



Riding Tourism's New Wave: Evaluating the Cruise Industry's Impact in Hilo

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The cruise industry invariably brings both positive and negative impacts to their home-port communities and to the ones they visit. Due to the recent increases of the cruise industry in Hawai'i, many controversies have surfaced regarding the proper management of this activity. Most of the discussions have centered on the environmental concerns, but other factors, such as the social and physical impacts deserve considerable more time on the discussion table. This paper will provide a brief overview of the range of cruise industry impacts currently being evaluated in Hawai'i, with special focus on the town of Hilo, in Hawai'i County.

Presently, Hawai'i is benefiting economically from the cruise industry on unprecedented levels. According to an impact study conducted by the State of Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism for the years of 2002-2003, the cruise industry's overall economic contribution to the State's Gross Product increased to \$390.5 million for 2003 from \$381.1 million in 2002 ("Cruises"). According to statistics reported by both the International Council of Cruise Lines and the State's study, in 2004 the industry was responsible for 7,569 jobs with wages totaling \$250 million for Hawai'i workers (ICCL, State of Hawai'i 5). This economic growth is due in part to the increases within the industry itself since 2001, plus approximately 550,000 cruise passengers visited Hawai'i in 2004, which accounted for more than 13% of all passengers to U.S. ports (ICCL). The cruise industry is expected to continue to experience growth due to more ships being added in 2005, and more are slated to begin cruising Hawaiian waters in 2006.

Environmental Concerns

The environmental concerns about the cruise industry in Hawai'i are fairly universal to wherever cruise ships call home-port or visit. Issues such as releasing contaminated bilge or ballast water into the ocean are common to any large maritime industry. However, issues of raw sewage/black water dumping are particularly exacerbated when it comes to cruise ships due to their large people-carrying capacity. For instance, each day it is estimated that a cruise ship can produce 30,000 gallons of raw sewage/black water and 255,000 gallons of grey water. Minimally treated sewage or sludge can be dumped into the water anywhere past the 1 mile mark from shore, as long as the ship is traveling at 6 knots (Kahea 2). Untreated grey water can be released 3 miles from shore, and may consist of bleaches and other chemicals used on the ship (Kahea 2). While in port, the ships themselves continue to have impact on the local communities they visit in that they keep their engines idling, sometimes for days at a time while visiting a destination. The diesel exhaust released is estimated to be the equivalent to 10,000-12,000 cars per day (Kahea 3). Also, a cruise ship can produce 7 tons of garbage per voyage, whereas 75% of these wastes are incinerated onboard and dumped, unregulated, into the ocean (Kahea 3). Further research is needed to ascertain the impact on the air quality on the communities located near ports due to cruise ship exhaust, smoke stacks, and incinerators.

Environmental groups are quick to point out that the cruise industry has a lengthy record of breaking environmental laws and regulations. However, Charles Toguchi, who lobbies for the Northwest Cruise Ship Association in Hawai'i, claims the industry's records are excellent and incidents that have been reported and given media attention were mere "infractions" and do not reflect a noncompliant attitude toward environmental policy (qtd. in McNarie 15). Still, when reviewing statistics collected by author Ross Klein at his website devoted to cruise ship information, he notes over 100 violations by cruise companies within the last ten years, many of which resulted in fines and some of them with fines of over \$100,000 (Klein).

As of 2002, the cruise industry was voluntarily abiding by a Memorandum of Understanding with the State of Hawai'i and the State of Florida regarding environmental standards and policies. One of the inherent weaknesses with the MOU was that it relied

on the industry to self-report violations and accidents. Certain other States, namely Alaska and California, have taken legislative steps to protect their interests, refusing to rely on the perpetrator's to self-tattle (Klein 2). Recently though, the Northwest Cruise Ship Association has given notice to Hawaii's Governor Linda Lingle, that they will be bowing out of the MOU as of December 31, 2005. Reasons cited for this are the State of Hawaii's new Act 217 consisting of maritime regulations which render the MOU redundant and unnecessary (McNarie 14). Critics of the State Act 217 decry this new development because Act 217 is environmentally weaker in its dumping stipulations. The MOU required dumping be outside of 4 miles off any coast but Act 217 stipulates only 3 miles off the coast, which would open up some previously prohibited areas between the island chain that are customarily used for recreation and fishing industries (McNarie 14). One plus of Act 217 is that it does have authority to legally hold violators accountable by fines and possibly even criminal charges, something that the MOU had no such authority to provide. However, they are both fundamentally flawed in that they both rely on self-reporting by the industry (McNarie 14).

