

Where The Assholes Of Arrogance And Political Manipulation Hang Out

[Jeanne Cooper](#)

The Kona-Kohala Coast on Hawaii Island has many fans among Silicon Valley's tech titans.

Matt Anderson Photography/Getty Images

The recent news that Hawaii is [recruiting mainland residents](#) to work remotely came as a surprise to locals expecting further, not fewer, restrictions on travel to the Aloha State. Yet the [Movers & Shakas program](#), which includes free round-trip airfare for 50 qualified applicants who will temporarily live on Oahu and pledge to volunteer with a community nonprofit, is part of a long tradition of luring well-heeled people to make Hawaii their vacation home.

Across the archipelago, it's easy to find Silicon Valley magnates with a large footprint, including Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg on Kauai, eBay founder Pierre Omidyar in Honolulu and Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison on Lanai.

However, it's the Kona-Kohala Coast on Hawaii Island in particular that has become a beachfront backyard for Northern California tycoons and tech titans from all over. This geographic affinity began with the heiress of the Oakland-based Matson shipping line, continued with the founders of Apple, Intel, Microsoft and Dell, and certainly shows no sign of stopping during the pandemic. At one of the most exclusive compounds on the island, media rooms are rapidly being renovated into home offices to accommodate sudden residency in what had been a second (or third or fourth) home.

Credit Laurance Rockefeller, the late son of John D. Rockefeller, for creating the idea of resort-style living in Hawaii. To help spur interest among wealthy San Franciscans in his now-iconic Mauna Kea Beach Hotel, which opened in 1965 as the first hotel and golf course on the Kohala Coast, he recruited his wealthy friend Lurline Matson Roth — owner of the Filoli estate in Woodside and daughter of the founder of Matson Navigation Co. — to build a mansion overlooking nearby coves. She called the 4,000-square-foot home Waiulaula, after a stream running through her almost 10-acre property.

The Mauna Kea Beach Hotel on Hawaii Island has long been a popular spot for the affluent to stay.

By the Mauna Kea's [50th anniversary in 2015](#), three generations of affluent Bay Area residents had made vacations at the hotel part of their family tradition, aided by a “legacy desk” that caters to their desire to keep coming back. In the meantime, Roth's daughter Bernice Spalding sold Waiulaula in 2007 for \$26.5 million, a year after Salesforce founder and CEO Marc Benioff began building a nearly 10,000-square-foot home on a neighboring 5-acre lot. The San Francisco executive recently made the news as a good neighbor, coordinating the donation of 1 million face masks to Hawaii County Civil Defense through UCSF, where he funded the Benioff Center for Microbiome Medicine.

Steve Jobs, the late founder of Apple, preferred less opulent digs for his Hawaii vacations, making annual family trips for more than two decades to rustic-chic Kona Village, closer to the airport in North Kona. Opened in 1965, the enclave of thatched huts was known for its “get away from it all” ambiance, with no phones or TVs and a discreetly isolated locale just north of what became the Four Seasons Hualalai.

Michael Dell, founder and CEO of Dell Technologies, bought the Four Seasons hotel and the surrounding Hualalai resort in 2006, going on to build an oceanfront home valued at some \$75 million in Hualalai’s tony Kukio compound. Hualalai and Kukio have golf courses open only to resort members, but Charles Schwab, founder of the eponymous San Francisco brokerage company, and billionaire investor George Roberts went one further in 2003 by building their own golf course across the highway, said to be open to just 100 invitation-only members.

The Kona Village Resort was once a Polynesian fishing village. The area was also a favorite of the late Apple founder Steve Jobs.

In 2010, rumors flew that Jobs met at Kona Village with Microsoft rival Bill Gates, although the latter was said to have preferred staying up the coast at Hilton Waikoloa Village and since 2007 has been co-owner of the Four Seasons Hotel management company, along with Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal. The late Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, however, definitely had a penchant for the Kona coastline; from the early 2000s to his death in 2018, he used a helicopter to shuttle between his mega-yacht and a magnificent 10-acre, \$30 million oceanfront estate on Kukailimoku Point, close to Kailua Pier and historic Kailua Village. He also owned 23 acres of undeveloped land on the Waikoloa Beach Resort, which recently sold for \$16 million.

Kona Village took a devastating drubbing from the 2011 tsunami that originated in Japan, and has been closed ever since. But Laurene Powell Jobs, Steve Jobs' widow, is part of a group of investors that is currently building an updated, much more upscale version of their beloved oasis, currently scheduled to open in 2022 as a Rosewood resort.

Now some Silicon Valley executives are turning their vacation homes into full-time residences, at least during the pandemic. Kohanaiki is an invitation-only golf course community of \$5 million homes near the Kona airport that has seen an uptick in both residents and prospective buyers from Northern California since the pandemic began, according to Chuck Cary, the development’s vice president of sales and marketing.

“We’re two to three hours earlier here, so to be able to finish your normal workday at 1:30 or 2 in the afternoon and have a huge day of doing whatever you want to do left in Hawaii really makes for a nice lifestyle,” Cary notes. “There’s nothing to getting up and going to work at 6 a.m. — most of us are up that time anyway — in order to have a giant chunk of day to spend with your family, or to go snorkeling or golfing, in absolutely perfect weather.”

Although some residents are bringing teachers with them to homeschool their kids, or enrolling them in local private schools, Cary says online schooling from the West Coast is also appealing to some. “The same time zone works for school, too — you’re done at 11 a.m., the day becomes longer for kids to goof off and for all the stuff they want to do,” he notes.

But some are finding that a few modifications to their homes are necessary, says Cary. Take one of Kohanaiki's six-bedroom, 7.5-bath houses, including a detached 'ohana (family) unit with its own movie theater: "Do people need six bedrooms? Some do, most don't. Do you need a movie theater in this detached 'ohana? We started to ask our members if there was something we could change, and they said, 'I don't need a cubby with my laptop, I need a home office, I'm not going to go back to Cupertino except occasionally,'" Cary explains. "So instead of a home theater people use four times a year, we're going to design a beautiful home office for them. They have no idea you're not sitting in Silicon Valley or Los Angeles, and when they're done, they just close it up and go back to the house."

Owning a home at Kohanaiki also qualifies Silicon Valley residents to purchase an annual membership for the Kona Shuttle, a private jet charter operated by [KaiserAir](#) twice a week from Oakland since 2009. Hualalai, Kukio and Mauna Lani homeowners are also eligible to fly on the Boeing 737-800 that has "VIP seating" for 60 — but there's said to be a waiting list for new members.