

BEST O'AHU EXPERIENCES

O'ahu is the *ali'i* (chief) of the

Hawaiian Islands. Most locals say they've got the best of both worlds here. There's the big city of Honolulu, encompassing the kinetic streets of Chinatown, downtown high-rises filled with power brokers next to Victorian-era historical sites and, of course, the classic beaches of Waikiki. Then there's the other side of the island – the 'country' – where rural farms and dirt roads lead deep into a Hawaiian heartland. On some wild, rugged and nearly deserted beaches, sea turtles still outnumber the surfers. Who says you can't have it all here? Not us, and definitely not O'ahuans.

The following pages showcase, in no particular order, our recommendations for the most unforgettable and in-depth experiences on O'ahu right now.

1 BEST ISLAND-STYLE NIGHTLIFE: Waikiki (p135)

Waikiki is back, baby. Hawaii's most famous beach resort may still be a haven for tacky plastic leis, coconut-shell bikini tops and motorized hip-shaking hula dolls, but real aloha has returned to this prototypical paradise. Nightly at beachfront hotels, bars and even shopping malls you can stumble upon famous Hawaiian musicians strumming their slack key guitars and ukuleles, singing *ha'i* (a style of falsetto) or traditional Hawaiian chants, and shaking *ipu* (gourds) while performing the subtle hand movements and patterned footsteps of ancient and contemporary hula dances. At sunset, watch the tiki torches get lit and the conch shell blown at Kuhio Beach Park, where you can spread out a blanket in front of the hula mound, where dancers sway nightly. Then wander over to the courtyard of the Moana Surfrider, the House Without a Key in the Halekulani Hotel, or a dozen more venues for live contemporary Hawaiian music and hula that's not strictly for tourists – it's also a way of keeping island traditions alive. And with such a gorgeous beachfront setting, it's irresistible and pure magic.





1



LEE FOSTER

2 BEST PLACE TO FIND OUT WHAT HAWAII IS ALL ABOUT: Bishop Museum (p74)

From the time the first Protestant missionaries stepped ashore to the onset of mass tourism after WWII, Hawaiian culture and traditions have come under pressure from what one 19th-century commentator described as ‘a tide of foreign invasion.’ While a rich polyglot mix of immigrants is part of what makes O‘ahu unique, sometimes it can be hard to find the lifeblood of ancient Hawaiian ways that took root here over 1000 years before Captain Cook arrived. That’s what makes the Bishop Museum such a valuable treasure house of Hawaiian cultural and natural history. Here you can see rare island artifacts such as the feathered cloak worn by Kamehameha the Great and fearsome *ki‘i akua* (carved temple images) that once commanded the respect of ancient *kahuna* (priests) and *maka‘ainana* (commoners) alike. This multidisciplinary educational campus is also a fantastic place to gaze at the stars – the same ones that guided ancient Polynesian voyagers to this remote archipelago – inside O‘ahu’s only planetarium. No doubt, when you walk out of this place, you’ll know more about Hawaii than ever before.



3 BEST BEACH: Kailua Beach Park (p173)

On a Polynesian island that has over 125 beaches, choosing the very best one is a tricky proposition. If you judge by numbers, Waikiki is packed with more bodies than anywhere else on O'ahu. Still, biggest isn't necessarily best. It's Kailua Bay that really deserves the gold star. For starters, it has jaw-dropping scenery, with tempting offshore islands that practically beg you to jump in the ocean, launch your kayak and paddle over to do a little sunbathing and snorkeling. Or look down at the beach itself and wonder at the soft, golden sand nestling

between your toes, while waves wash gently over your *rubbah slippah* (flip-flops) or your bare feet. Come in the early morning for sunrise yoga or a meditative swim. For an adrenaline-charged afternoon, show up when windsurfers and kitesurfers launch their rigs into the surf. Kailua Bay proves that yes, a beach really can be all things to all people. Don't forget to stop at the 1930s landmark Kalapawai Market beforehand for a fast java fix and to fill your beach cooler with a gourmet deli lunch.

