

# HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE & GLOSSARY

Hawaii has two official state languages: English and Hawaiian. Actually, make that three. There's also an unofficial vernacular, pidgin, which has a laid-back, lilting accent and colorful vocabulary that might baffle unfamiliar ears. While English is definitely the dominant language, it's hard read a local newspaper or carry on a conversation without basic familiarity of the other two. Many are daunted by the Hawaiian language's multisyllabic words and double vowels (humuhumunukunukuapua'a is the iconic example), but you'll soon learn that Hawaiian pronunciation is very straightforward.

The Hawaiians had no written language prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries in 1820. Instead they relied on the oral tradition to perpetuate their genealogies, stories, chants, songs and place names. The missionaries rendered the spoken language into the Roman alphabet and established the first presses in the Islands, which were used to print the Bible and other religious instructional materials in Hawaiian.

Throughout the 19th century, as more and more foreigners (particularly the Americans and the British) settled in the Islands, the everyday use of Hawaiian declined. In the 1890s, English was made the official language of government and education.

The push for statehood, from 1900 to 1959, added to the decline of the Hawaiian language. Speaking Hawaiian was seen as a deterrent to American assimilation, thus adult native speakers were strongly discouraged from teaching their children Hawaiian as the primary language in the home.

This attitude remained until the early 1970s, when the Hawaiian community began to experience a cultural renaissance. A handful of young Hawaiians lobbied to establish Hawaiian language classes at the University of Hawai'i, and Hawaiian language immersion preschools followed in the 1980s. These preschools are modeled after Maori *kohanga reo* (language nests), where the primary method of language perpetuation is through speaking and hearing the language on a daily basis. In Hawaii's 'Aha

Punana Leo preschools, all learning and communication takes place in the mother tongue – *ka 'olelo makuahine*.

Hawaiian has now been revived from the point of extinction and is growing throughout the community. Record numbers of students enroll in Hawaiian language classes in high schools and colleges, and immersion school graduates are raising a new generation of native speakers.

If you'd like to discover more about the Hawaiian language, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *South Pacific Phrasebook*.

## PRONUNCIATION

Written Hawaiian has just thirteen letters: five vowels (**a, e, i, o, u**) and seven consonants (**h, k, l, m, n, p, w**). The letters **h, l, m** and **n** are pronounced much the same as in English. Usually every letter in Hawaiian words is pronounced. Each vowel has a different pronunciation depending on whether it is stressed or unstressed.

## Consonants

**p/k** similar to English, but with less aspiration; **k** may be replaced with **t**

**w** after **i** and **e**, usually a soft English 'v,' thus the town of Hale'iwa is pronounced 'Haleiva.' After **u** or **o** it's often like English 'w,' thus Olowalu is pronounced as 'written.' After **a** or at the beginning of a word it can be as English 'w' or 'v,' thus you'll hear both 'Hawai'i' and 'Havai'i' (The Big Island).

## Unstressed Vowels (Without Macron)

**a** as in 'ago'

**e** as in 'bet'

**i** as the 'y' in 'city'

**o** as in 'sole'

**u** as in 'rude'

## Glottal Stops & Macrons

Written Hawaiian uses both glottal stops (ʻ), called *ʻokina*, and macrons (a straight bar above a vowel, eg ā), called *kahako*. In modern print both the glottal stop and the macron are often omitted. In our guidebooks, most macrons have been omitted, but glottal stops have been included, as they can be helpful in striving to pronounce common place names and words correctly.

The glottal stop indicates a break between two vowels, producing an effect similar to saying ‘oh-oh’ in English. For example, ‘*aʻa*, a type of lava, is pronounced ‘ah-ah,’ and Hoʻokena, a place name, is pronounced ‘Ho-oh-kena.’ A macron indicates that the vowel is stressed and has a long pronunciation.

Glottal stops and macrons not only affect pronunciation, but can give a word a completely different meaning. For example, *ai* (with no glottal) means ‘sexual intercourse,’ but *ʻai* (with the glottal) means ‘food.’ Similarly, the word *kaʻa* (with no macron over the second *a*) means ‘to roll, turn or twist,’ but *kaā* (with a macron over the second *a*) is a thread or line, used in fishing.

## Compound Words

In the written form, many Hawaiian words are compound words made up of several different words. For example, the word *humuhumunukunukuapuaʻa* can be broken down as follows: *humuhumu-nukunuku-a-puaʻa* (literally, trigger fish snout of pig), meaning ‘the fish with a snout like a pig.’ The place name Waikiki is also a compound word: *wai-kiki* (literally, freshwater sprouting), referring to the freshwater swamps once found in the area. Some words are doubled to emphasize their meaning, much like in English. For example, *wiki* means ‘quick,’ while *wikiwiki* means ‘very quick.’

