

New Pana‘ewa zoo fees set to kick in Aug. 1

HAWAII COUNTY RESIDENTS WILL PAY LESS THAN OTHER VISITORS

BY TRIBUNE-HERALD STAFF

Following extensive public input, the Hawaii County Department of Parks and Recreation is adopting rule amendments for the Pana‘ewa Recreational Complex, including the introduction of admission fees to the Pana‘ewa Rainforest Zoo and Gardens.

The revised rules address the use and management of both the Pana‘ewa Equestrian Center and the zoo. They will take effect July 1, except for the introduction of admission



In this 2021 file photo, Linda Cava feeds the lemurs, Tom and Harriet, while working at the Pana‘ewa Rainforest Zoo and Gardens in Hilo. TRIBUNE-HERALD/ FILE PHOTO

fees at the zoo, which start Aug. 1.

The zoo fees for county residents will be \$4 for adults, with no charge for keiki 17 and under or kupuna 60 and older.

Noncounty residents will be charged \$12 for adults 18 and older, \$5 for children 3 to 17, and no charge for visiting children under 3. An annual pass will be available for \$25 per individual.

The implementation of the updated rules follows two public hearings held in November 2024 and June 2025. After Mayor Kimo Alameda took office in December 2024, the new rules were suspended to allow the proposed fee structure for the zoo to be revised based on community feedback.

“I want to thank everyone who provided the county feedback after admission fees were first discussed last year,” Mayor Alameda said in a statement. “Your input helped craft changes that keeps the zoo affordable for local families and ensures that nonresidents pay their fair share while providing resources to support this important community facility.”

Following the November public meeting, the county changed the proposed fee structure by allowing Hawaii County kupuna and keiki to attend for free after originally proposing a \$1 for all local children, and also introduced the annual pass option. After the June public hearing, the county decided to retain the fee structure that reserves the rates for Hawaii County residents only despite an abundance of testimony on June 3 suggesting that residents of other islands should also be eligible for the kama‘aina rates.

“Throughout this process, it was heartening to hear how important the zoo and equestrian center are to our community,” said Clayton Honma, Director of Parks and Recreation. “Our goal with these new rules is to ensure these recreational facilities

continue to thrive and grow so our community can enjoy them for many years to come.”

In addition to the zoo fees, a new fee schedule for stall rentals at the Pana‘ewa Equestrian Center also is being implemented, with fee increases phased in annually.

The equestrian center includes equestrian-related facilities, such as a 5/8-mile racetrack, eventing and dressage areas, rodeo arena, wash racks, and rental stalls with attached paddocks. The center is open for public use seven days a week.

The zoo is home to 81 species and over 250 animals in a lush rainforest environment. It is the only zoo in the United States located in a tropical rainforest. In addition to exotic and native plants and animals, the zoo also features special amenities such as a playground, pavilions, a petting zoo, a gift shop and more.



In this 2017 file photo, Landen Bandy checks out Peanut the goat’s horns as the Animal Enrichment Team takes animals out for their weekly walk at the Panae‘wa Rainforest Zoo and Gardens in Hilo. TRIBUNE-HERALD/ FILE