RICHARD CUMMINS



Kailua Bay deserves
the gold star

**O'ahu is
an unsung
destination for
adventurous
hikers**





4 BEST HIKING TRAIL NETWORK:

Mt Tantalus area (p77)

With its lofty mountain ranges, O'ahu is an unsung destination for adventurous hikers. While many visitors think the Neighbor Islands possess all the best trails, that's just not true. You don't even have to go outside Honolulu to find incredible routes winding into the lush Ko'olau Range, especially around Mt Tantalus, aka Pu'u 'O'hia. Take the kids on a pint-sized trek up to Manoa Falls, or press on up a steep ladder of tree roots to the head-spinning Nu'uuanu Valley Lookout, where you can peer through a gap in the mountains to the emerald Windward Coast. Or join the locals back below on the thickly forested Makiki Valley Loop trail, which grants sweeping views of Honolulu and its protected harbor. No matter which trail you choose, you'll also get a free lesson in Hawaiian natural history along the way, walking past hulking banyan trees, fragrant guava, musical bamboo and delicate honeycreepers that flutter through the air. Without doubt, these interconnected trails are the best escape from urban traffic jams and the concrete high-rises of Waikiki. Getting back to nature is rarely so easy.

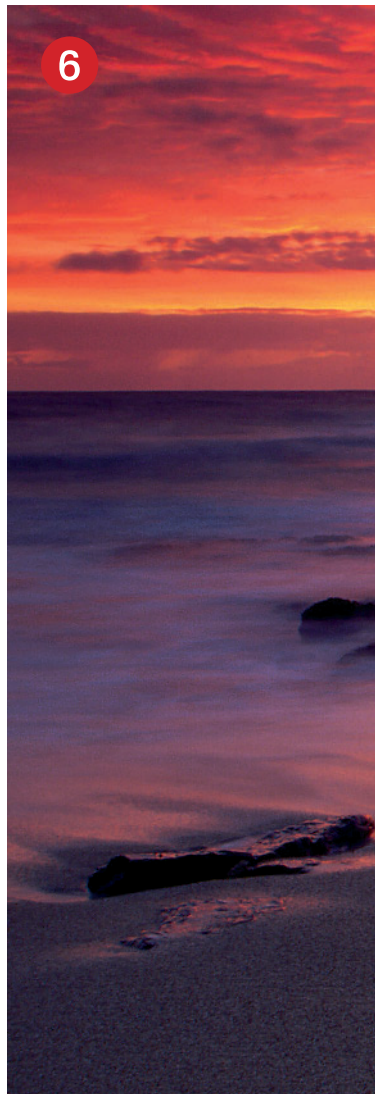


SCOTT KENNEDY

5 BEST UNEXPECTED GREENERY:
Wahiawa Botanical Garden (p221)

While O‘ahu was built on a reputation of green fields, lush rainforests and sparse population, sadly too many tourists remain city bound and never experience the island’s nature. Time to buck the trend and get out of the city and see what O‘ahu is really all about. All it takes to escape the urban jungle is a little bit of effort and a point in the right direction. There is little excuse not to get among the greenery here. The perfect rest stop on the way to the North Shore, the town of Wahiawa has a hidden gem in this historical and aesthetic garden, camouflaged among the suburbs. Founded by pineapple farmers nearly 90 years ago, the 27 acres are home to massive unkempt trees, manicured lawns and examples of both native and imported plants. The pathways weave a twisted tale through the trees and offer a sublime journey through the maintained wilderness. You can take a picnic, go for a jog or simply wander – this place is the perfect midisland location for a return to nature and a deep breath of solitude.

En route, pull over at
romantic coves and
dramatic lookouts



6 BEST SCENIC DRIVE: Southeast Coast (p162)

The Pali Hwy over the mountains from Honolulu gets all the fame, while the day-trippers' fave remains the Kamehameha Hwy that snakes up the Windward Coast all the way to the North Shore. But for the biggest dose of drive-by beauty, our vote goes to the Southeast Coast, starting at crescent-shaped Hanauma Bay and curving

around Makapu'u Point over to Waimanalo (which boasts O'ahu's longest beach). En route, pull over at lava-rock blowholes, romantic coves and dramatic lookouts. You can even hike out to a windswept lighthouse and still get back to Waikiki in time for sunset mai tais.