Advocacy groups are now encouraging the public to report any suspected violations, and are even promoting financial incentives. Kahea, an Environmental and Native Hawaiian organization, has started a campaign entitled "Be the Eyes of the Ocean" whereby the public is prompted to report on the cruise lines by either filling out a website form or by calling the complaint in to a Hawaiian phone number. At the bottom of the form, it cites a case where passengers who reported illegal dumping were entitled to claim shares on the \$250,000 fine against the cruise line and notes that "individuals whose documentation of dumping leads to fines against a cruise line may be eligible to receive half of any fine that is levied" (qtd. in McNarie 16). Whether this will be an effective method of control is yet to be seen, but grassroots organizations and advocacy groups in various areas have already had impacts on changing cruise industry policies, and at times, even routes. Protests in Monterey, California were successful in keeping a cruise ship banned from that port. In Alaska, a shopkeepers' strike resulted in a cruise ship not making that village a port of call (McNarie 16).

Several groups, including Hawaii's Kahea, the Sierra Club, Blue Water Network, Oceana and others, are banding together to educate and spur the government into action to regulate the cruise industry effectively. A bill recently introduced into Congress, called the Clean Cruise Ship Act (S.793/H.R. 1636),

is supported by many groups because of its tough stipulations. A short list of some of them follows:

- No dumping of sewage, graywater, oily bilge within 12 miles of any shore
- Empower the Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency to determine standards for sewage and graywater discharged beyond the 12 mile-point and charges the Coast Guard and EPA with enforcing the standards
- Allows for cruise ships to have their pollution control equipment inspected
- Protects cruise ship employees who report polluting activities onboard vessels
- Allows citizens to launch civil action against any vessel or carrier in violation of the Act (Kahea website)

The cruise industry following these regulations would resolve many of the complaints currently launched by environmental groups in Hawai'i. This bill would have sweeping repercussions for the industry, however, the bill needs more support for it to pass through Congress.

Physical and Social Impacts on Hilo

Two of the most overlooked discussions of the cruise industry are the physical and social impacts on the communities that have become ports of call. Considering that some ships carry 3,000 passengers, it is obvious that when those passengers disembark on their land-based visitations, amenities need to be available for them. To this end, cruise lines endeavor to deal with this potential onslaught of visitors by booking them on various land-based tours and adventures. For visitors to the east side of the island of Hawai'i, this may include a helicopter tour of the Hamakua Coast or the Volcano, a driving tour of downtown Hilo, and various other adventures or shopping excursions. However, the independent-minded passengers, and those not seeking to pay the exorbitantly overpriced bookings through the cruise lines, often opt to embark out on their own. Apparently, the cruise lines do not fully prepare their passengers for the immediate area surrounding the Hilo port, and many of the passengers that attempt to find adventure on their own quickly become discouraged by what they encounter.

For one thing, the Keaukaha area is primarily industrial directly around the port. The streets are lined with warehouses and huge gas tanks. While passengers are informed that they can walk to the beach from the ship, many do not apparently understand that it is at least a one mile one-way trip to Onekahakaha and a 3 mile one-way trip to

Richardson's beach. Dressed inappropriately, many cruise ship passengers attempting the walk are not prepared to hike that far, especially on hot days. The walk is entirely without a sidewalk, and at times one is forced to walk in the street on the narrow shoulder of busy Kalaniana'ole Avenue. Even if passengers hike to the beaches unscathed, many find that the beaches aren't what they were expecting. One cruise line advertised Richardson's beach as a good place to surf, which implies a very different type of beach than what most visitors find. Admittedly, some locals do surf there, but the rocky shore is treacherous and should be attempted by experienced surfers only. Overall, some of the cruise ship passengers that make it to the beaches are shocked by the small amount of sand and the lack of wave action and are sorely disappointed by the 'false' advertising presented to them by the cruise line.

Some who disembark from the ship are attempting to reach some mysterious shopping area as plugged by the cruise line. Silva Street, which is a side street off of Kalaniana'ole Avenue and directly across from the Port entrance, is mainly filled with huge gas tanks and light industrial establishments with a few commercial businesses. I have often observed cruise ship passengers wandering through this street trying to find a shopping district. When asked, these passengers claim that they were told on the ship that they could walk to the shops easily. Through my research, I have gathered that the cruise line was referring to the small gift shops that are in the lobbies of the Naniloa and the Hilo Hawaiian Hotels. The cruise lines repeatedly fail to supply adequate directions to their passengers, and it is doubtful that they would have been pleased by the selection available even if they had found these shops.

