



Maui's Vacation Rental Ban Just Cracked Wide Open

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Maui's plan to eliminate thousands of vacation rentals is already collapsing, and nobody knows what comes next. The bold housing promise that followed last year's fires has softened into a maze of court fights, new hotel zones, and rezoning proposals that will likely satisfy almost no one. What began as moral clarity and urgency is ending in confusion.

One longtime visitor who has rented the same Kihei condo for fifteen years said she now feels like she is booking into “a legal minefield.” Another wrote, “We supported Maui after the fires. Now we’re being told we’re part of the problem.” These voices echo across hundreds of similar comments from people who once called Maui their second home.

What’s changing and why it matters.

When Mayor Richard Bissen introduced Bill 9 last year, the goal was sweeping. The measure would phase out more than 7,000 apartment-zoned vacation rentals that had operated for decades under an old exemption. The idea was to convert those units into **12** -term housing and rebalance the island’s dependence on **TOURISM**.

A county investigative panel has flipped the script entirely. Instead of banning rentals, the group now wants to create two new hotel zones and move roughly 50 properties, about 4,000 units, into those categories, letting them operate indefinitely as vacation rentals. That's nearly half of the 7,000 units targeted initially.

This would allow them to keep operating as vacation rentals even after Bill 9 becomes law. The rest of the properties would, in theory, convert to long-term housing, but nobody can explain how or when that would happen at this point.

For owners, this proposal feels like a lifeline. For many residents, it feels like betrayal. The housing crisis that sparked this law has not eased, and county leadership now appears to be retreating from its own solution long before it even begins.

What visitors are seeing now.

Many longtime Maui travelers say they no longer know whether their condo will even be legal after this. One couple who has visited every winter since 1998 said their last trip felt "transactional, like we were tolerated, not welcomed." Another frequent visitor wrote that checking into their usual rental now feels like trespassing.

These comments are not isolated. They reflect a growing unease among travelers who once viewed Maui as their most reliable escape. The confusion over the future of Maui vacation rentals has only made that worse.

This shift is also visible on the ground. Visitors talk about rising fees, new parking rules, and subtle signs of fatigue among hotel and restaurant workers. One guest who stayed in West Maui this summer said, "The aloha spirit isn't gone, but it's harder to find." That sense of

uncertainty is starting to reshape travel patterns across the islands, with some guests saying they are exploring Kauai or the Big Island instead.

A crisis without direction.

The debate over vacation rentals has exposed Maui's deepest divide. On one side are those who believe tourism remains the island's only true economic engine. On the other side, some residents believe it is the same engine that broke the island in the first place. Neither side has a plan to replace what's being lost.

The Lahaina and Kula fires displaced thousands of people, and many are still waiting for permanent housing. The idea that small condos with high fees and limited parking could absorb families of four was never realistic. Yet leaders kept repeating that narrative until it collapsed under its own weight.

As one resident wrote, "The county has been absent for thirty years. They have worked against affordable housing in every way possible."

One longtime visitor who has stayed in the same complex for twenty years wrote, "I've watched Maui try to fix this for decades. Every time, they choose the money." That frustration captures what many see as the real story behind Bill 9's slow unraveling.

The economics behind the retreat.

Vacation rentals generate millions each month in county taxes and support thousands of hospitality jobs. Yet one condo owner testified that eliminating them will not create affordable housing, only shift those units to wealthy cash buyers who will live in them part-time and

pay lower resident tax rates. The policy may end up solving nothing and still costing everything.

Tourism fatigue, however, is just as real. Residents point to crowded beaches, clogged roads, and the growing sense that Maui has become unaffordable even for the people who call it home. What was supposed to be a reset after the fires has instead turned into another round of political stalemate.

The irony is impossible to miss. The same county that couldn't build affordable housing for decades now claims it can rezone thousands of units in under five years, a timeline that would outlast the current council and possibly the current mayor. Even if the plan works on paper, it may not exist in practice.

A message that keeps shifting.

Maui's leaders say the goal is still to protect housing for locals, but the new proposals sound more like a zoning reshuffle than a real housing plan. The Temporary Investigative Group's carveouts would rename thousands of units rather than transform them. For now, uncertainty rules, and both residents and visitors are tired of guessing what comes next.

In earlier coverage, [Maui Vacation Rental Ban Collides With New](#) Hotels pointed out the contradiction of restricting condos while approving new luxury developments nearby. That contradiction has only grown louder. The temporary relief for many rental owners may steady one corner of the market. Still, it reinforces what both visitors and residents are saying: Maui's leaders will bend almost any policy before risking tourism revenue.

