

A Warm "Aloha" Awaits You in Hawaii - Part 1

If you've always dreamed of vacationing in paradise, there is simply no other destination that fits the bill better than the islands of Hawaii. With a year-round average temperature between 80 and 87 degrees, any time is a great time to visit.

Our 50th state is comprised of a chain of islands. Of those, there are six main islands in the chain that are inhabited and welcome tourists. Each of the islands has its own special appeal that keeps people coming back again and again. The two main entry points to the islands are Honolulu, the state's capital located on the island of Oahu, and Kahului on the island of Maui. From either of these airports the other four islands of Kauai, Molokai, Lanai and Hawaii (referred to locally as simply "The Big Island") are easily accessible using Hawaii's interisland airlines; Aloha and Hawaiian.

For first timers visiting Hawaii, you can't help but begin with the island of Oahu. Considered to be the heart of Hawaii, here is where you will find most of your major tourist attractions. The famed Waikiki Beach (one of my all-time favorites), stretches for miles warmed by the golden sun with the water a consistent 72-76 degrees year round. For a truly breathtaking view of Waikiki, hike to the summit of the extinct Diamond Head volcano. For shopping enthusiasts, the International Marketplace offers hours of bargain hunting. Pearl Harbor, with the USS Arizona Memorial and the USS Missouri are just a short distance away. Oahu is also the only place in the United States where you can visit a royal palace. Being that Hawaii was originally ruled by a monarchy, the beautifully restored Iolani Palace is rich with Hawaiian history. The north shore of Oahu is home to the Polynesian Cultural Center, great golfing, and the surfing capital of the world; the Banzai Pipeline. For great snorkeling, it doesn't get any better and Hanauma Bay on Oahu's protected southeast shore. As the sun begins to set over Waikiki Beach, soak up the local flavor with a sunset cocktail and dinner at Duke's Canoe Club, named after legendary surfer Duke Kahanamoku.

Maui is the second most visited of the Hawaiian islands. Most repeat visitors bypass Oahu and head straight for Maui. This in part is due to the fact that Maui offers a perfect blend of sightseeing opportunities and relaxation. Not nearly as built up as Oahu, Maui offers more natural beauty. The major resort areas of Maui are Kaanapali, Kapalua, and Wailea. Kaanapali is one of the finest beaches you will find in Hawaii stretching four miles on the northwest side of the island. Just two miles south of Kaanapali is the historic fishing village of Lahaina, where whale watching is at its peak from December thru April. Continuing south, you'll come to Wailea, a resort oasis with championship golf courses, luxury hotels, great watersports and upscale shopping. If you're up for a little adventure, why not greet the day by viewing the sunrise at the summit of Haleakala Crater and then bike all the way down to the beach.

Kauai is the oldest and furthest west of the Hawaiian Islands. An island steeped in natural beauty, Kauai offers a wonderful experience for those who love the great outdoors. Kauai is home to Waimea Canyon, the Grand Canyon of the Pacific. Though there are several viewing locations, the best way to experience the vast expanse of Waimea Canyon is by helicopter flightseeing tour; it is an experience you will never forget. Waimea Canyon also offers hiking opportunities. The beautiful Na Pali Coast, with its folded green cliffs, covers the western coastline of Kauai. Much of the Na Pali Coast is reachable only by boat or via helicopter flightseeing tour. For those a little less adventurous, travel by boat down the Wailua River to the Fern Grotto. Kauai has strict building codes so that nothing detracts from the natural beauty of the island. Buildings can be no taller than a mature coconut tree. This leads to the more relaxed feeling that is prevalent throughout the island. It is important to note Kauai is not a destination for true beach enthusiasts as the surf is a bit rougher than on Oahu or Maui because it is the first point of impact as the waves travel across the Pacific from Asia. The resorts of Kauai make up for this with more luxurious pool areas than you may find on the other islands.

Next month, we'll explore the less traveled islands of Hawaii, Molokai, and Lanai.

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