RICHARD CUMMINS





7 BEST SHOP FOR FILLING YOUR SUITCASE:
Bailey's Antiques & Aloha Shirts (p123)

Nothing makes you look more like a tourist here than *not* wearing an aloha shirt, at least for guys. Fellas, as soon as you land in Waikiki, take yourself down Kapahulu Ave to this veritable museum of aloha wear, stocking everything from vintage prints to modern reproductions and everything in

between, including neon designs of Don Ho—worthy taste from the 1960s and '70s. Prices start at just \$10, so you've got no excuse for not giving your everyday wardrobe a little vacation. There are plenty of vintage tiki goods to peruse, too.

8 BEST SPLIT-PERSONALITY**BEACH:** Waimea Bay (p204)

Waimea is one of those beaches that can either be your worst fear or your wildest dream. The massive expansive sand is a year-round feature – it's the water that has a life all its own. In summer, when the swell switches to the south side of the island, the bay is a placid place to lounge by the sea. There is good snorkeling to be found and even the kiddies can enjoy a swim. Come winter, everything is very, very different. When the big winter swells pick up Waimea becomes a place of legend. The waves jack up to heights that would make even the boldest waterman quake in his boots. Wave heights of 20-plus feet are not uncommon and the rumble of the crashing mountains of water shakes the sand on the beach. Top-level surfers import from all around the world to test their mettle on the legendary break. If you know what you're doing Waimea is one of the best big-wave surf breaks on the planet – if not, stay away. Heroes are born here, legends have died and the rest of us stand in awe at the power of mother ocean.

MERTEN SNIJDERS



ANN CECIL





9 **BEST NEIGHBORHOOD FOR WALKING:** Chinatown (p64)

An anchor's throw from Honolulu Harbor, the crowded streets of Chinatown possess more history, block for block, than any other place on O'ahu. Nineteenth-century whalers whooped it up in bars and brothels, while plantation-era immigrants made their way into island society after putting down roots here. Despite suffering through

plague, fire and discrimination, Chinatown residents built a community that has endured. Today the neighborhood just keeps on evolving, with emerging art galleries, epicurean restaurants and hipster night-spots. Conveniently, it's small enough to leisurely walk around in a morning or afternoon, with a tasty break for dim sum.



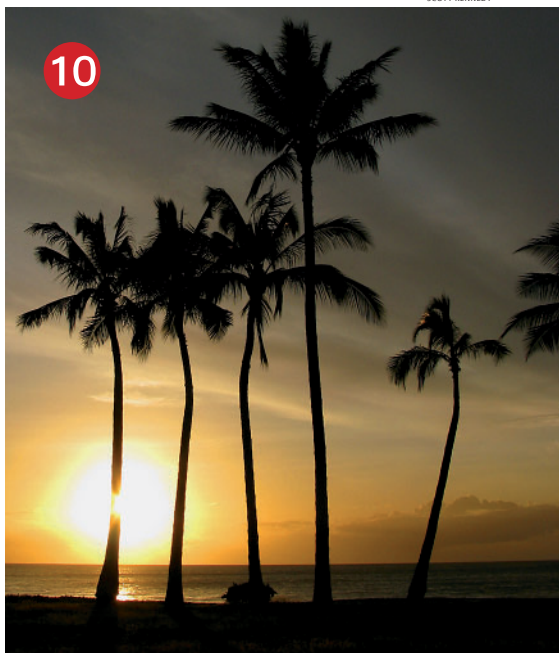
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RAY LASKOWITZ

