courtesy Kona Village/Rosewood Hotels).

"One of the most rewarding things about my career has been the unique perspectives and foreign cultures I've come across over the years," she says. "I've been incredibly fortunate to experience some of the most beautiful destinations around the world, from global capitals to more remote locations. I'm proud to have opened several hotels during my tenure, and the collaboration that goes into bringing a new property to life is something that I find very energizing and inspiring."

"With Kona Village, my team and I are working to introduce a highly differentiated experience that wholly immerses guests in the history and heritage of the Big Island," she continues. "It has been a true labor of love and I am very proud to be a part of this team and to share in this special land with our local community and future guests."

In order to offer guests an authentic experience, Estornell herself became immersed in local culture and was moved by Hawai'i's unparalleled natural surroundings and rich heritage. Namely, the sacred lands of Ka'upulehu, on which Kona Village sits.

"As a team, we have made sure to take great care in educating ourselves on the significance of this site," she explains. "We recognize the responsibility we have here at Kona Village, not only to breathe new life into a historic property that was beloved by many but also to be a responsible and supportive steward of the land and



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larger island. I'm thankful for the community's support in sharing their stories of both the origins of Ka'upulehu and the original Kona Village resort with me, and it's been heartening to see how many people have such a strong connection to this property.”

Perched above Kahuwai Bay, Kona Village was and will continue to be an iconic hideaway featuring standalone guest hale, thoughtfully designed to promise both privacy and beautiful views. An array of amenities and activities are found throughout the grounds as well as historical tidbits to provide a deeper understanding of the former ancient fishing village.

“Along with all those who have touched this project, my vision for Kona Village, A Rosewood Resort is to create the most complete opportunity for people to meaningfully connect with Hawaiian culture,” shares Estornell. “Throughout the property's development, we've drawn inspiration from the history of the site, the sensibilities of the local community and the natural elements of the Big Island to deliver a distinctive experience that captures the essence of Hawaiian hospitality.”

Estornell shares the concepts behind the resort's eateries, including the original Shipwreck and Talkstory bars, which pay homage to the sociable nature of local food culture, and the alluring wellness journeys

at Asaya Spa that tap into the spirituality of the land and the healing powers of its natural elements.

“We also recognize that it is not enough to simply preserve the past, but that we must also safeguard this land for the future, and we have closely collaborated with local government agencies and sustainability experts to ensure we are building and operating responsibly,” she adds. “One of the efforts I am most proud of is the development of our expansive solar fields that will run the resort off of 100% renewable energy — a first for Hawaii!”

At the heart of Kona Village is its commitment to allow tradition and modernity to live harmoniously under the same roof — it's innovative and elevated, while honoring all that's come before it.

“At Rosewood and, of course at Kona Village, we are guided by our ‘a sense of place’ philosophy in which all elements of the property and guest experience are influenced by the respective destination,” she says. “This allows us to deliver on the distinctive hospitality experience that today's travelers are seeking, while also ensuring that we are celebrating the unique nature of our destination and prioritizing its continued prosperity.” ♦

As of print, Kona Village, A Rosewood Resort, opens July 1. For more information, visit rosewoodhotels.com/kona-village.