What this means for travelers booking now.

Anyone with a Maui condo reservation for 2026 is now in limbo, although in reality nothing will change in the next few years. The units carved out as “hotel zones” won’t even be decided until next year at the earliest, and even then, property-by-property rezoning could take years. That leaves travelers booking blindly, owners unable to commit, and Maui’s reputation as a reliable destination continuing to erode.

Council review coming in November.

Any real change now seems sure to take years. Rezoning thousands of units one by one could stretch well beyond the current council term. The delay alone is enough to keep investors waiting and visitors wondering.

Hawaii cannot ban its way to affordability, and it cannot build its way out of grief. This latest compromise may be politically convenient, but it is poised to satisfy no one. Residents see another promise diluted. Visitors see another sign that the island is drifting.

Maui’s vacation rental crackdown may be softening, but so is confidence in what the island stands for. The danger now is not just losing short-term rentals. It is losing direction altogether.

What’s your take on this latest turn? We’d like to hear from you in the comments below.


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18 thoughts on “Maui’s Vacation Rental Ban Just Cracked Wide Open”

GH

October 15, 2025 at 8:53 am

This is just a microcosm of a systemic issue of Big money (Hotels; Developers; etc) who want to destroy Airbnb rentals so they can monopolize the industry and buying off politicians who fatten their pockets while in office, all the while the poor and disadvantaged are left with no solutions.

 1

REPLY

Ghery S

October 15, 2025 at 8:25 am

I’  ertainly glad we stay on Kauai. We’ve been to Maui a few times, but it’s been 18 years and that’s enough. This next trip will be for 4 weeks and will be our 32nd visit to Hawaii. Please keep this nonsense away from Kauai!



REPLY

Stafford L

October 15, 2025 at 8:02 am

The main problem is the past administrations have never done anything regarding low income housing and affordable housing. The county counsel and the Mayor think by eliminating short term rentals it will solve the problem, wrong as the amount of taxes which is generated by them would be cut in half and who is going to make up the difference. Then there are all the small business which depend on the tourist for there live-hood, not to mention the restaurants who depend on the tourist as well, then there are all the people that do maintenance on the condos and the cleaning people as well. Case in point we pay over \$9000.00 a year in taxes to the county, mutably by the number of short term rentals which is about \$126,000,000.



REPLY

PatG

October 15, 2025 at 7:16 am

BOH, you said "Anyone with a Maui condo reservation for 2026 is now in limbo". This is patently untrue.

The current Bill 9, disregarding any TIG carve-outs, would not go into effect until 2029 for West Maui and 2031 for South Maui. This is straight out of the Mayor's current version of Bill 9.

I've stated this several times, and yet you continue to introduce instability and insecurity for guests booking condos for 2026. People booking for 2026, 2027, and 2028 are safe from this legislation. 2029 and 2030 as well for South Maui.

We are already experiencing businesses starting to fail because of the drop in tourism due to confusion over this legislation. Please don't make things worse.

 4

REPLY

DebraM

October 15, 2025 at 6:57 am

I don't believe that the tourists are the engine that created the housing crisis. Another investigation study is another waste of money leading to indecisive ideas that accomplish nothing as we see what has been going on now since the fire. I am beginning to think Maui is heading into a Disneyland island where the Disney cruise ship can remake it their own. What a novel idea.



REPLY

D

October 15, 2025 at 6:46 am

2^^^ reservations are not in limbo. That is an important clarification.

A committee of Council has recommended rezoning of many complexes on the Mayor's list to new zone districts, H-3 and H-4,

which will allow STRs. A list of those exempted properties is now on the street, and they are many of your favorite tourist properties.

I accept that certain short term rental properties can be converted to work force housing, but the Committee's recommendations continue to fall short. Such conversions by zoning amendment to nonconforming will fail to legal challenge without at least a 5 to 10 year amortization, i.e., delay. So don't cancel your reservations!

The Committee's recommendations are a significant positive step, however.

Realistically, the only way short term rentals will be converted to work force housing is if the State or County buys them.

 3

REPLY

Gary N

October 15, 2025 at 6:45 am

"Hawaii cannot ban its way to affordability, and it cannot build its way out of grief." This is a brilliant summary of the situation.

 3

REPLY

Chris

October 15, 2025 at 6:43 am

There's a couple points that the article misses. First, the need for housing was sparked quite literally by the Lahiana fires. In over two years, there has been scant progress on getting homes rebuilt in

Lahaina. Partly because of the lack of construction workers and materials in Maui but also by the County's slow walking of building permits. This is causing people to give up on rebuilding, leaving Maui, and selling their lots to a so-called land trust owned by who knows?