10 BEST SECRET SUNSET SPOT: Ma'ili Beach Park (p234)

Shhh, don't tell anyone, but this could be the best spot on the island to watch the sunset. Sure Waikiki, the North Shore and other more tourist-oriented spots get most of the attention, but isn't the best part about a good sunset having the beach to yourself? Forget fighting the crowds here – located halfway up the Wai'anae (Leeward) Coast, this uncluttered and under-populated beach is popular with locals and the odd tourist who's looking to escape the masses. There's a vast stretch of sand from which to choose your sunset-watching spot – all of it is front-row center to watch the sun dip below the Pacific. If you're feeling energetic, the soft-sand beach is perfect for a sun-kissed stroll with your sweetie on your arm or a jog in the creeping surf. Those keen for a more relaxed session are in luck too – the swaying palms of the beach park make for fine photo props and even better back rests as you sit, reflect on the day that's been and hatch plans for the next day of adventure.

SCOTT KENNEDY



11



LINDA CHING

11 BEST SHAVE ICE:
Matsumoto's (p210)

It's a big call – the best is a pretty large claim. Some will say the softer, smoother shave ice found elsewhere is the way to go. Others prefer the crunchier style of Matsumoto's shave ice, though some say that Matsumoto's is the victim of its own popularity, with lines out the door and sticky floors all around. Perhaps the best plan is to decide for yourself – try them all. Savor all the sticky goodness you can handle before reaching sweetness saturation point. Debate the subtle differences in sweetness, texture and flavor with the ferocity of a wine connoisseur.

Pipeline offers a glimpse of the **rock stars of the ocean**

12



12 BEST BEACH TO WATCH THE WORLD'S BEST SURFERS:
Pipeline (p202)

When the waves are crashing huge all around the North Shore and you want to get a glimpse of the rock stars of the ocean, where do you go? In a word: Pipeline. Not only does it have best and most consistent break on the North Shore, it is by far the most spectator-friendly surfing spot on

the island. With the waves breaking mere yards offshore you get a great view from the beach. Forget having to pull out the camera lens larger than a howitzer; here you can look the surfers in the eye as they paddle into the monster surf.

ANN CECIL



ISLAND ITINERARIES

See the itineraries at the beginning of each regional chapter for more detailed routes.

IN THREE DAYS *This leg: 40 miles*

1 WAIKIKI (p99) Bronze your bod on the world-famous beach-resort strip, stretching from the windsurfing waves of **Fort DeRussy Beach (p106)** all the way south to the hide-away swimming and snorkeling spot of **Sans Souci Beach Park (p108)**.

2 KUHIO BEACH TORCH LIGHTING & HULA SHOW (p137) After you've put up your surfboard for the day and the sun starts to lazily sink over the Pacific, spread out your beach mat by the hula mound at **Kuhio Beach Park (p107)**.

3 DOWNTOWN HONOLULU (p59) On your second day, take a bus downtown to the Victorian-era **Iolani Palace (p59)** then browse the **Hawai'i State Art Museum (p61)** and **Hawai'i Maritime Center (p64)**, near the landmark **Aloha Tower (p63)**.

4 CHINATOWN (p64) Walk in the steps of 19th-century whalers from Honolulu's breezy harbor over to this vibrant neighbor-

hood, full of fresh **markets and lei shops (p65)**, eclectic **art galleries (p96)** and a tasty panoply of pan-Asian **eateries (p83)**.

5 UPPER MANOA VALLEY (p72) In the afternoon, shake off that urban grit by heading for the hills above downtown Honolulu. Wander among tropical plants in the **Lyon Arboretum (p72)**, then hike the family-friendly trail to **Manoa Falls (p76)** or **Nu'uuanu Valley Lookout (p77)**.

6 PEARL HARBOR (p141) On your third day, get up early to visit O'ahu's dramatic WWII-era sites, starting with the sunken **USS Arizona Memorial (p144)** and finishing at the **Pacific Aviation Museum (p145)**. Stuff yourself silly with *manapua* (Chinese-style steamed buns) from **Chun Wah Kam Noodle Factory (p147)**.

7 ALA MOANA BEACH PARK (p58) Finish off with a dip at Honolulu's favorite city beach, then take a sunset stroll around **Magic Island (p58)**.