## PIDGIN

Hawaii pidgin is a distinct language, spoken by over 500,000 people. It developed on sugar plantations where the *luna* (foreman) had to communicate with field laborers from many foreign countries. Early plantation pidgin used a very minimal and condensed form of English as the root language, to which elements from Cantonese, Japanese,

Hawaiian and Portuguese were added. It became the second language of first-generation immigrants and many Hawaiians.

As this English-based pidgin evolved, it took on its own grammatical structure and syntax. Many words were pronounced differently and combined in ways not found in English. Rather than a careless or broken form of English, it evolved into a separate language, called Hawaii Creole by linguists.

Today, there is ongoing controversy about the validity of pidgin, with opponents saying that it erodes standard English and becomes a barrier to social and educational advancement. Proponents argue that pidgin is a rich and vibrant language that should not be looked down upon or banned from schools, and that pidgin speakers are often unjustly seen as less intelligent.

In recent years many award-winning plays, novels and poetry have been written in pidgin by local authors who are passionate in their determination to keep pidgin alive in the community. There are a number of good websites where you can learn more about pidgin, such as [www.eyeofhawaii.com/Pidgin/pidgin.htm](http://www.eyeofhawaii.com/Pidgin/pidgin.htm).

## Common Pidgin Words & Phrases

- brah** – shortened form of *braddah* (brother); also used as ‘hey you’
- broke da mout** – delicious, as in ‘My auntie make broke da mout kine fish!’
- buggahs** – guys, as in ‘Da buggahs went without me!’
- bumbye** – later on, as in ‘We go movies bumbye den (then).’
- bummahs** – bummer; an expression of disappointment or regret
- chicken skin** – goose bumps
- cockaroch** – to steal, as in ‘Who went cockaroch my slippahs?’
- da kine** – whatchamacallit; used whenever you can’t think of the word you want
- Fo’ real?** – Really? Are you kidding me?
- funny kine** – strange or different, as in ‘He stay acking (acting) all funny kine.’
- geev ‘um** – Go for it! Give it all you got!
- grind** – to eat; as in ‘What you like grind, brah?’
- hapai** – pregnant
- Howzit?** – Hi, how’s it going? As in ‘Eh, howzit brah?’
- How you stay?** – How are you doing these days?
- kay den** – ‘OK then,’ as in ‘Kay den, we go beach.’

**laydahs** – Later on. I'll see you later, as in, 'Kay den, laydahs.'

**no ack** – (Literally, 'no act.'). Stop showing off, cool it.

**no can** – unable to

**no moa** – out of, no more

## GLOSSARY

**'a'a** – type of lava that is rough and jagged

**'ahi** – yellowfin tuna

**'ahinahina** – silversword plant with pointed silver leaves

**ahu** – stone cairns used to mark a trail; an altar or shrine

**ahupua'a** – traditional land division, usually in a wedge shape that extends from the mountains to the sea

**aikane** – friend

**'aina** – land

**'akala** – Hawaiian raspberry; also called a thimbleberry

**akamai** – clever

**'akepa** – endangered crested honeycreeper

**aku** – bonito (skipjack tuna)

**akua** – god, spirit, idol

**'alae ke'oke'o** – endangered Hawaiian coot

**'alala** – Hawaiian crow

**ali'i** – chief, royalty

**aloha** – the traditional greeting meaning love, welcome, good-bye

**aloha 'aina** – love of the land

**'ama'ama** – mullet

**'amakihi** – small, yellow-green bird; one of the more common native birds

**anchialine pool** – contains a mixture of seawater and freshwater

**'a'o** – Newell's shearwater (a seabird)

**'apapane** – bright red native Hawaiian honeycreeper

**'aumakua** – protective deity, deified ancestor or trustworthy person

**awa** – milkfish

**'awa** – see *kava*

**'awapuhi** – wild ginger

**azuki bean** – prepared as a sweetened paste; added to shave ice or Japanese desserts

**bentō** – Japanese-style box lunch

**broke da mout** – delicious; literally, 'broke the mouth'

**crack seed** – Chinese preserved fruit; a salty, sweet and/or sour snack

**'elepaio** – a brownish native bird with a white rump, common to O'ahu forests

**fuku-bonsai** – Hawaiian-style potted dwarf trees

**rubbah slippahs** – rubber slippers (lit); flip-flops

**talk story** – any kind of casual conversation

**to da max** – a suffix that adds emphasis to something, as in 'Da waves was big to da max!'

**try** – please; as in 'Try hurry, eh?'

**goza** – rolled-up straw mats used at the beach

**grinds** – food

**hala** – pandanus tree; the leaves are used in weaving mats and baskets

**hale** – house

**hana** – work; a bay, when used as a compound in place names

**haole** – Caucasian; literally, 'without breath'

**hapa** – portion or fragment; person of mixed blood

**hau** – indigenous lowland hibiscus tree whose wood is often used for making canoe outriggers (stabilizing arms that jut out from the hull)

