

# Climate Change Impacts to Hawai'i's Hospitality Industry and Coastal Communities: Benchmark Analysis and Outreach

A project sponsored by the Hawai'i Tourism Authority

The **Center for Sustainable Coastal Tourism (CSCT)** was established in 2009 as a University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program Center of Excellence.

In partnership with local businesses, government, and the community, the center conducts research, education, and outreach on Hawai'i tourism and the various economic, cultural and environmental impacts of the visitor industry. CSCT projects serve to improve the quality of Hawai'i's environment, restore habitats and ecosystems, and reduce the energy and water needed to support the tourism industry resulting in positive impacts on both Hawai'i's economy and quality of life for local residents.

The **purpose and mission** of the CSCT is to coordinate the UH and community resources to help support and promote a sustainable and economically-productive tourism industry in Hawai'i with minimum environmental footprint, strong stewardship of Hawai'i's precious coastal resources, and deep respect for the indigenous people and the multicultural society.

## Goals of the Project

- ◆ Investigate the current and potential impacts of climate change on Hawai'i tourism industry and coastal communities;
- ◆ Identify opportunities for adaptation and sustainable growth of tourism industry;
- ◆ Inform Hawai'i's decision-makers in the public and private sector.

## Climate Change in Hawai'i

Climate change poses a serious threat to Hawai'i's natural resources, public health, and economic well-being. Sea level rise threatens resources and infrastructure, including businesses, hotels, residents, utilities, and transportation assets. Ocean acidification will degrade Hawai'i's coral reefs and other marine resources. Freshwater availability will be threatened by salt-water intrusion and changes in temperature and rainfall. Global climate change may also increase the likelihood and severity of storms and extreme weather events.

Options are available to mitigate some of the extreme effects of global climate change and to adapt to new conditions. As Hawai'i plans for a new climatic future, decision makers and the public must be fully informed with the most reliable scientific information on the potential risks and available options.

## The Importance of Tourism

Hawai'i's economy relies heavily on tourism, which represents its primary source of income now and in the future. Since

1959, the visitor sector has grown to become the economic cornerstone of the State. Today, it is an integral part of Hawai'i's communities and the chief generator of employment including direct (travel-industry related) and indirect (commercial business) employment. The visitor industry extends through all sectors of Hawai'i's economy. Adapting the current tourism infrastructure to the present and projected climate change and to find a strategy for a sustainable growth of the visitor industry is essential.

## CSCT Research

The CSCT team has developed a methodology to derive the impact of global climate change on Hawai'i tourism. Current research includes the identification of Hawai'i most vulnerable resources and locations along with an assessment of the economic costs climate change could have on them. The CSCT is also developing targeted strategies of adaptation of the various touristic sectors to environmental changes.

## Outcomes and Products

Based on its research results, the CSCT will prepare a report titled "*Climate Change and the Hospitality Industry: People, Place, Culture and the Hawai'i Experience*" to inform legislators, private industries and residents on the consequences that global climate change will have on Hawai'i tourism industry. The report will also provide recommendations on viable adaptation measures to address near and long-term effects of climate change.

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