

Wellbeing and Travel to Hawaii During the COVID-19 Pandemic

When I first met my husband in 2006, we bonded over our shared love of travel. It didn't matter if it was a popular destination or off the beaten path—experiencing new places and cultures was something we both loved. When we had our son, we were delighted to see that he, too, loved to travel.

With our 10th anniversary just behind us, and our 40th birthdays coming up, we wanted to plan a special vacation. Neither of us had been to the East before, and we spent some time surfing through Costco packages for a stay in Bali or French Indonesia. We had settled on one, and were about to finalize our plans, when lockdown began. Two weeks turned into months. We ended up celebrating our birthdays not on a beach, but in our driveway while social distancing with friends and family.

This was a hard time for everyone's mental wellbeing, and I was always looking for opportunities to raise my family's spirits. I remember pushing my son on our backyard swing each night while talking and dreaming about all the amazing places we were going to go in the future.

Once the pandemic started to ease, international travel still seemed to be out of reach due to safety concerns and how each country was handling visitors. With our wanderlust reaching peak levels, we did some research and decided that Hawaii would be the ideal destination for our long-awaited trip.

We decided to go first to Oahu and then to Kawaii. I would spend my evenings on TripAdvisor and similar sites researching things to do on each island. Family evenings were spent viewing videos and debating about what to do and see. Financially, this long-term planning worked in our favor as I could book excursions and pay for them then. Thus, we had more spending money for the actual trip. The planning also helped our general wellbeing in having something so special to look forward to.

We originally planned for the fall of 2021, but there had been a sharp increase in COVID cases. Therefore, we had to delay our trip to March of 2022.

The Hawaiian government was being very careful with how it managed the pandemic, and was concerned about a large influx of tourists. It had put a plan in place that anyone traveling there needed to first sign up on their website, and then provide proof of vaccinations. Upon arriving at the airport, we were required to join a special line in which each member had to produce confirmation of a vaccination (card) and the QR code provided by the Hawaiian government clearing us for travel. I clearly remember a gentleman in front of us did not have his card and was turned away.

Masks were required at the airport, during the flight, and by Hawaiian state law when inside. Locals and visitors alike were pretty good about abiding by these restrictions. Many activities were outside which certainly helped.

The biggest impression I had during our trip is how places, like Hawaii, who have a bustling tourism trade have suffered due to the pandemic. In speaking to the tour operators and staff, many of them suffered hardships due to the shut-down. The fact that it happened so quickly, with no end in sight, meant that a lot of small companies had completely shuttered their doors.

In a positive light, the lack of tourists meant that there was less destruction to plants and animals. In fact, many were able to thrive due to the lack of contact with so many people. What a special trip this was, and Hawaii was filled with beautiful landscapes, people, and history. I hope to return again soon.