**Hawai'i nei** – all the Hawaiian Islands taken as a group

**heiau** – ancient stone temple; a place of worship in Hawaii

**hele on** – to get moving

**Hina** – Polynesian goddess (wife of Ku, one of the four main gods)

**holoholo** – to walk, drive or ramble around for pleasure

**holua** – sled or sled course

**honu** – turtle

**ho'olaule'a** – celebration, party

**ho'onanea** – to pass the time in ease, peace and pleasure

**huhu** – angry

**hui** – group, organization

**hukilau** – fishing with a *seine* (a large net), involving a group of people who pull in the net

**hula** – Hawaiian dance form, either traditional or modern

**hula 'auana** – modern hula, developed after the introduction of Western music

**hula halau** – hula school or troupe

**hula kahiko** – traditional hula

**hula ohelo** – a hula dance style in which the some of the dancer's motions imitate sexual intercourse

**humuhumunukunukuapua'a** – rectangular triggerfish; Hawaii's unofficial state fish

**'iwi** – a bright red Hawaiian honeycreeper with a curved, salmon-colored beak

**'iliahi** – Hawaiian sandalwood

**'ili'iili** – small stones

**'ilima** – native plant, a ground cover with delicate yellow-orange flowers

**'io** – Hawaiian hawk

**issei** – first-generation Japanese immigrants

**kahili** – a feathered standard, used as a symbol of royalty  
**kahuna** – knowledgeable person in any field; commonly a priest, healer or sorcerer

**kahuna nui** – high priest

**kaiseiki ryori** – multicourse chef's tasting menu

**kama'aina** – person born and raised in Hawaii; literally, 'child of the land'

**kanaka** – man, human being, person; also Native Hawaiian

**Kanaloa** – god of the underworld

**kane/Kane** – man; also the name of one of four main Hawaiian gods

**kapa** – see *tapa*

**kapu** – taboo, part of strict ancient Hawaiian social and religious system

**kaukau wagon** – lunch wagon

**kaunaoa** – a groundcover vine with yellow tendrils used to make lei

**kava** – a mildly narcotic drink (*'awa* in Hawaiian) made from the roots of *Piper methysticum*, a pepper shrub

**keiki** – child

**ki** – see *ti*

**kiawe** – a relative of the mesquite tree introduced to Hawaii in the 1820s, now very common; its branches are covered with sharp thorns

