

NEW HOTEL DEBUTS ON KUHIO AVENUE



The Hilton Garden Inn Waikiki Beach replaces the closed Ohana Waikiki West

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Hilton Garden Inn opened its largest site in Waikiki on Monday, ushering in a new era for hospitality on what was once a tired, crime-ridden stretch of Kuhio Avenue.

It emerged as the 700th Hilton Garden Inn property worldwide after a \$115 million transformation of the former Ohana Waikiki West. This week's opening at 2230 Kuhio Ave. follows last week's grand opening of the Hilton Garden Inn Kauai Wailua Bay on the beach in Kapaa, Kauai. That oceanfront property is the first HGI to open in the state, but at 623 rooms, the Waikiki property is the largest to open in the brand's history.

"It's going to be a very special place here," said John Taffin, Hilton Garden Inn Waikiki Beach's general manager. "It's not only going to be a fabulous hotel, it will be a nice landmark as this whole corridor is redeveloped."

The opening of the newest HGI, which will be managed by Hawaii newcomer Evolution Hospitality, brings a high volume of much-needed hotel room inventory to Waikiki,



At top, the pool deck on the third floor of the Hilton Garden Inn Waikiki Beach. At right, the property features the Holoholo Cafe and Market.



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which has been suffering from severe property compression and high occupancy. It also expands the range of midpriced hotels in Waikiki, further gentrifies the Kuhio corridor and returns additional hotel jobs to the market. When paired with the Ritz-Carlton Residences, Hilton Garden Inn Waikiki Beach, which is taking bookings for July 1, and the opening of the International Market Place in August, it is expected to create the critical mass necessary to re-establish Kuhio Avenue as a highly desirable part of the Waikiki experience.

"We saw a lot of potential for redevelopment along Kuhio," said Ben Wang, executive vice president for Honolulu's BlackSand Capital, which owns the hotel along with Boston-based Rockpoint Group. "We are very proud of this redevelopment, which is in the epicenter of Waikiki. The redevelopment is just the the start. We know other hotels down the street will follow our lead, and that's going to be great for Waikiki, where most of the hotels were built in the 1950s, '60s and '70s."

Taffin said the redevelopment already has sparked further Kuhio reinvestment. The nearby boutique Aqua Waikiki Wave is being transformed into a Marriott Autograph Collection hotel, and the Waikiki Trade Center could become a Hyatt Centric-branded property.

"This beautifully renovated hotel is the latest project to beautify Kuhio Avenue, which will serve as another catalyst to improve and enhance this critically important part of Waikiki for our visitors, workers and residents," said Mufi

Hannemann, president and CEO of the Hawaii Lodging & Tourism Association.

The hotel, which sits on land owned by the Queen Emma Co., replaces the 659-room Ohana Waikiki West, which was managed by Outrigger Enterprises Group and was nearly 4 decades old.

"We haven't seen this kind of investment on Kuhio in decades," said Honolulu City Councilman Trevor Ozawa, who represents Waikiki. "This property was in dire need of revitalization, and I'm glad that these companies were able to work together to produce a product that is at a midrange price point and provides high-end amenities for those traveling with families from around the world."

Stacy Manzo, director of sales and marketing at Hilton Garden Inn Waikiki Beach, said daily prices at the hotel are expected to range from \$229 to \$289, prices that are probably about \$200 lower than peak-season rooms at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort.

Manzo said all renovated rooms will include a king bed or two double beds, a microwave, minifridge, clock radio with MP3 connections and Keurig coffee/tea makers. Individual air-conditioning units have built-in dehumidifiers. Some rooms have Toto washlets, Japanese toilets with automated bidet functions.

Guests, who will not be charged resort fees, also will have access to free business centers and free Wi-Fi in the lobby and in their rooms, which have enough bandwidth to accommodate five electronic devices. The room TVs are 48 inches, the largest in Waikiki.

"We are kind of like an HGI on steroids," Manzo said. "We're not a full-service hotel, but we have focused ser-

vice. 'Stay fit' and 'Eat well' are two of our pillars."

To that end, Manzo said there is a rooftop bar and pool, and two fitness centers. There's also the Holo-holo Cafe and Market, a new concept from the Sullivan Family of Companies, which operates Foodland. TR Fire Grill, a Florida-based chain known for farm-to-table dining and creative drink mixologists, is expected to open in late August or early September in the former Chili's space.

"We're about 95 percent complete," Taffin said. "We have a few hundred guests tonight. We expect to be close to market occupancy very soon. We may even be full for July Fourth."

The hotel opens with 140 workers, which is fewer than the 175 workers that Outrigger employed during the Ohana Waikiki West's peak days but more than the 90 employees who closed the 39-year-old property.

Jinele Guira, a housekeeping manager, jumped at the chance to work at the hotel, which is closer to her Waipahu home than her previous employer.

"I went to a job fair and got a job as an associate," Guira said. "Two weeks later I told them that I wanted to step up, and they gave me a chance. In this company we all grow together."

Guira said the hotel employs 29 housekeepers, who care deeply about making a good visitor impression.

"We've been working seven days a week for the past two weeks to get it ready," she said.

Housekeeper Josephina Castillo said she's proud of the property and glad about the work it has created.

"I'm so happy to work here and to clean the rooms for our guests. I want them to have a great stay," Castillo said.