

Kauai, A Perspective

Kauai has changed quite a lot in the 17 years we have been visiting here.

No, that is not accurate. Kauai may not have changed a bit, but residents have certainly changed. Kauai is the same. It is still the “Garden Isle”. It is still the only Hawaiian island that has navigable rivers. It is still a lush, tiny island with the wettest place on earth, with one part averaging 450 inches of rain each year. It still has “The Grand Canyon of the Pacific”, and if it is not as grand as the one in Arizona, well it is a damn good imitation at 12 miles long and 3,000 feet deep. Kauai still has only one two-lane road around the edge of the tiny island, and the speed limit may be a posted 50, but it is actually set by the slowest car on the road because passing is nigh impossible.

Two giant hurricanes have kept Kauai from becoming the tourist destination it might have otherwise become. We arrived first in 1982 just weeks after Hurricane Iwa, that left the Island without TV, radio, roads, and just about everything else. We went into recommended restaurants, only to find a slab with a pipe or two protruding. We saw condos that looked like drive through car washes. The last hurricane, Iniki in 1992, left great hotels demolished that have not yet been rebuilt.

Still, Kauai has been discovered by the great hordes of rich Japanese tourists in the last



Beautiful Front Yard Flowers in Kilauea

17 years and has been forgotten just as quickly by recession struck Japanese tourists. Whipsawed by weather and the ebb and flow of tourists, Kauai remains beautiful and in recession – but then Hawaii is suffering a state-wide, self inflicted recession brought on by government corruption, unions, and a business-hostile environment.

Kauai has all the problems of the state, superimposed on a less sophisticated population and a physically damaged infrastructure. Nevertheless, the flowers bloom in abundance alongside the roads because flowers even bloom on weeds in Kauai, and beauty is the nature of the island. It is a great honeymoon destination, because it is quiet, beautiful, and there is little to do other than what honeymooners do.

Kauai is small. You can drive almost around the entire island in an hour and a half, excepting only the Na Pili Coast where there is no road. The island is nearly circular, with about a 25 mile diameter. The center of the island is uninhabitable because it is rain forest or vertical cliffs, leaving only the gentle perimeter for the 50,000 inhabitants. The one road that almost circumvents the island is a two lane, 50 MPH speed limit thread close to the coast.

The southern part of the island is where the tourists gather in a town called Lihue that includes the sunniest beach, Poipu. Lihue has a good shopping center with a Borders Bookstore, a Longs Drugstore, a Radio Shack, and a May Co. department store. The Borders Bookstore is the center of culture on the island, and, though it is small by usual Borders standards, it has a good cappuccino bar.

Around the western part of the island is the Grand Canyon of the Pacific, and Barking Sands Navy Base.

Along the eastern part of the island is Kapa'a, a nice town with a Safeway and a great oceanfront restaurant, the Bull Shed. Once you are past Kapa'a going north, there are no stop lights. The northern, or windward and rainy side, has the town of Kilauea, the Princeville luxury community, and finally the town of Hanalei. The town of Hanalei is accessible only over a one-vehicle bridge, and past Hanalei there are several more one way bridges. This is a sleepy island. (Details of the drive around the North side of the island, complete with recommendations, are at the end of this article.)

My Grandson Readies the Kayak



The community of Kilauea, where our ‘second home’ is located, has little to recommend it – and that is its charm. When we were first here in 1982, Kilauea had a tiny grocery, a smaller post office, a historical church, and a great bakery. Oh, Kilauea has Kong Lung, a small but very expensive clothing and Hawaiian store that has been there for more than 100 years, and is a place we go several times a visit to buy nice things. Since our first visit, the grocery has grown to include a Subway Sandwiches, there is a new Post Office, and the bakery (a Quonset hut) was blown away in a hurricane. The approximately 100 homes have remained virtually the same

We go to Kilauea daily to pick up the mail, and once a week we stop by a house to buy a plumeria lei for \$5. The woman who sells them at her house, makes them for the airport where leis sell to the tourists for \$18.

