



Hawaii

Jewel of the Pacific

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About 2100 miles from Los Angeles, California, in the middle of the Pacific, lies a tiny group of six islands called Hawaii. They are Hawaii—or the Big Island—Maui, Oahu, Molokai, Lanai, and Kauai. This exotic paradise is blessed with gentle tropical breezes, white- and black-sand beaches, and spectacular sunsets. Hawaii is one of the most popular destinations in the world, and tourism is its mega-industry.

Part of a unique chain, these islands were conceived in a primal stew of fire, molten rock and liquid magma oozing from a powerful hotspot many miles deep in the earth's mantle. Over millions of years, they became colossal volcanic mountains, moving northwest a few inches a year along a shifting tectonic fault in the Pacific Plate. What we see are just the tips of these volcanoes rising from the floor of the earth's deepest ocean. The oldest islands, since eroded away, are now mere atolls near Alaska, thousands of miles from the fissure where they were born. The youngest, the Big Island of

Hawaii, is now positioned over this hotspot, which explains its current volcanic activity. The newest island, named Lo'ihi, is already forming about 30 miles southeast of the Big Island, and growing steadily inch-by-inch. It will be many eons before it finally reaches the surface and becomes another Hawaiian Island.

History

The earliest Hawaiians probably came from Bora Bora or Tahiti some 1500 years ago. How did they make this incredible 2000-mile voyage across the world's largest ocean in simple, double-hulled canoes, heading for an unknown destination with only the sun, stars, and moon to guide them? Why did they abandon their homeland to embark on such a formidable journey? Something catastrophic must have forced their migration, and once here, they lived in total isolation for many centuries, developing their own special culture. Each island was a



separate kingdom controlled by a kapu—or taboo system—governed by strict laws. Violate a law, and the punishment was death. By the time Captain James Cook discovered Hawaii in 1778, all the islands had been united under King Kamehameha the Great.

The missionaries arrived in 1820, creating a major upheaval in Hawaii's culture. They converted most of the Hawaiians to Christianity, and nearly eradicated many of their ancient customs, which the missionaries considered primitive. By 1900, many of their traditions, including the hula dance (which was considered obscene), were virtually wiped out. Fortunately a renewed pride in their past has brought back old traditions, including the hula.

Hawaii offers visitors a multitude of attractions. Photography, volcano-watching, star-gazing, hiking, surfing, sunbathing, whale-watching and championship golfing are just a few of the many activities you can participate in.

The Big Island

The primary attraction is Kilauea, currently the world's most active volcano. Between 1995 and 2002, almost 500 acres of new land has been added to the island. The Volcanoes National Park covers a vast area of approximately 230,000 acres, and the Visitor's Center provides booklets, guides, maps, and the latest updates on volcanic activity. Five massive volcanoes, Mauna Loa, Mauna Kea, Hualalai, Kohala, and Kilauea, have built this island of over 4000 square miles, making it almost twice the size of the other six



Previous page:
A spectacular sunset on Oahu's North Shore.
This page, far left: Sheer lava cliffs form this coastal area not far from Hawaii's southernmost point.
Left: A young hula dancer poses for pictures at a busy Oahu shopping center.
Below: Haleakala Crater is a dormant volcano on the island of Maui.



islands put together. Watching the red-hot lava creeping down towards the ocean, slowly but relentlessly destroying everything in its path, is an awesome sight. This is Pele, the fire goddess in all her glory. Pele doesn't look kindly upon souvenir hunters, so don't even think about taking lava rocks home—it's considered unlucky.

The famous telescopes atop the lofty 13,476-foot Mauna Kea draw many visitors. Accessible only by four-wheel-drive vehicles that can be rented in Kona, Mauna Kea is a dormant volcano, which last erupted 3500 years ago. If measured from its base in the Pacific, it is—at 33,476 feet—the tallest mountain in the world. Its location, with a clean, pollution-free atmosphere, makes it a Mecca for astronomers. Open to visitors year round, it provides a wonderful opportunity to star-gaze and marvel at the universe and distant galaxies through the world's most powerful telescopes. The grand vista from here is awesome, giving you the feeling of standing on top of the world.

The sacred "City of Refuge," or Puuhona O Honaunau National Historic Park on the Kona Coast, is definitely worth a visit. Dating back to the early days of kapu, when death was the punishment for persons violating any of the

laws of the island, reaching the City of Refuge before getting caught was the only hope of survival for a condemned person. A ceremony performed by the resident priests cleansed the kapu breaker from his misdeed, and now forgiven, he could rejoin the community. This is the only remaining temple on the islands and is of significant historical importance.

Driving around the island offers some magnificent photo opportunities, like the Waipi'o Valley Lookout on Route HI-240. The dramatic view of this wide, deep valley nestled between 2000-foot cliffs called the "Valley of the Kings" has been inhabited by the Hawaiians for over a thousand years.

Other attractions are the town of Hilo, and Lava Tree State Park, where tree trunks are now petrified and coated with solidified lava, the result of a 1790 Kilauea eruption when lava engulfed and destroyed a large grove of trees. During our last evening on the Big Island, we observed a sunset at the southernmost tip of the Hawaiian Islands. While sitting here on ancient volcanic rocks, we contemplated the seemingly unending ocean, with the sobering thought that the next landfall was Antarctica, over 7000 miles away. The wind was warm, the surf was high and as evening approached, we watched the Pacific sky turn to hues of deep orange, crimson and copper as the sun dipped below the horizon.