This problem highlights weaknesses in the cruise industry and in Hawai'i County's preparation for dealing with this industry. On the one hand, the industry should take better responsibility in educating their passengers on what is reasonable to expect at their ports of call, and on the other hand, both the industry and the County would do well to invest in the local communities that are near the ports. The Keaukaha community is home to a large population of Native Hawaiians and this community deserves to be protected and consulted on matters that impact their physical environment and way of life.

Since Kalaniana'ole Avenue is the only road for entering and exiting the area, special considerations should be given to traffic policies and road improvements, such as ADA sidewalks and alternative routes for vehicles. Several times a week when the cruise ships are in, Kalaniana'ole Avenue is

backed up on both sides to accommodate tour buses, delivery trucks, and the general populace using the road, not to mention the passengers and crew workers attempting to cross the busy street on foot to get to Keaukaha Market. At lunch-time when the cruise ship is in, this small market, which is already dealing with a lunchtime rush of locals, now finds that it is often inundated with cruise ship crew and passengers browsing for souvenirs. Locals that formerly could count on ordering box lunches often find the lines stretching out the door and lunch provisions quickly running out.

Considering the physical impact that Keaukaha residents are enduring due to the influx of cruise ship visitors, what are the social impacts being felt from the locals in the area? This is an area where research needs to be done to ascertain the true nature of how the industry is impacting the residents in more subtle ways than are readily apparent. Community meetings to discuss their views should be encouraged, along with a door-to-door survey to determine the community's perspective and goals for their future. The community in Keaukaha, with particular attention to the Native Hawaiian community within the area, should be involved in deciding the future of the Keaukaha area. Native Hawaiian cultural impacts should neither be overlooked nor minimized in decision making for the future. As was noted previously, grassroots organizations elsewhere have had direct impacts on the cruise lines' decisions on where to visit and what to do while in port. To this end, the County of Hawai'i should be proactive in researching and implementing a community plan for improving the area and the existing infrastructure in order to benefit tourists and residents alike. Possible resources to cover these costs may come, in part, from implementing a per-passenger tax that has been proposed at the State level.

Business Impacts

While the Keaukaha market is one of a few local businesses that has been profiting from the surge in cruise ship visitors, it seems that most locally owned businesses in Hilo are 'missing the boat' as far as profits are concerned. The options that cruise ship passengers have, if they want to be shuttled somewhere free, are limited to places such as Walmart and the Prince Kuhio Mall. Due to enhanced security precautions at the port facilities, the contract for shuttling passengers is carried out by one company, Arnott's Lodge and Hiking Adventures of Keaukaha. Since the cruise ships are already providing room and board, the main amenities passengers take advantage of while visiting their land-based destinations are

shopping facilities. It is unfortunate that so much of the cruise ship shopping business is captured by Walmart and the Mall, while local businesses in the downtown areas are seemingly overlooked. Requirements and/or incentives for the cruise industry to expand their local marketing should be considered in order to fully realize the resource that the cruise industry could bring to Hilo. By giving cruise tourists more local options, they may better be able to appreciate Hawai'i culture and have a more 'authentic' local experience. By ensuring that more local businesses benefit from the cruise industry, we will be more likely to curtail any negative social impacts and build a strong economic base from which to continue to improve Hawai'i Island.

Conclusion

The cruise industry is booming in Hawai'i, with cruises getting longer and more ships being added. For Hawai'i to protect its maritime treasures and its communities, we must manage the cruise industry more carefully, with a proactive vision for the future. Other states are enacting strict legislation with hefty penalties for environmental violations, and other areas have formed grassroots organizations that have impacted cruise industry decisions. Hawai'i should waste no time in exerting its jurisdiction over this industry so as to better protect the environment and the local residents' best interests. Physical improvements are drastically needed to our port facilities and the surrounding communities' infrastructure, as well as sociological studies to determine how the cruise industry is affecting the local communities and Native culture. Local businesses in Hawai'i should be encouraged to reach out to the cruise ship market, and Hawai'i County should take the lead in making sure that the cruise lines are making adequate local options available to their passengers.

C. S. Lewis, the British Scholar and novelist once said that "we all want progress, but if you're on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive" (Lewis). In the case of the cruise industry in Hawai'i, it may well be that we have been on the wrong road for some time and now we have the opportunity to do an "about-turn" and find the right road. By doing so, we would demonstrate that modern Hawai'i is progressive in its planning, responsible in its development, and ready to ride whatever the next wave brings us.

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