There are plenty of places to eat on the island, ranging from Burger King to some very nice but relaxed restaurants. (Of course there are terrific and expensive restaurants in the luxury Poipu hotels, but we have never seen them – we are simple folks.) The most famous restaurant on the North coast is past Hanalei and was owned by Charo until 1999 when it reopened under a new name and a with new management. My personal taste runs to a mai-tai at Zelo's Beach House in Hanalei. For fine food, we prefer The Dolphin in Hanalei, CJs at the Princeville shopping center, the Bull Shed in Kapa'a (a local's favorite most tourists can't find), and The Plantation in Lihue (Gaylord's Restaurant) which is excellent.

The most advertised food on the island is Bubba Burgers, which advertises that "We cheat tourists, drunks, and lawyers". They are not particularly great, but not bad.

The best hamburgers on the island are in the Living Room, the sunset bar and lounge of the Princeville Hotel. The price is about \$15, but for beautiful views, great hamburgers, and ambience, this is unmatched in the world.

Hawaiian Politics

I don't understand the politics of the Middle East, and certainly do not understand the politics of the Baltics. Add to the politics that I don't understand, Hawaii.

But I am trying, and I am slowly getting the hang of it.

As a point of reference, it is best to give my prejudices and try to explain what I have observed about politics in general. I think that there is general equity among political parties in the United States with corruption, with an edge going to the Democrats. The difference between the parties is in shame – Republicans feel it and resign quickly, but Democrats hang on and deny even after being fitted for prison garb.

I have observed that almost all Asian governments are more corrupt than western nations. Of those Asian governments, the Filipino governments are corrupt in the

Democrat Party sense and will deny to the end. The Japanese governments are corrupt in the Republican sense, and resign in shame with great regularity.

Those observations are important because Hawaii has a large Filipino population, and a very large Japanese population. All Hawaiian governments are dominated by the Democratic Party, but that party is dominated by cultural Japanese and Filipinos.

You mix the cultural Japanese and Filipinos with Democratic Party ethical standards, and a huge influence of labor unions of the New Jersey stripe, and you have Hawaiian politics. I have no clue what the portions of the formula are at present, but you would be hard pressed to find a more corrupt government. Perhaps Mississippi or Louisiana in the 1950s would be as corrupt, but that was just plain power politics corruption. Hawaii is corruption with an accent, but so long entrenched that it is pervasive throughout the courts, businesses, banking, police, schools – you name it.

You note that there is no mention of native Hawaiians. While there is a warrior strain among Hawaiians as there is among most people (the French, Canadians, and Italians excepted), generally the Native Hawaiians are a passive, loving, “simple” people – simple in the living sense, not in the intelligence sense. After all, they live in paradise and not in Green Bay, so they are plenty intelligent! They are so intelligent that they are seldom involved in Hawaiian politics.

The State of Hawaii

The state of Hawaii is, well, pretty awful.

The Bishop Estate is a good metaphor for Hawaii. The Bishop Estate is a 115+ year old, \$10+ billion private foundation — one of the largest in the world. Additionally, the Bishop Estate Trust is the State’s largest landowner, and owns 365,000 acres on Hawaiian soil. The Trust controls the famous Kamehameha Schools for the benefit of native Hawaiians. It is the most powerful single private force in the State.

The Bishop Estate is run by five Trustees, and until the recent controversy, they were appointed by the State Supreme Court. These were political patronage appointments for generations, and one of the now ousted Trustees was the former Leader of the State Senate. These political appointees were paid a minimum of \$865,000 a year, each!

In 1997, five influential private citizens submitted a report called “Broken Trust” in which they said the huge Bishop Estate was being badly mismanaged. The two main Hawaiian newspapers published Broken Trust in front-page articles. Jean and I followed the saga since the day it was exposed.

Subsequently, the Trustee who was the former Leader of the State Senate filed a suit against another Trustee and was himself indicted for felony fraud. His wife and her brother were also indicted, all in a kickback scheme that involved the Bishop Estate.