The other point is that many people have been placed in financial distress by the County's terrible management of the post fire PR when they were telling people to stay away from the island despite the fact that huge parts of Maui were open and waiting for people to come (Kihei, Wailea, Hana, etc.). Then Bill 9 happened and it caused STR owners to see their values collapse by some 40%. Many people were forced to sell because of the two year recession in visitors and they have eaten that price collapse.



1

REPLY

Paul

October 15, 2025 at 6:35 am

Two points:

- 1.) Follow and publish where all of the tourist money has gone over the last 10 years to zero in on a core issue.
- 2.) Residents need to come to grips with who they keep voting for. Not just the individual but the "ideology" that is consistent with the problems that never get fixed.

I plan on traveling to Maui next November 2026. I'll be keeping an eye on overreaching fees everywhere and the kind of service I receive while on the island. This will largely determine if I choose Maui and possibly Hawaii for my future vacation plans.



REPLY

P.A.C.T.

October 15, 2025 at 6:23 am

I booked one of our regular Maui condos and will continue to do so. Because we stay in condos, shop at the grocery and try to be low key, thoughtful tourists we aren't feeling a lot of the negativity. I feel empathy for locals and especially native Hawaiians. However, I will continue to visit and try to direct my dollars to local owned places. I'm not abandoning Maui. The expense has shortened our Maui time and we are adding Oahu now to our vacations.

 2

REPLY

Eric T

October 15, 2025 at 6:17 am

What about cracking down on the illegal short term rentals? Why are they not pursuing this? Illegal str's in residential neighborhoods have been going on for decades. The council does not mention any progress or statistics on cleaning up the illegal str's. Instead they are trying to eliminate the legal str's that have been paying taxes and generating income for the county, state, and local businesses for years.

 3

REPLY


Alan T

October 15, 2025 at 6:16 am

Too little, too late. My wife and I canceled our annual 2.5 month Maui escape from the Pacific NW winter rains, in favor of Asia in Feb 2026. The level of incompetence and bungling by the local government is shocking. Avoiding quick fix, knee jerk reactions to the housing problem isn't rocket science. There are ways to satisfy all stakeholders without draconian rental bans....they just need competent urban planners with no political or anti-tourist agenda, private investment, government funding /support and removal of artificial zoning obstructions. Trying to force fit affordable family accommodation into purpose built, high cost / maintenance small vacation rentals doesn't make sense, even if expedient. Unfortunately, the result is multi-year repeat visitors like us choosing more welcoming options. Not sure we'll ever return.



1

REPLY

Drew808

October 15, 2025 at 6:10 am

Maui needs a political reset. Sack the mayor and the entire council and start over. Maui has suffered immeasurable harm by decades of greed and corruption. Wealthy developers and an out of control real estate industry have run roughshod over sensible planning and created this mess. This latest development does not thing to curb the incompetence. The people of Maui deserve so much better.



3

REPLY



Mariann

October 15, 2025 at 6:05 am

Sounds like this is a compromise with them trying to balance the local housing problem with needed tourism. Isn't this a step in a positive direction?

 1

REPLY

Matthew B

October 15, 2025 at 6:54 am

Only sort of.

People go on vacation to relax and relieve stress. Nothing about this ban results in that. We just want to book a vacation and not worry about it. This is not a step in that direction. It is just more uncertainty. There isn't a place to go that will simply tell a potential vacationer that on MM/DD/YY date this property is OK. The other islands are simpler, that's where I'll be going.

 1

REPLY

William W

October 15, 2025 at 5:49 am

I lived Maui for 30 years ! Build affordable houses, fix the roads, more parking at beaches condos etc , restrooms clean & working , reduce congestion work for the people environment and reduce costs

 6

REPLY

Jay

October 15, 2025 at 5:48 am

This article should mention the phase out period because for many, if not most, STR complexes, if the phase-out were to happen, it wouldn't be till 2028 or even 2030. So visitors should book with confidence in many areas. It's not as dire as this article makes it sound – from a visitor standpoint, anyway.

 7

REPLY

Marianne

October 15, 2025 at 5:42 am

It's a start, and far from an ideal solution, but saner heads have finally prevailed. Reversing the original str's ban completely wasn't possible, so this is a compromise. Lawsuits from owners will take care of the rest. With so many condos on the market now at reduced prices, it's obvious that this ban wasn't the solution to the housing shortage. This committee at least has the guts to take steps in the only feasible direction.

 3

REPLY


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