Maui

North of the Big Island is the second-largest island, Maui. Profuse lava flows from two massive volcanoes joined to form one island and a deep, fertile valley. This is why Maui is also called the "Valley Isle."

The crater of the dormant volcano Haleakala is a "must-see." This bizarre volcanic crater features multihued reddish-brown, black and gray cinder cones, which give it a lunar-like appearance. Dawn and evening temperatures at the crater can drop to below freezing, so it's essential to bring a warm jacket.

There's much to see and photograph on this beautiful island. A few highlights include the quaint, historic whaling town of Lahaina, where, during the winter months, whale-watching draws many spectators. There's also the three-mile scenic drive from Wailuku to Iao Needle and State Park,

where a bloody battle was fought in 1790 when Maui's king was ousted by Kamehameha the Great.

Take the picturesque 50-mile drive from Kahulu to Hana on Maui's windward coast. The winding, twisting road, interspersed with waterfalls, tropical forests, quaint villages and gorgeous scenery certainly tests a driver's skills. Once there, visit the Waianapanapa State Park and the Hana Cultural Center.

Oahu

Third in size, Oahu is like an oasis in the ocean. As the center of everything, including location, this island is the heart that beats in Hawaii. This is where most visitors get their first introduction to the islands. Honolulu, the state capital, is also the financial, cultural and academic center, while its glamorous neighbor Waikiki is chock-full of world-class luxury resorts. Upscale shops, elegant gourmet dining, and a glittering nightlife that shifts into high gear at sundown makes Oahu one of the world's hottest tourist destinations.

South of Waikiki Beach, Diamond Head rises majestically on the horizon. It got its name when some British soldiers discovered Calcite crystals there in 1825 and thought they were diamonds. You can take an interesting drive inside this extinct crater.

Below left: Hot lava from Kilauea's eruption enters the ocean off the big island of Hawaii.
Below: Downtown Honolulu on the island of Oahu.



Pearl Harbor, today a strategic naval base, was once a sleepy village. Now millions come to see the solemn Arizona Memorial where history was made on December 7, 1941, when the battleship was sunk by Japanese fighters, killing 1100 American service men who are still entombed within the hull.

The Polynesian Cultural Center is an introduction to the culture of Tahiti, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Marquesa, and of course, Hawaii. Students in traditional costumes from these islands work in several model villages, demonstrating various crafts, dance and music of their home island. An excellent IMAX show about Polynesia rounds off the experience. Finally at sundown, one can attend the Luau, a huge Hawaiian-style banquet. The main course for dinner is roasted pig, slow-cooked for six to eight hours in an imu—or earthen pit-oven—surrounded by banana leaves and covered by hot coals. Though somewhat commercialized, the luau is fun and entertaining. Starting at around \$50 a person, it's a good evening's outing with plenty of food, drink, and good cheer.

No trip to Hawaii is complete without a hula show.



Above: Observatory dome on the summit of Mauna Kea, on the big island of Hawaii.
Below: The beautiful coastline along the northern part of Oahu.



The popular Kodak Hula Show in Waikiki's Kapi'olani Park is an hour-long, free event. The open-air amphitheatre, complete with thatched grass huts as the backdrop, is fun and a great picture-taking opportunity. Male and female dancers sing and sway to the accompaniment of ukuleles and drums while reciting stories about Hawaii. The hula has always been highly revered in Hawaiian culture and before there was a written language, this was how their history was passed from one generation to another.

Lanai and Molokai

Lanai is nicknamed the "Plantation Isle" because it was once used exclusively for pineapple cultivation, and Molokai is nicknamed the "Friendly Isle." Both are totally dissimilar to their sister islands. Unspoiled and laid-back, they offer a peaceful, leisurely vacation for those seeking relaxation, away from the crowds. This is the way Hawaii once was, before mass tourism invaded the islands. The beauty and solitude of these islands is just being discovered, and not all the local people are happy about this; you can't really blame them.

Kauai

This exceptionally beautiful island has been selected by Hollywood as the location for many movies, including South Pacific, Blue Hawaii and Jurassic Park. Rising three miles from the ocean floor, it is the oldest of the Hawaiian Islands. Thousands of years of erosion have carved massive mountains into the spectacular Waimea Canyon.

Kauai was the first of the Hawaiian Islands to be discovered by Captain Cook in 1778, ending centuries of isolation and putting these islands on the world map.

Photography

Hawaii is a photographer's paradise. For my trip, I took two camera bodies, 20–35mm and 28–200mm zoom lenses with a 2X extender, a flash, and a tripod. I loaded one camera with ISO 100-speed film for daylight shooting, the other with ISO 200 for dusk and night shots. The contrasty beaches, with intense blue skies and the ocean under a bright, tropical sun made polarizing filters indispensable.

Due to strict airport security and the high risk of x-ray damage, I opted to buy most of my film in Hawaii since it's readily available. I also had most of the film processed before returning home.

Conclusion

Mother Nature has lavishly bestowed the Aloha State with perfect weather, rugged, haunting beauty and a rich blend of multi-cultural history that casts a spell over visitors. At the end of a dream-come-true vacation, as they say in Hawaiian, "ahuiho," or "till we meet again". ■