

Hawaii



So many states claim uniqueness, and Hawaii does too. It now even boasts that it's the birthplace of the USA's 44th president, Barack Obama. But this string of emerald islands in the cobalt-blue Pacific Ocean, over 2000 miles from any continent, takes a little work to get to. So you may wonder: will that be time and money well spent?

We're so glad you asked: cue the galloping *Hawaii Five-0* theme music and watch surfers carve a thunderous ocean, Elvis croon and lei-draped beauties dance hula 'neath wind-rustled palms.

Hawaii, as tourist bureaus and Hollywood constantly remind us, is 'paradise.' Push past the hype and what do you find? Darned if they're not right. Hawaii is hiking sculpted cliffs or diving coral-reef cities in the morning and drinking mai tais to slack-key guitar at sunset. It's slurping chin-dripping papayas with hibiscus flowers in your hair; it's Pacific Rim cuisine, fiery volcanoes and cavorting whales. By serendipity and design, Hawaii is an almost flawless destination. It's an enchanting multicultural society with roots in Polynesia, Asia, North America and Europe, and it's an expression of nature at its most luscious and divine.

About seven million visitors come to experience paradise annually, but the islands are not as crushed with sun-baked tourists and cooing honeymooners as that sounds. If you want a cushy resort vacation, head for Oahu's Waikiki or West Maui. For something cheaper or more adventurous, aim for the Big Island or Kaua'i. If time is short, stick to one island and make the most of it. Honolulu is a teeming cultural and economic powerhouse, but in under an hour you can be alone in the rainforest or snoozing on white sand.

Locals know that Hawaii isn't really paradise, but on any given day it can sure feel like it.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring multicultural Honolulu, particularly the herbalists and eats of **Chinatown** (p1111)
- Snorkeling with tropical fish in O'ahu's **Hanauma Bay** (p1117)
- Hiking the smoldering crust of a living volcano at **Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park** (p1122)
- Catching sunset in the 'house of the rising sun,' Maui's **Haleakalā** (p1127)
- Kayaking or hiking Kaua'i's wrinkly **Na Pali Coast** (p1128)



HISTORY

Little is known about Hawaii's first settlers, who arrived around AD 500. Tahitians arrived around AD 1000, and for the next 200 years navigated thousands of miles back and forth across the ocean in double-hulled canoes. Ruled by chiefs, ancient Hawaiian society was matriarchal, and its religion followed strict laws known as *kapu*.

In 1778, famed British explorer Captain James Cook stumbled upon the islands, and he returned in 1779. The first white Westerner to arrive, Cook was initially feted like a high chief (perhaps even a deity) as Hawaiians plied him with food and goodwill. However, on the second visit, tensions escalated over a series of small thefts and insults. During a confrontation on the beach, Cook lost his temper and shot a Hawaiian, sparking a violent melee during which Cook himself was killed.

Beginning in the 1790s, King Kamehameha, chief of the Big Island, conquered and united all the Hawaiian islands. He is credited with bringing peace and stability to a society that was often in flux due to wars and the power struggles of the ruling class. However, after his death in 1819 his son Liholiho inherited the throne, while Kamehameha's favorite wife, Queen Ka'ahumanu, became regent. In a stunning repudiation of traditional Hawaiian religion, Liholiho and Ka'ahumanu deliberately violated the *kapu* and destroyed many temples.

As fate would have it, Christian missionaries arrived not long after, and in the midst of Hawaii's social and spiritual chaos they found it relatively easy to 'save souls.' New England whalers also arrived, seeking different quarry, and by the 1840s Lahaina and Honolulu were the busiest whaling towns in the Pacific. Meanwhile, foreigners made a grab for Hawaii's fertile land, turning vast tracts into sugarcane plantations; needing workers in cane fields, they encouraged a flood of immigrants from China, Japan, Portugal and the Philippines. This gave rise to Hawaii's multi-ethnic culture, but it also displaced Native Hawaiians, most of whom became landless.

In 1893 a group of American businessmen overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy. The US government was initially reluctant to support the coup, but it soon rationalized its colonialism by citing the islands' strategic importance and annexed Hawaii in 1898. Hawaii played an infamous role in US history when a surprise attack

on Pearl Harbor vaulted America into WWII. Hawaii became the 50th US state in 1959.

LOCAL CULTURE

Compared to 'the mainland' – the blanket term for the rest of the USA – Hawaii may as well be another country. In fact, some Native Hawaiians would like to restore Hawaii's status as an independent nation. It makes sense. Geologically, historically and culturally, Hawaii developed in isolation, and, like its flora and fauna, its society is unique, endemic and even fragile. Locals treasure their customs and sensibilities and constantly guard them against the diluting influence of *haole* (white or mainland) ways – which arrive like so many invasive species.

In Hawaii, no ethnicity claims a majority, but this diversity is also distinct from typical American multiculturalism. Hawaii has large Asian populations and very small African American and Mexican Hispanic communities, with about 20% of residents identifying themselves as full or part Native Hawaiian.

As befits a tropical paradise, Hawaii has a decidedly casual personality. Except in cosmopolitan Honolulu, aloha shirts and sandals ('rubbah slippahs') are acceptable attire for any occasion, socializing revolves around food and family, and fun means sports and the outdoors. In local and Hawaiian sensibilities, caring for the land and caring for the community are integral and intertwined.

Then there is aloha – or alooooooHA, as they say at the luau. It is of course a greeting, but, more than that, it describes a gentle,

HAWAII FACTS

Nickname Aloha State

Population 1.3 million

Area 6423 sq miles

Capital city Honolulu (population 375,570)

Sales tax 4.16% (plus 8.25% room tax, due to increase to 9.25% in 2010)

Birthplace of entertainer Don Ho (1930–2007), President Barack Obama (b 1961), actor Nicole Kidman (b 1967), pro golfer Michelle Wie (b 1989)

Home of ukuleles, America's only royal palace

Famous for surfing, hula, mai tais, the world's most active volcano

Most famous state fish

humuhumunukunuaopua'a (or, 'fish with a nose like a pig')