IN FIVE DAYS *This leg: 60 miles*

8 DIAMOND HEAD (p153) Start your fourth day with a sunrise hike up this ancient volcanic crater, now a **state monument (p154)**, then ride the waves of **Kuilei Cliffs Beach Park (p153)** below.

9 HANAUMA BAY NATURE PRESERVE (p158) If you're jonesing to go face to mask with schools of rainbow-colored fish and gentle sea turtles, head straight to this crescent-shaped bay with hands-on, kid-friendly educational exhibits.

10 KOKO HEAD REGIONAL PARK (p160) Roadside stops through this coastal park include the **Halona Blowhole (p161)**, next to idyllic **Halona Cove (p161)** and the bodysurfers' mecca of **Sandy Beach (p161)**. Further along the highway is the lighthouse trail out to windy **Makapu'u Point (p162)**.

11 WAIMANALO (p170) Rounding the southeast tip of the island brings you to the rural farming community on 'Nalo, boasting the island's longest **beach (p170)**, a white-sand beauty with gentle waves beloved by families. This really feels like the countryside.

12 KAILUA (p172) Grab dinner, then bed down in a beachfront cottage B&B in this laid-back surf-style town. Don't leave the Windward Coast's adventure-sports capital without **kayaking (p173)** to offshore islands, **windsurfing (p174)** or doing sunrise **yoga (p175)** at **Kailua Beach Park (p173)**.

13 KANE'OHE (p180) The next morning, take off early for a leisurely drive up the Windward Coast. Stop off at **Ho'omaluhia Botanical Garden (p180)** and **Byödō-In (p180)** temple, both with the misty Ko'olau Mountains as a dramatic backdrop.

14 KUALOA (p184) Continue the classic drive up the Windward Coast to the North Shore, passing fruit stands like **Tropical Farms (p185)** along the way. **Kualoa Regional Park (p184)** is an incredibly scenic spot for a swim, just across the highway from historic **Kualoa Ranch (p184)**, a famous movie and TV location.

15 LA'IE (p190) All the tour buses stop at the **Polynesian Cultural Center (p192)**, but just north of town you'll find an irresistibly wild, rugged beach at **Malaekahana State Recreation Area (p190)**, where you can pitch a tent. Kahuku's **shrimp trucks (p194)** are just up the road.



IN SEVEN DAYS *This leg: 50 miles*

16 WAHIAWA (p220) On your sixth day venture into the vast interior of the island and stop off at the **Wahiawa Botanical Garden (p221)**. These luscious gardens are home to hundreds of native and imported species. They're a sanctuary for flora, nature lovers and those escaping the hustle of the south. Just to the east is **Kolekole Pass (p219)**. Weave your way through Schofield Barracks and climb the steep hill to this historic pass. During the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese fighter planes soared through here to reach their targets. These days it offers a nice walk with great views. Finally, head north to the **Dole Pineapple Plantation (p222)**. Want to learn everything you ever needed to know about pineapples? Here is your chance. It's sickly sweet and prepackaged fun – do the maze, ride the train, buy the T-shirt.

17 WAIMEA BAY (p204) On day seven head to the North Shore. If you're an experienced surfer it's a great place to catch some big winter waves. If it's summer, bring your snorkeling gear.

18 TED'S BAKERY (p203) Ted's is a legendary place to grab a bite on the North Shore. The chocolate coconut pie is as good as it sounds and the savory delights are a perfect first course.

19 HALE'IWA (p207) Get the sand out of your shorts and head to Hale'iwa – the largest town on the North Shore – filled with cool shops, yummy restaurants and some great galleries. Be sure to stop off at **Matsumoto's (p210)** – you can't come to the North Shore and not get some shave ice. Like a snow cone on steroids, this could be the best 1000 calories of your day.

20 MOKULE'IA BEACH PARK (p212) Finish the day by visiting one of the more secluded beaches on the island. If you're a windsurfer, this is a great place to catch some wind and waves. If you're more of a land lover, go for a stroll on the deserted beach.



