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Hawai'i Tourism Authority President and CEO John De Fries Announces He Will Decline Extension of Employment Contract

Three-year term emphasizing holistic destination management concludes September 15, 2023

HONOLULU – A visionary leader dedicated to the guiding principle of Mālama Ku'u Home — caring for our beloved home — John De Fries, President and CEO of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA), announced today he will not be accepting an extension of his three-year employment contract, which concludes on September 15, 2023. De Fries made the announcement to HTA's Board of Directors during a special board meeting today.

"It has been an honor to serve the communities and people of our islands these past three years and I will support the board and staff during this transition in leadership of HTA," said De Fries. "I am incredibly proud of our passionate, unwavering team of professionals at HTA and all that is being accomplished in our communities to improve the well-being of Hawai'i. I extend my gratitude to the HTA Board for their support of our critical work in accelerating HTA's focus on improved destination management and increased visitor education, and changing our collective outlook toward tourism for the long-term benefit of our kama'āina, our native culture, and the places we hold dear throughout Hawai'i. I'd also like to thank the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Legislature for working together and making it possible for HTA to continue its work in the coming fiscal year."

De Fries took the helm of HTA to lead Hawai'i's visitor industry in September 2020 amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic and state's self-quarantine requirement for travelers at a time when visitor spending and arrivals were nearly at a standstill. In September 2020, visitor arrivals were down 97.4 percent with only 18,868 visitors as compared to September 2019.

Building on HTA's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan which articulated the need for destination management, under De Fries' leadership, HTA developed three-year Destination Management Action Plans for each island. This community-first, community-led approach to rebuilding, redefining, and resetting tourism is making positive strides as HTA works in collaboration with fellow government agencies, visitor industry partners, and community members toward a regenerative model of tourism for all of Hawai'i.

De Fries also led an operational restructuring beginning in June 2021, continuing HTA's pivot from an agency that was primarily focused on marketing through Hawai'i Revised Statute 201B to a more effective destination management organization.

HTA Board Chair George Kam credited De Fries for putting tourism on a new course and doing so at a time when the industry was facing its greatest economic challenge in decades. "John has done an admirable job fulfilling his three-year contract during the most challenging period in recent Hawai'i history. At a time when we needed a strong, visionary leader to calmly guide us forward out of troubling circumstances, John was there for HTA."

The board invited De Fries to consider an extension of his contract in a March 30, 2023 meeting. Following the conclusion of the legislative session, De Fries informed the board on May 9 that he would decline that extension.

Together with numerous community and industry partners throughout the state, HTA continues to mindfully guide and support the implementation of destination management to advance a regenerative model of tourism, helping to resuscitate Hawai'i's economy well ahead of projections. In the first four months of 2023, total visitor spending increased significantly by 21.7 percent to \$7.09 billion despite fewer arrivals compared to the pre-pandemic first four months of 2019, continuing the trend of higher visitor spending with fewer visitors to Hawai'i.

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About the Hawai'i Tourism Authority

The Hawai'i Tourism Authority is the state agency responsible for representing The Hawaiian Islands around the world, and for holistically managing tourism in a sustainable manner consistent with community desires, economic goals, cultural values, preservation of natural resources, and visitor industry needs. For more information about HTA, visit hawaiitourismauthority.org or follow @HawaiiHTA on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

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