

Paradise Found

Hawaii boasts an awesome natural beauty, but it is also one of the world's best destinations for shopping, dining, nightlife and the arts. Whether you are after an adventure-packed holiday or just want to get away from it all, the island of Oahu – home to the state capital of Honolulu – is a good place to start

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If you want to get to know the real Hawaii, you have to know where to look. It's sometimes hard to escape its cheesy factor – think lurid-pink cocktails, plastic flower leis and polyester aloha shirts – but if you look past its commercialised veneer, you'll uncover the Islands' true beauty and character. More than its white-sand beaches and lush green mountain ranges, however, you will discover Hawaii's story – how America's 50th state came to be a melting pot of cultures, how its past has shaped its present, and how incredibly proud the locals are of their rich history. Every island in the chain is different and has something unique to offer, but the best place to begin your discovery is Oahu.



1. Waikiki Beach by night
2. Leonard's Bakery Malasadas
3. Leonard's Bakery sign



WHERE TO STAY
Hilton Hawaiian Village
One of the island's most loved resorts, the Hilton Hawaiian Village has hosted a number of famous guests, including John Legend and the late Michael Jackson. It has so many restaurants, cafes, shops and facilities that, once you've checked in, you'll probably find that you have no reason to leave. The private lagoon and beach offer a host of water-based activities, and musical and dance (including hula) performances take place around the property almost every night (www.hiltonhawaiianvillage.com).



WHERE TO EAT
Rainbow Drive-In
This local institution, just several minutes' walk from the Honolulu Zoo, serves cheap and hearty island favourites like Loco Moco, a surfers' staple of rice, hamburger patties and eggs covered in brown gravy, Portuguese sausage and eggs, saimin noodles, and long rice, a dish of seasoned cellophane noodles with pork and veggies (rainbowdrivein.com).



WAIKIKI
This is where most of Oahu's hotels, restaurants and retail stores are located. It's incredibly touristy and can get pretty crowded, but as long as you avoid the tourist traps, spending time here can be a fun experience.
Kalakaua Avenue, Waikiki's main drag along the beach has a number of boutiques that are worth checking out, but if you want to really shop till you drop, take a tram to Ala Moana Center, the world's largest open-air mall (www.alamoanacenter.com).
For fantastic aerial views of Honolulu, Waikiki and the Pacific Ocean, make your way up the Diamond Head State Monument. The hiking trail is steep at some points, so you have to be relatively fit to do the two-hour trek (www.hawaiistateparks.org).
A Segway tour is one way to enjoy Waikiki and Diamond Head Road. Ride past some of Waikiki's most famous landmarks, like the historic "Pink Palace", the stately Moana Surfrider hotel, and Kapiolani Park. The tour then proceeds along Diamond Head Road, where you'll

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cruise by million-dollar estates and spots like Diamond Head Lighthouse and Amelia Earhart Lookout.
While you're here, don't miss Doris Duke's Shangri La, the stunning five-acre estate that once belonged to the American heiress and art collector. Now open to the public, this architectural wonder houses Duke's extensive collection of

Islamic art. Shangri La tours depart from the Honolulu Museum of Art (honolulumuseum.org and www.shangrilahawaii.org).
Craving a sweet treat? Try the traditional Portuguese hole-less doughnuts (called malasadas), as well as a range of other baked goods, at Leonard's Bakery on Kapahulu Avenue (www.leonardshawaii.com).

4. Rainbow over Manoa and Waikiki
5. Royal Hawaiian Hotel, aka the Pink Palace

HAWAII

DOWNTOWN & CENTRAL OAHU

When locals refer to “downtown”, they are talking about Honolulu proper. On weekdays, this area is a bustling commercial hub, but come sundown, it transforms into a playground for the cool crowd. The best times to check out the bars and restaurants are Friday and Saturday nights. Every first Friday of the month, the streets close from about 6pm for a massive block party.

Chinatown is worth a wander. This historic neighbourhood is especially lively in the mornings, when most of the markets are open. There’s also a lot to see and explore, including theatres, art galleries, and other historic buildings (www.chinatownhi.com).

Do visit Iolani Palace, the only royal palace in the United States. Built in 1882 by the last King of Hawaii, King David Kalakaua, it was last occupied by Queen Liliuokalani until the latter was overthrown in 1893. The palace has since been restored and is now a museum (www.iolanipalace.org). The Mission Houses Museum is also a great

place to learn about Hawaiian history, in particular, its missionary influence (www.missionhouses.org).

Nearby Kakaako is the new kid on the “hip neighbourhood” block. This area, located between Waikiki and Downtown, is home to locally owned boutiques, farmers’ markets and the Ward Centers, not to mention, countless chic cafes and restaurants (kakaako.com).