Another Trustee attempted suicide by drug overdose after having been found in a compromising position in a local hotel restroom with a female attorney who represented a branch of the Bishop Trust. The female attorney committed suicide the day after the discovery. Another Trustee was under investigation by a Grand Jury, and the most controversial Trustee – no, she is none of those so far mentioned – was sued for incompetence by two of the other Trustees and her resignation was demanded by almost everyone.

No one resigned during the years of controversy. Why would they when they continued to receive a salary of more than \$72,000 a month?

The State Supreme Court washed their hands of the whole affair, because they appointed each of the Trustees, and announced that they will appoint no future Trustees. Several of the State Supreme Court members were criticized for their close ties with the Trustees.

Will Rogers once said that the two funniest things he had ever seen was the Mexican Army on parade, and the Arizona Legislature, but he had never witnessed the Bishop Estate in Hawaii. The Bishop Estate was emblematic of the self-dealing, corruption,

and political “good old boy” network that has been entrenched for more than a hundred year in Hawaii.

None of this is obvious to the tourist who is sunning on Waikiki Beach, but the results of the disarray of the state in general, the bad economic condition caused by the Japanese economy and anti-business atmosphere has caused a real “brain-drain.” The Honolulu newspaper, which has been on this subject for years, had a two-page article on that “brain drain”. Many Hawaiian who have fled to the mainland complained about that which I have expressed. The newspapers have been filled for years with articles on the anti-business atmosphere, corruption, etc.

Educationally, the state is in terrible shape. In addition to the economics, the most recent National Test Results show that only Hawaii is worse than California when comparing the very important reading score at the fourth grade level. It is instructive that the previous test done four years before showed that Louisiana was as bad as California, but Louisiana improved over the four years leaving California and Hawaii at the bottom. If education is the answer to many problems, and I believe it is, then the turnaround in this state is far away. In 2003, two-thirds of all Hawaii schools failed to meet the standards of the No Child Left Behind program.

Meanwhile, there are stores and businesses closing all over the state. Unions have depleted the State of all the pineapple growers, and reduced the sugar cane growing to a trickle through excessive demands, sending the business to Indonesia — while the low skilled labor is left unemployable, and in the words of a mainland Hawaiian who fled, “waiting for their food stamps.”

The Japanese are no longer buying property, selling what they have at fire sales, and most of Asia is unable to enjoy the pleasures of a State with which they once had a terrific love affair. Since the “Asian flu” turnaround is a long-range affair, so is the future of Hawaii unless there is another answer. The only good news is that mainland visitors have filled in the gap, are staying longer, and spending more.

Strangely enough, technology may be the salvation for the state. Even with the anti-business atmosphere fueled by unions and liberal politics that dominate the state, the

weather permits information working individuals who work the net and can live anywhere, to live here. This may become the refuge of wealthy entrepreneurs who don't want to hire anyone anyway and so are immune to unions. The annual threat of the AFL-CIO to seek the banning of working from home by Internet (they refer to it as "electronic sweatshops") is less and less possible in the new technological world.

But until the electronic entrepreneurs arrive in great numbers, this place is an economic mess. A warm, sandy, flowery – mess.

The Bishop Estate deserves better. The Hawaiian people deserve better. The Islands are great, but many of the residents in positions of power are less than honorable, and it has gone on for so long as to be part of the culture.

A Court has subsequently removed one Trustee completely, permitted one Trustee to resign, and removed the others temporarily while appointing new Trustees. The Attorney General of the State was defeated in her attempt to get re-appointment by the State Senate, because she had brought the Bishop Estate Trustees to Court – and the Legislature wanted revenge. The Democrats who control the State Senate, fought the Democrat Attorney General even though many should have recused themselves because the Senators were actually on the Bishop Estate payroll – placed there by the now ousted Trustees. The State Senators said there was no conflict of interest!!!!

The Democrat Governor actually tried to change the culture of corruption. His reform-minded Attorney General was sacrificed by a Democrat Senate.

The visible corruption was SO BAD, that in 2002 the State elected, (Drum-Roll, please)...a Republican Governor!