IN EIGHT DAYS *This leg: 23 miles*

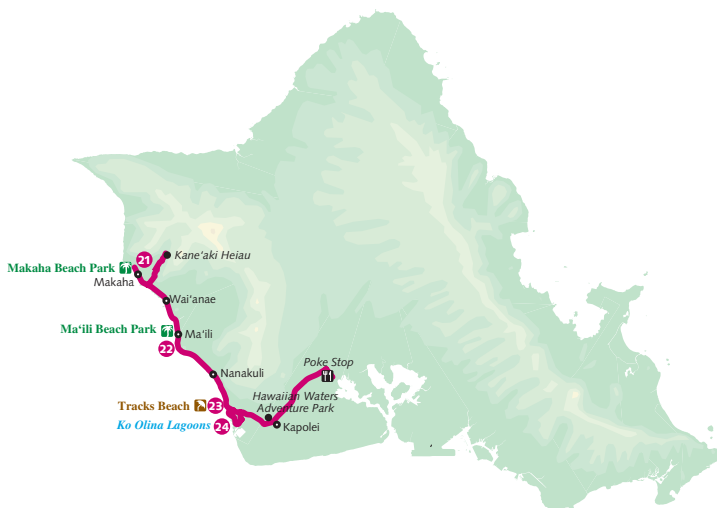
21 MAKAHA (p235) For your last day head to the Leeward Coast and experience the quiet side of the island. The heart and soul of little Makaha is classic **Makaha Beach Park (p235)**. If the surf is up, it can be way up – winter brings monster waves here. Summer is a quiet time, with gentle rollers and infrequent visitors. Or take a break from the beach and get cultured at **Kane'aki Heiau (p238)**, just up the hill. This ancient site is a great spot to see what the old Hawaii was all about. Finish up with a scrummy smoothie from nearby **Surfah Smoodeez (p234)**. It's one of the best tropical treats on the island – on a hot day a bucket of fresh berry smoothie is like a gift from the gods. Stick around for a nice, no-nonsense lunch.

22 MA'ILI (p234) Time to head back to the beach – grab a bodyboard and hit the beach break at Ma'ili Beach Park, where micro-tubes are a go-go when the swell is in. If that

sounds too juvenile, hit the sand and tuck into your book.

23 TRACKS (p233) If Ma'ili was going off, then Tracks will be pumping. Forget the bodyboard, pull out the short-board and rip it up. The shore is the opposite of aesthetic, but the waves are great.

24 KO OLINA LAGOONS (p229) Mellow out and go for a swim in some placid waters. Pull out the snorkeling gear and see what you can see – try near the rocks; the goods are hidden out there. When hunger strikes head to **Poke Stop (p232)**. Good food at a strip mall? Believe it; this little shop has some of the best eats around. Take away a plate of poke, or devour it on the picnic table out front. Finish up with some waterslide action at **Hawaiian Waters Adventure Park (p230)** – fun for kids of all ages.



KICKIN' IT WITH THE KEIKI

1 KUHIO BEACH PARK (p107) Kids love a day at the beach, so start off on Waikiki's most popular stretch of sand, with two walled-off pools and screamin' bodyboarding.

2 KAPI'OLANI PARK (p108) Take an ocean-front amble or hop on a bus to the **Waikiki Aquarium (p109)** and **Honolulu Zoo (p110)**.

3 DIAMOND HEAD STATE MONUMENT (p154) Scramble through spooky tunnels and up twisted staircases to summit an ancient volcanic crater.

4 HANAUMA BAY NATURE PRESERVE (p158) This outdoor fishbowl has great snorkeling spots for little 'uns to get their feet and face masks wet.

5 BISHOP MUSEUM (p74) Take a mini-submarine dive or walk through an exploding mock volcano at Hawaii's top natural and cultural history museum.

6 HAWAII MARITIME CENTER (p64) See traditional Polynesian canoes and 19th-

century sailing ships, then climb nearby **Aloha Tower (p63)** for aerial views.

