

Written Testimony – HTA Advisory Board Confirmation Hearing for Terry Fischer

TO: Committee on Economic Development and Tourism

Aloha Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai and Members of the Committee:

My name is Terry Fischer, President of Polynesian Adventure Tours. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this testimony expressing my interest in serving on the Hawaii Tourism Authority Advisory Board. I am seeking this role because I believe Hawaii's visitor industry is at a crucial turning point and thoughtful, balanced leadership is essential to ensuring tourism continues to thrive to support our communities while protecting the land and culture that make Hawaii unique.

Throughout my professional career, I have worked in tourism and specifically passenger transportation where operational planning, stakeholder coordination, and long-term sustainability are critical. My experience spans multiple high-demand visitor destinations, including Hawaii, the Canadian Rockies, and key tourism markets throughout the western United States. Working across these regions has provided me with a broad and practical understanding of how tourism-driven economies function, as well as the challenges that arise when balancing economic opportunity with environmental stewardship and community well-being.

In the Canadian Rockies, I have observed firsthand how globally recognized natural attractions require disciplined visitor management to protect fragile ecosystems while maintaining a high-quality visitor experience. Destinations in this region must carefully manage capacity, transportation access, infrastructure limitations, and seasonal demand fluctuations. The importance of preserving natural landscapes while still supporting local economies is a continuous consideration. These experiences reinforced the value of coordinated planning among government agencies, tourism operators, and local communities to ensure tourism growth does not come at the expense of environmental integrity.

Similarly, my experience in tourism markets across the western United States exposed me to destinations facing challenges related to rapid visitation growth, infrastructure strain, workforce housing limitations, and seasonal volatility. Many communities in these areas

depend heavily on tourism revenue while also seeking to preserve their unique character and quality of life. Through this work, I gained insight into the importance of distributing visitor demand, promoting shoulder-season travel, and aligning marketing efforts with destination capacity. These markets highlighted how proactive planning, data-driven decision-making, and stakeholder collaboration can help avoid reactive policies and support sustainable long-term growth.

This cross-regional experience has provided me with a practical understanding of how tourism impacts infrastructure, workforce stability, small businesses, and community resources at the ground level. I have seen how transportation systems, visitor flow, and operational logistics directly affect both the visitor experience and local communities. I bring a results-oriented perspective focused on balancing economic vitality with responsible management. I am committed to collaborative decision-making, data-driven planning, and ensuring that policies are both practical and measurable.

I am motivated to serve on the Advisory Board because I believe tourism must evolve in a way that is economically strong, culturally respectful, environmentally responsible, and supported by local communities. Hawaii's visitor industry is not only an economic engine but also a shared responsibility. It must be stewarded thoughtfully to ensure long-term sustainability and broad community benefit.

One of the most significant challenges facing Hawaii's tourism industry today is balancing economic impact with environmental stewardship. Overcrowding at natural attractions, strain on infrastructure, and environmental degradation place increasing pressure on fragile ecosystems. At the same time, there are growing concerns about preserving Hawaiian culture and maintaining community well-being. Residents want assurance that tourism respects local identity and contributes meaningfully to communities. Additionally, managing visitor volume and seasonality remains a challenge, with peak periods creating stress on public resources while slower seasons create instability for workers and businesses. Hawaii must also maintain its global competitiveness by focusing not simply on visitor numbers, but on attracting travelers who align with the state's values and contribute positively to the local economy.

To address these challenges, the Hawaii Tourism Authority should lead with a comprehensive, long-term strategy that balances promotion with responsible regulation. This includes implementing visitor management tools such as carrying capacity guidelines, reservation systems in high-traffic areas, and infrastructure coordination with counties. Responsible marketing should prioritize higher-value, lower-impact travelers, promote shoulder-season travel, and highlight culturally respectful experiences and locally owned businesses. Equally important is reinvesting tourism revenues into conservation, cultural preservation, and community initiatives, while measuring success not only by visitor spending but also by environmental impact and community satisfaction.

Balancing economic benefits with protection of the environment, culture, and communities requires a disciplined, value-driven approach. Tourism supports jobs, small businesses, public services, and infrastructure statewide. However, growth for growth's sake is not sustainable. The focus must shift from volume to value by attracting visitors who respect Hawaii's culture, understand their responsibility while visiting, and contribute meaningfully to the local economy. By optimizing value over volume, Hawaii can maintain economic strength while reducing strain on resources. The intent is not to restrict tourism, but rather to guide it.

In closing, I am grateful for the opportunity to be considered for the HTA's Advisory Board. I am committed to supporting a balanced approach that maintains tourism as a strong economic driver while safeguarding Hawai'i's land, culture, and communities for future generations. I would be honored to contribute my experience, perspective, and dedication to this important work.

Mahalo for your consideration

Terry Fischer