

# I Dream Of Hawaii : A Tropical Travel Feature

by Michelle R. Mangio, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When it comes to planning a vacation, most people desire to experience something exotic, without the hassles of flying to a foreign country where one has to worry about what languages are spoken, what side of the road to drive on, and different currency.

It is for that reason that Hawaii has remained one of the most desired destinations of Americans, consistently ranking in the top 10 of surveys.

Hawaii combines the best of both worlds: the lure of something new and exotic (lush rainforests, gorgeous waterfalls, Polynesian culture and experiences), with the familiarity of 'home' (it's still within the United States).

Visitors to Walt Disney World can get a glimpse of this unique experience with a stay at the Polynesian Resort, offering theming, dining, and influences straight from Hawaii. And now Disney has offered another way to experience this wonderful destination: through the new Disney Adventures program, giving you and your family a magical vacation on two Hawaiian Islands (either Oahu and the Big Island, or Oahu and Kauai), liberally sprinkled with the service and pixie dust that Disney is known for.

Oahu is the island most people think of when they think of Hawaii, though it is perhaps more well-known for one of its regions: Waikiki. This famous beach and city attracts travelers to take a stroll along the stretches of soft white sand, or to partake of the great food and lively entertainment in the city, from night clubs to Polynesian luaus.

Most hotels have great kids (and family) programs, and there are plenty of activities to participate in throughout the island. The U.S.S. Arizona Memorial, for example, is located in Pearl Harbor (a short distance away), commemorating the lives lost during the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Do you love animals? The Honolulu Zoo, the Waikiki Aquarium, and the Sea Life Park all give you the opportunity for up close encounters with many animals, including dolphins, sea turtles, stingrays, sharks, and moray eels. Or explore the 4,000 acres of Kualoa Ranch by horse, ATV, helicopter, Jet Ski, or kayak. Explore sunken ships, airliners, and coral reefs by submarine, or ride the slides at the Hawaiian Waters

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Adventure Park. See Pearl Harbor by catamaran -- either by day, or as the sunsets -- or take off into the interior on a nature hike or 4x4 safari tour.

On the "Big Island" of Hawaii, even more adventure awaits, for here is the most amazing contrast of the Hawaiian Islands: lush tropical vegetation interspersed with glowing lava fields. A view of the red-hot lava by night is not to be missed! But there's more than just Volcanoes National Park (where you can witness the island "growing" as the lava slowly flows out into the sea and cools)⋯ visit the desert-like conditions along the Kona coast (and taste its fine coffee!) and then hop on over to Hilo, the rainiest city in America. If you are visiting during the winter, be sure to take a whale watch tour and see the great Humpback whales up close. Swim with the dolphins or learn Hawaii's favorite pastime, surfing!

And then there is Kauai. When people imagine what Hawaii is like, Kauai is what they are dreaming of; lush, tropical and wild, majestic green mountains with flowing waterfalls streaming down its side. The most amazing way to see Kauai is by helicopter. Soar over the Waimea Canyon, and visit the lush rainforests, some of which can only be reached by helicopter. For hikers this island is paradise, though you can also explore it by guided tour or renting mountain bikes to explore on your own.

A wealth of programs and activities can be found to enrich your experience, teaching you everything from surfing to coconut frond weaving, and exploring everything from tide pools to historic sites. On Saturdays, be sure to check out the Starlight Planetarium Program at the Kauai Children's Discovery Museum in Kapaa, which demonstrates how the ancient Polynesian voyagers used the stars, winds, and currents to reach these islands by canoe. Or just enjoy one of the many gorgeous beaches.

Maui can argue that it is more famous than Oahu, at least among honeymooners. Here romance reigns, with gorgeous stretches of beach (some of the best beaches in the entire country) ranging from soft white to rich black sand, bamboo forests and lush scenery, an ancient volcano, and beautiful waterfalls.

Don't forget to visit the Maui Ocean Center, featuring a 750,000-gallon, open-ocean tank with a walk-through acrylic tube. Scout for rare birds on a walk through a bamboo forest, or explore the ocean floor on a glass-bottom boat. Hike up Haleakala to view the sunset or sunrise, or take a relaxing catamaran cruise on the ocean. Relax and enjoy this magical island.

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Tiny Lanai is often referred to as the most exclusive island in Hawaii; less visited than the "Big Three" (Oahu, Maui, and the Big Island). Visitors to Lanai can often find stretches of sand all to themselves. With only 3,000 people living on the island, you'll feel as if you've found a secluded tropical hideaway where you can escape from hectic, everyday life. This is where people come to relax, enjoy the beautiful scenery, and be pampered. Arguably the best golf courses in Hawaii can be found here. But if you're not into golf -- or into pampering and spa treatments -- there is plenty more to do; snorkeling, scuba diving, sailing, and deep-sea fishing. Swim in the warm waters, where you might find spinner dolphins frolicking alongside you. Or explore glorious Hulopoe Bay by scuba or snorkel, which is prized for its vivid tropical reef fish. Then take a thrilling 4x4 excursion into remote Keahikawelo or along the sands of Kaiolohia Bay to marvel at the rusting Liberty Ship grounded just offshore. Or just spend some time lying in the sun, enjoying the best Lanai has to offer - turquoise waters, lush tropical vegetation, beautiful beaches, and plenty of sunshine.

But if you really want to escape from it all, Molokai is the island for you. The most noise you might hear is the tropical birds calling out to you from the trees, or the sounds from the bakery in Kaunakakai when folks line up for delicious cinnamon buns and freshly baked rolls. While "relaxation" is the middle name of Molokai, there is still plenty to see and do, for here is a true nature's playground for you to indulge in. Enjoy a truly unique experience as you take a mule ride down a cliff to Kalaupapa National Historical Park, the isolated, historic settlement of those afflicted with Hansen's Disease. Enjoy a bicycle tour of the island, or partake in an intimate hike into the interior. Explore the many natural tide pools along the shore. But whatever you do, don't miss Molokai's most stunning attraction, the world's tallest sea cliffs, plunging an astounding 3,000 feet to meet the crashing surf. You can experience it in a myriad number of ways; by sightseeing boat, hike, bike, horseback ride, or a thrilling mule train trip down the steep cliffs.

Hawaii is truly a dream destination. Nowhere else in the U.S. can you find a place so full of natural beauty and lush tropical vegetation, surrounded by turquoise waters filled with brightly colored fish and coral reefs. Here green mountains peak out of fern leaf rainforests, revealing gorgeous waterfalls tumbling down their sides. Stretches of white and black sand beaches invite sun bathers to watch as surfers ride the waves, or dolphins and humpback whales frolic in the ocean.

Here, too, you will find friendly people, and be enriched by the amazing Polynesian culture; from arts and crafts (such as frond weaving and floral leis), to dance (the hula), to delicious cuisine, and immersion in a culture so different and yet familiar.

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Hawaii is more than just a dream: it's very much a reality, and a destination that's within our own backyard. Accommodations range from simple hotels to villas to luxurious suites, and can accommodate all budgets. So the next time you are planning a dream vacation, make this a dream come true, and visit Hawaii.

*About The Author: Michelle is the Owner of Magical Escapes, a full service travel agency. She is also a Certified Hawaii Destination Specialist.*

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