

Honolulu and and Waikiki: Things to Do While Visiting Aulani

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

In the final part of this [series](#) looking at things to do in O'ahu if you're spending time at either Disney's resort in Aulani or heading there on one of the two cruises on the Disney Wonder this fall, we turn our attention to the islands' capital, Honolulu. In fairness, we've already explored two of the biggest attractions, Pearl Harbor and the Bishop Museum in previous articles, but as some of the most visited sights on O'ahu, they deserve their own focus.

Here we look at what to do in the state capital, which is located about 25 miles from Aulani, if that's where you're coming from. Be wary though, as if you're taking this route, the chances are that thousands of other people are, and that number increases significantly during the rush hour. If you have a tour booked, be sure to allow plenty of time for your journey, as journey times of an hour weren't uncommon for us.

☐ One of the places I really wanted to visit during our stay at Aulani was the 'Iolani Palace, a unique building, as it's the only Royal residence in the United States, but sadly I was thwarted in my efforts, as I obviously didn't do my research thoroughly enough before our visit, and discovered that on Veterans' Day, it was closed. Guess what day we chose for our visit? Let that be a lesson to all of you! We did see it from the outside, and it looked impressive, although I know that the photos I've seen of the interior on their website look even better. Another one chalked up for the "next time" list…

☐ Having said that, there is plenty else to see around this area. Opposite the palace is the famous King Kamehameha Statue, which will be familiar to anyone who watches Hawaii Five-O. Can you tell we're fans? Sadly, it's not the original, as that was lost in a storm, although was eventually recovered, and now stands on Big Island. What you see here is a replica, but even so, you'd never know, and it makes for a very striking sight.

Another striking sight can be found on the other side of the 'Iolani Palace. The State Capital was designed to look like the Hawaiian islands rising from the sea, with the building surrounded by a reflecting pool. We were delighted to find that we could just walk through the courtyard of the Capital without having to pass through any security checks, although then again perhaps visiting on a holiday has its perks!

☐ Just across the road from the State Capital is the eternal flame war

memorial, which is beautifully done, and there's even a version of the Liberty Bell to see here as well. It's well worth the short walk to enjoy each of these sights, and it's rare to find so many attractions so close to each other in a city.

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□Something else well worth seeing isn't in the heart of Honolulu, rather it's above it. The National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific looms above the city, having been created inside another of the island's extinct volcanic craters. It was first dedicated in 1949, and of course contains a huge number of graves from World War II, but casualties from a myriad of wars, including Vietnam and Korea, are also buried here. We visited on Veterans' Day, which gave it added poignancy, with the Stars and Stripes flying everywhere.

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□Although it takes some finding, there is a road that leads up to an overlook over Honolulu, and this really is worth seeing, and not just for the stunning view over the city below. As you make your way up the walkway, memorials to the fallen are on either side, and it reminds you of just how many wars there have been, and the different ways that people have given their lives, either in the service of the army, navy, or air force, or even as civilians. It's a very sobering experience walking up here, but there's also hope, with one example being the memorial to the World War II veterans of both America and Japan on the 50th anniversary of the ending of that devastating war. If you have time, a visit to this moving cemetery is well worthwhile, and something I would recommend to anyone.

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□I'll say a word here about Waikiki, which is where the vast majority of Oahu's hotels are located. We had a quick drive through it, although we struggled to find anywhere to park. I guess visiting on a Saturday afternoon wasn't the greatest plan in fairness. As a result, neither of us felt in love with the place, which seemed crowded, and to us, it seemed to cater for tourists. It had none of the Hawaiian feel we'd got from a lot of other places on both O'ahu and the other Hawaiian islands we'd visited on our travels. I have said that when we go back (do you like my optimism?) we'll have to spend a night in Waikiki before heading to Aulani, so that we can make a fairer judgement of what we think of it.

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□Finally, I have to wrap up with mention of somewhere that we went to visit with the best of intentions, but didn't get to experience fully, Diamond Head State Monument. The real attraction here are the views of the now dormant volcano during the hike to the summit, as they show Honolulu and Waikiki sprawling beneath you. Keen as I was to see those, unfortunately on a very hot day (into the mid 90s), when the heat was sapping all my energy, I just didn't think either of us were fit enough to brave the hike, as from what I'd heard from others, it is pretty

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tough going. The people we saw heading back to the entrance did look absolutely exhausted, and they also looked fitter than us! Maybe the next time we visit, we'll try heading there either first thing in the morning or later in the day when it's cooler and attempt it.

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□ That brings me to the end of this series of articles looking at things to do at O'ahu, and I hope one thing is clear, and that's just how much there is to see and do on the island. For those of you on a short stay here, either before or after your cruise on the Disney Wonder, good luck to deciding what to do. For those of you heading to Aulani, hopefully this will have given you some good reasons to leave the resort, and head out and explore, however tempting it is to stay put at Aulani -- and trust me, we know that feeling only too well!

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

Article last updated: 04-30-2015

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