Welcome to Hawaii

It's easy to see why Hawaii has become synonymous with paradise. Just look at these sugary beaches, Technicolor coral reefs and volcanoes beckoning adventurous spirits.

Natural Beauty

Snapshots of these islands scattered in the cobalt blue ocean are heavenly, without the need for any tourist-brochure embellishment. As tropical getaways go, Hawaii couldn't be easier or more worth the trip, although visiting these Polynesian islands isn't always cheap. Whether you're dreaming of swimming in waterfall pools or lazing on golden-sand beaches, you'll find what you're looking for here. Sunrises and sunsets are so spectacular that they're cause for celebration all by themselves.

Go Play Outside

Just as in days of old, life in Hawaii is lived outdoors. Whether it's surfing, swimming, fishing or picnicking with the 'ohana (extended family and friends) on weekends, encounters with nature are infused with the traditional Hawaiian value of aloha 'aina – love and respect for the land.

Start by going hiking across ancient lava flows, up craggy volcanic peaks and along fluted *pali* (sea cliffs). Learn to surf, the ancient Hawaiian sport of 'wave sliding,' then snorkel or dive with bountiful tropical fish, giant manta rays and sea turtles. Kayak to a deserted offshore island or hop aboard a winter whale-watching cruise. Back on land, crawl through hollowed-out

lava tubes, gallop with *paniolo* (Hawaiian cowboys) along mountain ranch trails or zipline through cloud forests.

Island Style

Floating alone in the middle of the Pacific, Hawaii maintains its own sense of self apart from the US mainland. Spam, shave ice, surfing, ukulele and slack key guitar music, hula, pidgin, 'rubbah slippah' – these are just some of the touchstones of everyday life. Pretty much everything here feels easygoing, lowkey and casual, bursting with genuine aloha and fun. You'll be equally welcome whether you're a globe-trotting surf bum, a beaming couple of honeymooners or a big family with rambunctious kids.

Modern Multiculturalism

Hawaii is as proud of its multicultural heritage as it is of island-born US President Barack Obama. Here descendants of ancient Polynesians, European explorers, American missionaries and Asian plantation immigrants mix and mingle. In contemporary Hawaii, multiculturalism is the rule, not the exception. Arts and cultural festivals keep diverse community traditions alive, from Hawaiian hula and outrigger canoe races to Japanese *taiko* drumming and modern-day surfing championships.

Why I Love Hawaii

By Sara Benson, Coordinating Author

On my first trip to Hawaii, I landed on Maui almost broke and with my luggage lost in transit. No problem: I camped by the beach, plucked ripe guava from trees and spent days hiking in Haleakalā National Park. Since that serendipitous first island sojourn, I've lived and traveled around the archipelago, from the Big Island's geological wonderland to the emerald river valleys of Kaua'i to the big city of Honolulu, whose backstreets now seem as familiar as my own hometown. When it comes to Hawaii, I'm always ready to go again. *Hana hou*!

For more about our authors, see page 680