



Aloha!

The islands of Hawaii, overflowing with the scenic beauties of volcanoes , palm-fringed beaches , verdant valleys , glorious rainbows and awesome cliffs , hold some of the most spectacular sceneries on earth. With seven million tourists per year, including honeymooners from all over the world, frequent fliers cashing in their mileage, and almost two million Japanese visitors, the islands now seem like a gigantic theme park.

■ By Suzy Guttler



I was (and have been for the past ever) ready for this theme park. Upon touchdown into the Honolulu international airport, my heart raced with excitement as I debarked the uneventful eight-hour flight into the paradise island that is Hawaii. After being hospitably “leied” by locals, my first impression was: *We’re in Southeast Asia!*

The Locale

Hawaii has the nation’s highest percentage of Asian residents. The earliest Asian immigrants, the Chinese, were superseded in number in 1900 by the Japanese, and the influx of Filipinos and other Pacific island peoples was largely a 20th-century phenomenon. Asian culture is prominent in modern Hawaii, and much of it came from the early immigrants. For the immigrants, the thought of being in an entirely new and different culture did not keep them from bringing a little of their lifestyles into their new home.

Today, around one-third are Caucasian, one-third Japanese and one-sixth Filipino, with 200,000 claiming at least some Hawaiian ancestry.

Best of the Islands

Haleakala National Park

Mount Haleakala is the world’s largest inactive volcano and the highest point on the island of Maui, over 10,000 feet high, providing spectacular views of clouds and rainbows beneath. The National Park preserves the outstanding volcanic landscape of the upper slopes of Haleakala and protects the unique and fragile ecosystems of Kipahulu Valley’s tropical rainforest, the scenic pools along Oheo Gulch, and many rare and endangered species. This tropical playground is one of Maui’s favorite places to enjoy outdoor activities and adventures.



Haleakala National Park

Hanauma Bay

Formed thousands of years ago by the flooding of a volcanic crater, this nearly circular bay is home to an amazingly diverse and abundant population of fish life. Hanauma Bay is one of the best and most popular snorkeling and swimming areas in the world, and is one of the few places in the world where you can literally swim with a school of fish.



Hanauma Bay

Waikiki Beach

Hawaiian for "Sprouting Water", this beach is the tourism mecca on the island of Oahu. The two mile stretch of white sand coast is fronted by hotels, restaurants, bars, high end specialty shops, souvenir outlets, and tourist facilities. The area is excellent for everything from swimming, surfing, boogie boarding, catamaran and outrigger canoe rides. In the evening, entertainment begins as street performers join the crowd, and hula dancers and live music light up the beach front.

Diamond Head Trail

Located on the South-east Coast of O'ahu overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Diamond Head is one of the world's most popular volcanic craters. A short hike leads to the edge of the crater's rim, from which point both the city of Waikīkī and the Pacific Ocean can be seen in breathtaking detail.



USS Arizona Memorial

USS Arizona Memorial

The USS Arizona Memorial is the final resting place for many of the battleship's 1,177 crew members who lost their lives on December 7, 1941 during WWII. The national memorial commemorates the site where World War II began for the United States.



Aerial view



Chinatown

Welcome to Chinatown

Chinatown is Hawaii's most exciting and mysterious neighborhood. The historic district is located in downtown Honolulu, and has long been a popular gathering place for kama'aina and visitors. As a gateway to Hawaii for many immigrants, Chinatown is a colorful and eclectic blend of Southeast Asian cultures.

Vietnamese, Laotian, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean and Caucasian merchants work harmoniously together, selling their wares and perpetuating respective cultural traditions. Daily, visitors and residents flock to Chinatown to buy fresh produce, fish, meat, manapua, candied fruits and vegetables, noodles, tea, duck eggs, char siu and other Asian delicacies. At noon, people in the downtown business community flock to the nearby area for dim sum, or lunch at one of the delicious and inexpensive specialty restaurants.



Chinatown

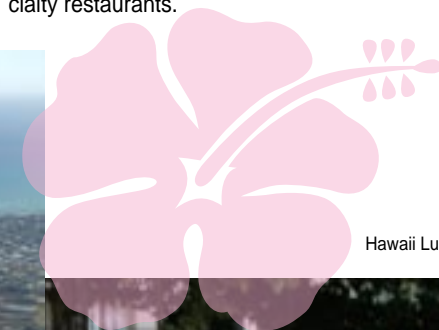


Bubble Tea

What's Happening

The two biggest festivals are the Big Island's week-long Merrie Monarch Festival honoring King David Kalakaua in April, and the statewide King Kamehameha events in June. These traditional feasts provide an opportunity to sample Hawaiian foods such as kalua pig - baked underground, local fish such as ono, ahi, mahi mahi and lomi-lomi (raw salmon), and poi - a paste made from mashed taro root. To add to the festivities, men and women dance the night away in the ancient art of hula.

Boarding pass stamped, baggage checked -- this chapter of my wonderful vacation slowly draws to an end. As I board my flight for the mainland (United States), I can only think of the wonderful memories I've had on the islands and the unwavering experiences on cultural diversity and unique traditions that is truly preserved on this tropical island destination.



Hawaii Luau

