



O'ahu

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Why Go?

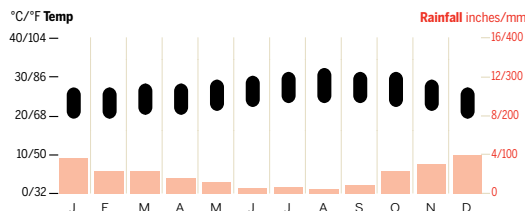
O'ahu is not just a transit point en route to the Neighbor Islands. It's the thrill-of-a-lifetime adventure. Here you can surf the North Shore's giant waves, hike atop knife-edged *pali* (cliffs), dive into Hanauma Bay's outdoor fishbowl, go windsurfing or kayak to uninhabited islands off Kailua – and still be back in Waikiki for sunset drinks.

Nicknamed 'The Gathering Place,' the capital island is home to nearly three-quarters of Hawaii's residents. Landing at Honolulu's airport plunges you into the urban jungle, but relax – this is still Polynesia. Even among the high-rises of downtown Honolulu, you'll see palm trees and power brokers in breezy aloha shirts.

Like Honolulu-born President Obama, O'ahu is proud of its multicultural heritage, and through it all pulses the lifeblood of Hawaiian traditions. A short drive from the modern city lies 'the country,' with its beckoning two-lane roads and all-natural beaches where sea turtles bask.

When to Go

Honolulu



May–Jun Sunny skies; fewer crowds after Easter's spring break before summer vacation.

Sep–Oct Low-season discounts; big festivals in Honolulu and Waikiki.

Nov–Dec Triple Crown of Surfing sweeps the North Shore.

History

Around AD 1450, Ma'ilikukahi, the ancient *mo'i* (king) of O'ahu, moved his capital to Waikiki, a coastal wetland known for its fertile farmlands and abundant fishing, as well as being a place of recreation and healing. O'ahu's fall to Kamehameha the Great in 1795 signaled the beginning of a united Hawaiian kingdom. Kamehameha later moved his royal court to Honolulu ('Sheltered Bay').

In 1793 the English frigate *Butterworth* became the first foreign ship to sail into what is now Honolulu Harbor. In the 1820s, Honolulu's first bars and brothels opened to international whaling crews just as prudish Protestant missionaries began arriving from New England. Honolulu replaced Lahaina as the capital of the kingdom of Hawai'i in 1845. Today Hawaii's first church is just a stone's throw from 'Iolani Palace.

In the 1830s, sugar became king of O'ahu's industry. Plantation workers from Asia and Europe were brought to fill the island's labor shortage. The names of some of Honolulu's richest and most powerful plantation families – Alexander, Baldwin, Cooke and Dole – read like rosters from the first mission ships. The 19th century ended with the Hawaiian monarchy violently overthrown at Honolulu's 'Iolani Palace, creating a short-lived independent republic dominated by sugar barons and ultimately annexed by the USA.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, O'ahu was placed under martial law during WWII. As many civil rights were suspended, a detention center for Japanese Americans and resident aliens was established on Honolulu's Sand Island, and later an internment camp was built in the Honouliuli area of central O'ahu. The US federal government didn't apologize for these injustices until 1988.

After WWII, modern jet-age travel and baby-boom prosperity provided O'ahu with a thriving tourism business to replace its declining shipping industry. In the 1970s, the Hawaiian renaissance flowered, especially on the University of Hawai'i at Manoa campus and after the successful wayfaring voyage of the *Hokule'a* canoe to Tahiti, first launched from O'ahu's Windward Coast.

By the 1980s, rampant tourist development had overbuilt Waikiki and turned some of O'ahu's agricultural land into water-thirsty golf courses and sprawling resorts. The island's last sugar mills closed in the 1990s, leaving O'ahu more heavily depend-

ent on tourism than ever. Debates about economic diversification and the continuing US military presence continue today.

National, State & County Parks

Although O'ahu is Hawaii's most populous island, nature awaits right outside Waikiki's high-rise hotels. About 25% of the island is protected as natural areas. The entire coastline is dotted with beaches, while the lush mountainous interior is carved by hiking trails, including in forest reserves rising above Honolulu's steel skyscrapers.

Most county beach parks are well-maintained with free parking, public restrooms, outdoor cold-water showers, lifeguards and picnic areas. Some of the North Shore's most famous surfing breaks are offshore from modest-looking county parks. The Wai'anae Coast doesn't register on many tourists' itineraries; its beach parks are blessedly free of crowds, save for locals.

State parks include iconic Diamond Head State Monument, where hikers can summit a landmark volcanic tuff cone, and idyllic, crescent-shaped Hanauma Bay, the island's premier snorkeling spot. At O'ahu's lesser-known state parks, you can visit ancient heiau ruins and rebuilt fishponds or take panoramic photos from beaches, lighthouses and cliff-top lookouts.

Although O'ahu has no national parks, the federal government oversees WWII Valor in the Pacific National Monument (including the USS *Arizona* Memorial) at Pearl Harbor, James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge on the Windward Coast and the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary encompassing offshore waters.

Camping

You can pitch a tent at many county and some state parks spread around the island, but none are close to Waikiki. Most private campgrounds and those county beach parks that have recommendable campgrounds are found along the Windward Coast.

All county and state park campgrounds on O'ahu are closed on Wednesday and Thursday nights; some are open only on weekends. Ostensibly, these closures are for park maintenance, but also to prevent semi-permanent encampments by homeless people, especially along the Wai'anae Coast.

Choose your campground carefully, as roadside beach parks can be late-night hangouts for drunks, drug dealers and gang members. O'ahu's safest campgrounds with