7 HAWAIIAN WATERS ADVENTURE PARK (p230) It's got wild rides on all sorts of chutes and slides – some geared for youngsters, others for speed riders.

8 KO OLINA RESORT (p228) Even if you don't stay overnight, stop by for a swim in the calm, waveless **Ko Olina Lagoons (p229)**.



GO GREEN

1 MT TANTALUS (p77) Where Honolulu-ans go to hike in the cool upland forests of the misty Ko'olau Range.

2 HANAUMA BAY (p158) Protected as the state's first underwater park, this is O'ahu's premier snorkeling and diving spot.

3 KAILUA (p172) This adventure-sports hub has cozy vacation rentals and B&Bs, yoga on the beach and ecofriendly eateries.

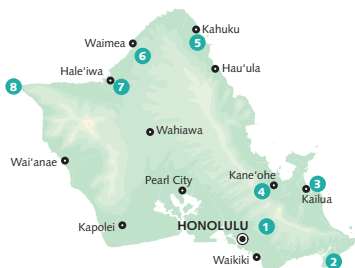
4 HO'OMALUHIA BOTANICAL GARDEN (p180) The Windward Coast doesn't get more lush than inside this county park, which also has pretty campsites.

5 MALAEKAHANA STATE RECREATION AREA (p190) Another opportunity for camping or renting a rustic cabin, along with all kinds of family-friendly water sports.

6 WAIMEA VALLEY (p205) Explore some ancient Hawaiian archeological sites, go bird-watching or waterfall-pool swimming.

7 DEEP ECOLOGY (p209) North Shore dive shop with strong environmental ethics that runs whale-watching tours in winter.

8 KA'ENA POINT STATE PARK (p239) This feels about as far away from urban civilization as you can get on O'ahu, especially if you approach from the Mokule'ia side.



SURF'S UP

1 CENTRAL WAIKIKI BEACH (p107) It doesn't matter if you're an old pro or a grommet, you have to start your surfing adventure under the watchful eyes of Duke. Central Waikiki Beach is the ancestral home of surfing and where most O'ahu surfers catch their first wave. Pull out the longboard and ride a few.

2 LEEWARD COAST (p225) Off the radar for most travelers and a hidden gem. This coast is chockablock with great surf breaks. **Tracks (p233)** is a local classic and can have some great waves. **Ma'ili (p234)** is a ferocious beach break and is perfect for a bodysurf. End the day in **Makaha (p235)**, where the waves can be massive and the vibe is always mellow.

3 NORTH SHORE (p195) This is the day you've been waiting for. From the east, surf **Sunset Beach Park (p201)**, **Pipeline (p202)**, **Waimea Bay (p204)** and **Hale'iwa Ali'i (p208)**. All are classic breaks and must-dos on any surfer's itinerary.

4 SOUTHEAST COAST (p149) Finish up the circle and surf some of the southeast classics. **Diamond Head Beach (p153)** often has good waves even when other breaks are playing the fickle card.



TAKE A HIKE

1 DIAMOND HEAD STATE MONUMENT (p154) Do the classic O'ahu hike and walk to the top of this beautiful lookout. You won't have it to yourself, but the views are unreal and it's a great way to get a feel for the island's geography.

2 UPPER MANOA VALLEY (p76) An awesome place for a hike and, best yet, it's only a few steps from Honolulu. It doesn't take a huge effort to get here, and the walks are some of the island's best.

3 MAUNAWILI TRAIL SYSTEM (p168) Trek this southeast O'ahu classic, with panoramic views of the mountains and Windward Coast that are a feast for the photographic eye.

4 LEEWARD COAST (p225) Hike this wild, rarely visited coast and you'll likely have it all to yourself. The **Ka'ena Point Trail (p240)** takes in great beaches and explores the island's wild northwest corner.

5 KAWELA (p199) On the island's northeast corner is this little pocket of trails. Most people head here to surf, but there are great walks, beaches to explore and bays to discover.

6 KEALIA TRAIL (p214) Go to the island's northwest for this gem of a track. Get lost on the set of *Lost* and take in the views from the ridge – classic.



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