Fortunately, the native Hawaiians are absolutely enraged, or as enraged as Hawaiians get, that the Bishop Estate, developed for their education, has built up assets as much as \$10 billion and still has only provided demonstrably poor education for very few Hawaiian children. Some estimates are that fewer than 8% of Hawaiian children are being serviced by the Estate. There are no Bishop Schools on Kauai, for instance, and

none on most of the neighboring islands, including Ni'ihau – which has only Hawaiians living on it.

It is a mess! Where are federal RICO statutes when they are really needed?

Live Like a Local

Being identified as a local is important on the island.

I had occasion to go to the Lehu Airport to pick up a friend flying in from the Mainland with his son to share our “second home in Hawaii”. I decided to drive the old Jeep pickup, because the friend was bringing a surfboard. As I arrived at the airport, there was a long line of shiny new cars in front - tourists picking up their friends. I drove to the back of the line, to wait. A local policeman came down the line and told everyone to keep on driving around in a circle. He would not let people wait.

When he arrived at my truck, I was sitting there, tan, hair tousled, barefoot, wearing shorts and a tank top, and driving this rust colored old Jeep. I looked, and acted like a



Up a Lazy River

local. The policeman said, “Hey, Bro’. You park over unda’ da tree. I no botha you.”

I said, “Thanks, Bro’, and Mahalo”

(Note: As a result of 9/11, no one can park, or wait, any longer.)

Being a Kama’ina (local) just saved me time and money. Watching the “tourists” drive around and around put a smile on my face as I waited in the shade for my friend to arrive. Jean and I often refer to the “damn tourists”, laughingly, because, while we are one, we don’t have to act like one or be identified as one. We save a lot of money shopping also, because everyone assumes we are locals. We have been there so often, we practically are locals.

OMMMM-OMMMM-OMMMM

As your North Shore KAUAI observer, I feel it is my responsibility to give you a feel for the living here. It is not easy to describe, but through my mai-tai haze I’ll give it a try.

“Shanji” appeared here in 1999. Shanji has had an article on his life and philosophy in the local paper. The article was larger than all of the articles on Columbine High – combined.

So, who is Shanji? Glad you ask? He is an “Eastern mystic, healer and teacher from India”. On his instructors’ orders, Shanji spent several years living in a cave, the article says – although I am not at all certain how that fact was checked by the writer of the article. We are told that he spent his time in the cave practicing Raja, Yogi, and in meditation. It is not known how, or if Shanji bathed.

In his teachings we are told that he, “emphasizes self-inquiry and self observation, and leads one to an understanding of the mind and how to transcend the duality of what is seen versus what is real.” In doing this, Shanji “translates ancient Vedantic wisdom into modern psychology, beyond religion, traditions and customs.”

His message is the theory of “Non-doing” we are told. I have been a big proponent of it for the past few weeks and I think it will sell here with no trouble. In fact Shanji can learn a lot about “non-doing” on the North Coast of this island.

Many years ago, when I needed some career advice, my mentor said, “Allen, have a vision. If you can see a burning bush, or hear a voice, you can be rich beyond your dreams with more women than you can count.”

It was great advice, but I couldn’t do my lines with a straight face.

Apparently, Shanji can.

Polo. Yes, Polo

Polo is a BIG sport on North Kauai. I’m not certain how it began, but the Kauai Polo Club was founded in 1886, and every Sunday there is a match between two well-mounted teams. It could be between Bubbas Hamburgers and Bali Hi Realty for example. It is serious competition, exceeded only by the longboat races between local competitors. I guess softball is just too tame.

Anyway, the polo is very serious. The horses are superb animals, not some broken-down glue-factory rejects. And the riders are much better than you might expect. Three and four goal riders are not uncommon, the facility is excellent, and the 100 or so people who attend in very informal attire are attentive, but don’t let the action get in the way of their party and socializing. This is a “tailgate” environment – not some stuffy operation.

There is a grandstand that holds no more than 50 people, but the real fans eschew the grandstands for the perimeter. The field is located right across the street from the best swimming, snorkeling, and wind-surfing beach on the North Shore, Annini Beach, so if you get bored you can go bikini watching. Actually, the beaches are so un-crowded that you might have to walk a mile before seeing anyone swimming at all. I can’t remember the last time I saw a bikini on a beach here.