

O'ahu



Nicknamed 'The Gathering Place,' O'ahu is home to nearly three out of every four Hawaii residents. In this jangling nerve center of the archipelago, you can come face-to-face with contemporary Hawaii as it really is, without pretense. O'ahu, especially in the capital city of Honolulu, has the most complex, multiethnic society in the islands, and through it all pulses the lifeblood of Hawaiian traditions, from ancient heiau (stone temples) to Ka'ena Point, which legends say was the jumping-off point for souls leaping into the afterlife.

For some, O'ahu is just a transit point en route to the Neighbor Islands. For others, it's the place for thrill-of-a-lifetime adventures. Here you can surf the giant waves of the North Shore, dive into the outdoor fishbowl of Hanauma Bay, go windsurfing or kayak to uninhabited islands off Kailua Beach, and still be back in Waikiki in time for sunset drinks, torchlit hula and live tunes by some of Hawaii's most iconic musicians. No worries, brah.

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 find power brokers in breezy aloha shirts, and the pungent, chaotic markets of Chinatown taste more like Asia than the USA. Even in this modern 21st-century city, some places manage to feel timeless, like the harborfront and the hills, where hiking trails lead deep into the lush Ko'olau Range and its knife-edged *pali* (cliffs) that officially divide the 'city' from the 'country.'

Everything you've ever dreamed about Hawaii, you can find it here.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Swizzle tropical sunset cocktails while slack key guitars play in **Waikiki** (p160)
- Touch dramatic WWII-era history at **Pearl Harbor** (p141)
- Surf giant winter waves at **Sunset Beach** (p186)
- Snorkel and dive at **Hanauma Bay** (p166)
- Kayak to uninhabited offshore islands from **Kailua** (p174)
- Chow down and go gallery-hopping in Honolulu's **Chinatown** (p120)
- Inspect royal feathered capes and ancient temple carvings at the **Bishop Museum** (p126)
- Hike around **Mt Tantalus** (p129)
- Cruise the lush **Windward Coast** (p169)
- Get lost on the untrammelled beaches of the **Wai'anae Coast** (p197)



■ POPULATION: 905,600

■ AREA: 604 SQ MILES

■ NICKNAME: THE GATHERING PLACE

HISTORY

Around AD 1350, Ma'ilikukahi, the ancient *mo'i* (king) of O'ahu, moved his capital to Waikiki, a bounteous coastal wetland known for its fertile farmlands and abundant fishing, as well as for 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. In 1809 Kamehameha moved his royal court from Waikiki to Honolulu ('Sheltered Bay') to control the vigorous international trade taking place in the harbor.

First established in the 1830s, sugar plantations soon became O'ahu's major industry. Contract workers from Asia, North America and Europe were brought in to fill the island's labor shortage, as evidenced today by the island's ethnic diversity. The 19th century ended with the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy and the institution of a short-lived republic, until the USA annexed Hawaii in 1898.

Honolulu's electric streetcars reached Waikiki Beach in 1901, which was the same year that Waikiki's Moana Hotel opened, spurring a tourism boom interrupted only by the Great Depression and WWII. During the war, O'ahu was placed under martial law. As 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 established in the Honouliuli area of Kunia Rd in central O'ahu. The US federal government did not apologize for WWII internment camps in Hawaii and on the mainland until 1988.

Modern jet-age travel and baby-boom prosperity after the war provided O'ahu with a thriving tourism industry that conveniently replaced its declining shipping industry. In the '60s and '70s, the Hawaiian renaissance flowered here, especially on the University of Hawai'i's Manoa campus and after the successful voyage of the *Hokule'a* (p37), first launched from Kualoa on the island's Windward Coast.

In 1971 the first Hawaiian Masters surfing competition was held on O'ahu's North Shore. 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 remaining sugar mills closed in the 1990s, leaving O'ahu more heavily dependent on tourism than ever. Debates about economic diversification, sustainable tourism and also the continuing US military presence continue today.

O'AHU ITINERARIES

In Two Days

Got only a weekend in the sun? Then it's all about you and **Waikiki** (p145). Laze on the beach (p149), enjoy the sunset torch lighting and hula show at **Kuhio Beach Park** (p160) and dine at **Roy's - Waikiki Beach** (p159). The next day get up early to snorkel at **Hanauma Bay** (p166), then hike up **Diamond Head** (p165) or out to the lighthouse at **Makapu'u Point** (p168). Reward yourself later with a few mai tais on a **catamaran cruise** (p150) or at the Halekulani's posh **House Without a Key** (p160).

In Four Days

With two extra days, you can rent a car and drive to the **North Shore** (p184) and the **Windward Coast** (p169). Stop off at whatever beaches catch your eye - especially, say, around **Waimea Bay** (p186) or **Kailua Bay** (p174). Spend at least a full morning or afternoon exploring the capital city of **Honolulu** (p113), with its impressive museums, historical sites and revitalized Chinatown.

For Foodies

O'ahu dominates the other Hawaiian Islands when it comes to food. Taste goodness straight from the land and sea at the Diamond Head **farmers market** (p165), Kaimuki's **Town** (p137) restaurant and **Lanikai Juice** (p176) over on the Windward Coast. *Izakaya* (Japanese pubs serving food) are all the rage across **Honolulu** (p132), while pan-Asian eateries inhabit **Chinatown** (p133). Don't leave the island without trying traditional Hawaiian cuisine, not at a touristy luau (Hawaiian feast) but at **Ono Hawaiian Food** (p158) on the outskirts of Waikiki, which has plenty of local flavor if you know where to look. When the bikini gets tight, you've conquered the island.