**ki'i** – image, statue (often of a deity); also known as *tiki* in Tahitian

**kilau** – a stiff, weedy fern

**kipuka** – an area of land spared when lava flows around it; an oasis

**ko** – sugarcane

**ko'a** – fishing shrine

**koa** – native hardwood tree often used in making native crafts and canoes

**kohola** – whale

**kokī'ō ke'oke'ō** – native Hawaiian white hibiscus tree

**kokua** – help, cooperation

**kona** – leeward side; a leeward wind

**konane** – a strategy game similar to checkers

**ko'olau** – windward side

**Ku** – Polynesian god of many manifestations, including god of war, farming and fishing (husband of Hina)

**kukui** – candlenut tree and the official state tree; its oily nuts were once burned in lamps

**kumulipo** – Native Hawaiian creation story or chant

**kupuna** – grandparent, elder

**ku'ula** – a stone idol placed at fishing sites, believed to attract fish

**Laka** – goddess of the hula

**lama** – native plant in the persimmon family

**lanai** – veranda

**lau** – leaf

**lahuala** – leaves of the hala plant used in weaving

**lei** – garland, usually of flowers, but also of leaves or shells

**limu** – seaweed

**lio** – horse

**loko 'ā** – fishpond

**lolo** – stupid, feeble-minded, crazy

**lomi** – to rub or soften

**lomilomi** – traditional Hawaiian massage

**Lono** – Polynesian god of harvest, agriculture, fertility and peace

**loulou** – native fan palms

**luakini** – a type of *heiau* dedicated to the war god Ku and used for human sacrifices

**lu'au** – traditional Hawaiian feast

**mahalo** – thank you

**mahele** – to divide; usually refers to the missionary-initiated land divisions of 1848

**mahimahi** – dolphin fish or dorado, popular in restaurants; not related to the mammal dolphin

**mai ho'oka'awale** – leprosy; literally, 'the separating sickness'

**mai'a** – banana

**maile** – native plant with twining habit and fragrant leaves; often used for lei

**maka'ainana** – commoners; literally, 'people who tend the land'

**makaha** – a sluice gate, used to regulate the level of water in a fishpond

**makahiki** – traditional annual wet-season winter festival dedicated to the agricultural god Lono

**makai** – toward the sea

**makaku** – creative, artistic imagination

**malihini** – newcomer, visitor

**malo** – loincloth

**mamane** – a native tree with bright yellow flowers; used to make lei

**mana** – spiritual power

**manini** – convict tang (a reef fish); also used to refer to something small or insignificant

**mauka** – toward the mountains; inland

**mele** – song, chant

**menehune** – 'little people' who, according to legend, built many of Hawaii's fishponds, heiau and other stonework

**milo** – a native shade tree with beautiful hardwood

**moa pahe'e** – a game, similar to *'ulu maika*, using wooden darts and spears

**mokihana** – an endemic tree or shrub, with scented green berries; used to make lei

**mo'i** – king

**mo'o** – water spirit, water lizard or dragon

**mu** – a 'body catcher' who secured sacrificial victims for the heiau altar

**mu'umu'u** – a long, loose-fitting dress introduced by the missionaries

**naupaka** – a native shrub with delicate white flowers  
**Neighbor Islands** – the term used to refer to the main Hawaiian Islands outside of O'ahu

**nene** – a native goose; Hawaii's state bird

**nisei** – second-generation Japanese immigrants

**niu** – coconut palm

**noni** – Indian mulberry; a small tree with yellow, smelly fruit that is used medicinally

**nuku pu'u** – a native honeycreeper with a yellow-green underbelly

**ogo** – seaweed

**'ohana** – family, extended family

**'ohi'a lehua** – native Hawaiian tree with tufted, feathery, pom-pom-like flowers

**'okole** – buttocks

**olo** – traditional long, wooden surfboard

**one hanau** – birthplace, homeland

**'ono** – delicious

**'o'o ihe** – spear-throwing

**pahoehoe** – type of lava that is quick and smooth-flowing

**pakalolo** – marijuana; literally, 'crazy smoke'

**palaka** – plantation-era plaid fabric (usually navy-white or red-white) made from sturdy cotton

**pali** – cliff

**palila** – endemic honeycreeper

**paniolo** – cowboy

**pau** – finished, completed, no more

**Pele** – goddess of fire and volcanoes; her home is in Kilauea Caldera

**pigdin** – distinct Hawaiian language or dialect (see p578)

**piko** – navel, umbilical cord

**pili** – a bunchgrass, commonly used for thatching houses

**pilo** – native shrub of the coffee family

**pohaku** – rock

**pohuehue** – morning glory

**poi** – staple Hawaiian starch made of steamed, mashed taro

**Poliahu** – goddess of snow

**po'ouli** – endangered endemic creeper

**pua aloalo** – a hibiscus flower

**pueo** – Hawaiian owl

**puhi** – eel

**pu'ili** – bamboo sticks used in hula performances

**puka** – any kind of hole or opening; small shells that are made into necklaces

**pukiawe** – native plant with red and white berries and evergreen leaves

**pulu** – the silken clusters encasing the stems of hapu'u ferns

**pupu** – snack or appetizer; also a type of cowry shell

**pu'u** – hill, cinder cone

**pu'uhonua** – place of refuge

**raku** – a style of Japanese pottery characterized by a rough, handmade appearance

**ryōkan** – traditional Japanese inn

**sansei** – third-generation Japanese immigrants

**shaka** – hand gesture used in Hawaii as a greeting or sign of local pride

**stink-eye** – dirty look

**tabi** – Japanese reef-walking shoes

**talk story** – to strike up a conversation, make small talk

**tapa** – cloth made by pounding the bark of paper mulberry, used for early Hawaiian clothing (*kapa* in Hawaiian)

**tī** – common native plant; its long shiny leaves are used for wrapping food and making hula skirts (*ki* in Hawaiian)

**tiki** – see *ki'i*

**tutu** – grandmother or grandfather; also term of respect for any member of that generation

**'ua'u** – dark-rumped petrel

**'ukulele** – four-stringed musical instrument used in modern Hawaiian music (literally, 'leaping flea,' because of the action of the fingers when playing), derived from the braguinha, which was introduced to Hawaii in the 1800s by Portuguese immigrants

**'uli'uli** – gourd rattle containing seeds and decorated with feathers

**'ulu maika** – ancient Hawaiian bowling game

**unagi** – eel

**wahine** – woman

**wikiwiki** – hurry, quick

**wiliwili** – the lightest of the native woods

**zazen** – Zen meditation

**zendo** – communal Zen meditation hall