For amazing bargains, head to Waikele Premium Outlets in central Oahu, which has all the designer and high street fashion you could want, at discount prices (www.premiumoutlets.com/waikele).

WHERE TO EAT

Kakaako Kitchen

This is a great spot for lunch and people watching. The menu boasts jazzed-up but well-priced local favourites, like Furikake Tempura Catfish and Garlic Chicken, classic American fare such as meatloaf and fried chicken, and creative salads and wraps (kakaakokitchen.com).

1. Iolani Palace
2. Chinatown Markets
3. Honolulu Bar

Below Kakaako Mural



EAST OAHU

Oahu’s eastern side (also called “windward”) is famed for its scenic and swimmable beaches. Hanauma Bay is perfect if you want to snorkel or just relax. Immortalised in the Elvis Presley movie Blue Hawaii (1961), this nature preserve is teeming with fish and other gorgeous marine life, from the gracious Hawaiian sea turtle (“honu”) to living coral and more (www.hanauma-bay-hawaii.com).

Manoa Falls is another popular movie location (parts of Jurassic Park were shot here). The 100-foot waterfall is a sight to behold, however swimming is not allowed at its base. Hiking is the only way to access this beautiful area, and you can choose between a short and a long hike. Caution: the trail can be slippery at times (manoafalls.com).

Further up the coast is Lanikai Beach in Kailua. Just half a mile long, it is consistently ranked as one of the world’s top beaches, thanks to its powder-white sand and clear-blue water. Lanikai is a popular beach for kayaking, snorkelling and stand-up paddling,

too. Rent your gear and make a day of it (www.kailuasailboards.com).

A few minutes’ drive from Lanikai is the upscale beach town of Kailua. US President Barack Obama has a holiday home here, but the town’s bars, restaurants and hippie-fashion stores are its main draw. For breakfast or brunch, you can’t beat Cinnamon’s Restaurant (www.cinnamons808.com) for its red velvet pancakes and ingredient-packed omelettes. For pupus (appetisers) and beer, check out Kailua Town Pub & Grill (kailuatownpub.com).

WHERE TO STAY

Hawaii’s Hidden Hideaway Bed & Breakfast

This award-winning B&B is a short walk from Lanikai and Kailua beaches, and features a variety of units, depending on your sleeping arrangements. The property can only accommodate seven people at a time, so it’s perfect if you want to escape the crowds or just crave some peace (www.ahawaiibnb.com).

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Above Sunset in Honolulu



1. Snorkeling at Shark's Cove

2. A Surfer



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NORTH SHORE

Oahu's North Shore, which stretches from Haleiwa to Turtle Bay in the northeast is a mecca for surfers, with many professional surfing competitions held here annually. It's also mostly undeveloped, with no high-rise buildings or sprawling malls to spoil its rustic charm. Here, you'll see wild chickens roaming the roads, and even the odd boar or two making their way through the lush jungle.

November to February are when the waves are at their biggest and most dangerous, so if you want to swim at any of the North Shore beaches, you're best advised to visit in the summer months, when the waters are calmer. The North Shore is about an hour's drive from Waikiki (www.gonorthshore.org).

Voted one of the top shore dives in the world, Shark's Cove is a favourite with snorkelers, although it's never as crowded as Hanauma Bay. For swimming or body boarding, Waimea and Sunset beaches are good choices. Pack a beach mat, beach umbrella and a picnic, and you're all set.

You might also wish to spend the day in Haleiwa, the North Shore locals' "town centre". You'll find a number of art galleries, like Wyland Galleries (www.wylandgalleries.com) and Tabora Gallery (www.taboragallery.com), gift and souvenir shops, and bikini and beachwear boutiques. Cool down with shave ice (a coloured and flavoured ice cone) at the famous Matsumoto Shave Ice, which has been around since 1951 (matsumotoshaveice.com). ★

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WHERE TO EAT

Giovanni's Shrimp Truck

Tuck into plump, garlicky shrimp sautéed to perfection and served with two scoops of rice and a lemon wedge. It's a must-stop when you're visiting the North Shore. If you're not into strong flavours, go for the mild Lemon Butter version (www.giovanisshrimptruck.com).



WHERE TO STAY

Ke Iki Beach Bungalows

The North Shore has more B&Bs and hostels than hotels, so you might want to go with this top-rated company, which offers beachfront and garden-view bungalows. The bungalows are reasonably priced, tastefully outfitted, and include all the modern conveniences, including Wi-Fi.



3. Haleiwa at North Shore

4. Lei Maker

5. Shaved Ice

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