

Another Day in Paradise

Storage facilities in a tropical location cater to a unique clientele.

By Laura Fries

A tropical paradise is the dream for many, especially as the cold winter months take over. Perhaps it's just a fantasy piña colada-filled vacation to escape the mounding snow drifts, a lucrative investment from rental income, or even the ultimate retirement goal.

For some, however, an ocean view and a sea breeze is part of the normal work day. When you run a self storage business in the tropics, sun, sand and surfboards are just part of your day's work.

Shaun Salvador, vice president of marketing and sales for Hawaii Self Storage, explained that "kai" is the Hawaiian word for ocean and is significant in Hawaiian culture and the lifestyle of their islands.

"We are blessed to have one of the best weather climates on the planet and are surrounded by beautiful beaches and oceans," he said. "Besides some rare hurricane scares and tropical storms, our weather is consistently warm 365 days a year."

With the great weather comes a slightly divergent clientele and a set of self storage needs different from those on the mainland. Chances are people have moved to, or frequently visit, a tropical climate to take advantage of the outstanding outdoor activities available. But all of these hobbies take up space, and with the cost per square foot in desirable locales at a premium, there usually isn't room for paddleboards, windsurfing equipment or surfboards in your bungalow by the sea.

Space at a Premium

"Besides having the largest inventory of normal storage units, we have made some special accommodations for surfboard, paddleboard, canoe, and kayak customers," said Salvador. "Space in Hawaii is at a premium, and renting a typical storage unit for odd-shaped items might not make sense, so we built secure drive-up storage areas that our customers can access from 5 A.M. to midnight. Our facilities are fully gated with coded access, perfect for early and late-night sessions since many customers like to hit the water before their normal work day."

In addition, Salvador said their Waikiki facility has 24-hour access and staffing for added service and convenience.

"It's open air in our covered garage, so [client] equipment is protected from the sun and always stays dry," he explained.



Hawaii Self Storage said many of its customers store their surfboards and kayaks horizontally to protect from damage.

"No problem with sand or salt water, as everyone usually washes down at the beach. Units rent for \$40 to \$70 a month. In addition, we rent stalls to accommodate boats, jet skis and any other water vehicles. Our last three storage facilities were also built with extra-tall ceilings, up to 14 feet high, which provides our customers extra free cubic feet to store their tall surfboards, fishing poles and other water gear."

Renting storage space in a tropical location isn't all just fun and games and sporting gear. Storage for the tropical homeowner is smart for several reasons. A carefree beach lifestyle requires a carefree home. A facility provides a place to store the things vacationers might need in the future without cluttering up the house on a daily basis.

Many rental investors and condo owners need a secure place to store personal belongings while they are back on the mainland. And although a bigger beach is better, folks in tropical climates tend to look for smaller rental units. Tom Gardner, director of operations for Fortress Self Storage in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, said his client base varies from islanders to vacation rental owners and, occasionally, the wandering traveler who decides spontaneously to try and make a go of it in the beautiful, tropical locale.

"We have 5 x 5 x 4 units that tend to be popular with college kids who need someplace to stick their stuff," he said. "They come here to bartend or waitress and live the island life for a while, and that is a perfect size for them."

"We have charter boat operators and yacht owners that come and go, as well as tourists that own rentals and need to store personal items on a continuous basis," said Gardner. "Our facilities are perfect for excess equipment like extra life preservers, ropes, tools and maintenance equipment. If you are just doing a quick charter, you don't need to take all of your tools with you."

Another factor that separates Fortress Self Storage in St. Thomas: the business isn't constricted by the same laws as their counterparts on the mainland.

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“We have five acres of huge storage warehouse like an industrial park, and we even have an office-type building with windows,” Gardner said. “The building has 10-foot-wide hallways with 10x20 rooms that people can rent and turn into offices for their business. Because it is a month-to-month lease with no long-term commitment, it allows people to test out a business plan.”

Island Time

Tropical living follows a different clock than on the mainland, so self storage owners in sought-after locations often need hours that reflect beach life.

Jeff Willits, site manager of Aloha Self Storage in Lahaina on the island of Maui in Hawaii, said they offer extended hours and 24-hour access to some tenants who need this for their business—mostly for customers who store boats and need access very early in the morning.

“Any kind of real estate is at a premium on west Maui,” he said. “People tend to live in smaller spaces here than they might on the mainland. Small 5x5 units are very popular and help people living in condos with minimal storage



Space is at a premium in a tropical paradise, so Hawaii Self Storage offers extended hours and uniquely sized units designed for island living.

space. We converted some 5x5 units to even smaller units, about 5x5x5, and these are very popular as well. Some people have condos that they rent and only occasionally use themselves. They like to leave personal items in our smaller units, such as snorkel gear and holiday decorations.”

Besides tropical weather issues, such as possible hurricanes and tsunamis, a tropical facility usually offers customers information about keeping salt and sand off of

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~ Shaun Salvador, Hawaii Self Storage

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their items before storage. It’s not unusual for ocean-adjacent facilities to offer tips on how to clean and store items like surfboards, kayaks, paddleboards and wetsuits.

Many travel promotions show a colorful surf board resting against the outside of a beach villa. It creates a great visual and will get even the most snowbound mainlander dreaming of surf and sand. While storing your beach items outdoors may seem like a good idea, high salt content and even bright sun can damage equipment.

Outdoor hobbies are investments. If you’ve spent the money and time to take lessons, earn certificates and travel great distances, storing your outdoor equipment properly is also a smart way to keep your investment—and possibly your safety—a top priority. And less maintenance means more beach time. ❖