



First Time Hawaiï Vacations the Easy and Fun Way!

How to Get to Hawaii,
Where to Stay, and
What to Do

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First Time Hawaii Vacations the Easy and Fun Way;

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Hi, I'm Lisa. Find me here: <http://www.hawaii-lisa.com> - and find my other books here: <http://www.hawaii-lisa.com/answers/hawaii-guide-book/> There are 8 total and all are free. There's one for each island plus specialty books on topics like saving thousands on your vacation.

This ebooklet is an answer to many requests from people who really wanted some personal advice about visiting Hawaii for their first time.

The book is free, you may give it away to anyone you like, but you may not change it in any way.

I Disclaim any Liability: I have made every effort to ensure that this information was correct when I wrote or updated it, but I do not assume any liability to any party for any loss or damage caused by any errors or omissions, regardless of how they occurred. Nothing in this book is guaranteed.

Most everything in this book is **my opinion**, based on my preferences and resources and experiences. I hope my opinions help point you in the direction you most want to take based on your preferences and resources.

☺

Aloha!

So you're planning your first vacation to Hawaii...how exciting!

Before we get started, here are some **Fast Facts about Hawaii.**

- Hawaii has two official languages: English and Hawaiian, but English is primarily spoken. In casual conversation, Pidgin English is spoken among locals. The staff at hotels and most restaurants and activities all speak standard English to visitors (other than "aloha" and "mahalo.")
- Hawaii is our 50th state and is also known as "The Aloha State."
- The currency here is the U.S. dollar, major credit cards are accepted almost everywhere, and there are lots of ATMs. Many businesses also accept traveler's checks. If you're a U.S. citizen, you won't need a passport to visit Hawaii.
- The average year-round, daytime temperature throughout the islands is 75° to 88° F, with the Leeward (west) side of each island being on the warmer end of this range. Hawaii has but two seasons: summer and winter. Summer is from May to October and winter is from November through April. The only difference between the two seasons – winter is just a few degrees cooler and has more rain.

Temperatures in Hawaii rarely drop more than 5 degrees at night. Upland temperatures are cooler, and there's even snow on some of Hawaii's mountain peaks, like the Big Island's Mauna Kea in winter.

- The Hawaiian Islands are all volcanic in origin and Hawaii is the youngest and most remote island chain on Earth.
- Broadband Internet service is available at many hotels and Internet cafes.
- Dress is casual and summery. For resorts and upscale restaurants, wear dressy casual.

- Beautiful beaches can be found on each island. All beaches are free to use (except for Hanauma Bay Marine Preserve on Oahu). Water temperature averages around 74° but gets closer to 80° on the Leeward (west) sides during Hawaii's summer months.
- Hawaii's winter is whale watching season on all islands.
- The time zone is Hawaiian Standard (GMT-10 hours), which is two hours behind Pacific Standard Time. When dawn is breaking here at about 6 a.m., it's already 8 a.m in California. During Daylight Savings Time, which Hawaii doesn't have, the islands are three hours behind the West Coast. Hawaii is five hours behind Eastern Standard Time.
- All of the islands have beautiful beaches, nice hotels, wonderful restaurants (American, island and ethnic cuisine), and fun activities including snorkeling over coral reefs, dolphin and whale watching, golf, shopping, cultural events, sunset sails and more.

If you haven't yet decided which island you will visit, this ebooklet will help you choose. First we'll talk about how to get to Hawaii, then where to stay once you get here, and finally what to do when you're here.

How to Get to Hawaii

Since the Hawaiian Islands are located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean (2500 miles from Los Angeles) you will need to fly to get here – even if you take a Hawaiian cruise, you will probably be flying to Hawaii first.

Here are the international airports in Hawaii – these all serve direct flights from the mainland: Honolulu International Airport on Oahu; Kahului Airport on Maui, Lihue Airport on Kauai, and on the Big Island: Kona International Airport at Kehaole and Hilo International Airport (Hilo sometimes has and sometimes does not have direct flights).

Booking Flights and Packages

Chances are when you book your flight or vacation package you will be placed on a flight to Honolulu International where you will transfer to an interisland flight.

Most visitors to Hawaii enter through Honolulu. These reservations are taken care of for you when you book your flight to your destination island(s). All of the United States' major domestic carriers and 16 international carriers fly to Oahu.

You will almost always find the best fares during the Hawaii tourism industry's low season: when kids are traditionally in school. In 2009, these fares hovered around \$350 from the West Coast and around \$700 from the East Coast during low season. During the summer and around the major holidays, fares tend to double.

So to book your flight, here's what I would do. Hawaii's own airline, which scores very high in customer satisfaction, flies from the West Coast, Las Vegas and Phoenix, Arizona. They often have good deals, so if flying from one of those locations, I'd check their rates: [Hawaiian Air](#).

I would *also* search the discount sites and compare. My favorites are [Expedia](#), [Priceline](#) and [Hotwire](#). [Pleasant Holidays](#) often also has good deals.

Booking your airline seats online saves you money. And the more flexible you can be with your dates and times, the easier it will be to find good deals. With the *exception of Hotwire*, you'll get the best price breaks at least 2 weeks out, and with Hotwire you'll do best booking within 2 weeks or less.

Speaking of Hotwire, you can get their regular low rates while specifying your hotel, airline/flight time and car model, but to get the deep discounts, you need to go with general times on flights, star rating on hotels, size of car, etc. And then after you purchase, Hotwire can give you the specifics. This has to do with agreements they have with their vendors.

The same sort of thing applies to bidding at Priceline – Whether booking a flight, hotel or car, you will be given general information but not the exact carrier, hotel name or car make/model. Before I place my bid there, I check

the going rates for other hotels, flights, cars in the category I'm searching. Then I bid 50% of that.

The Priceline website will have a ticker of recently accepted rates in the area you are searching for that is helpful. And the [bidding for travel](#) forum is a big help too because here, people can post their accepted and decline bids. So that gives you an idea of how much to bid. If you've never bid at Priceline, be sure to read their "New to Priceline" page.

Sometimes you may want to book interisland flights separately, especially if you're island hopping and find better deals this way. You can check prices with the following airlines:

[Hawaiian Air](#), [Go!](#) and [Mokulele](#) airlines are pretty much equal in price (mostly around \$60 one way in 2009), but with any given airline, fares can fluctuate widely from day to day and with the time of day.

[Island Air](#) is another choice if you don't mind turboprop planes. These fly lower, offering better views. They fly into most of the islands' major airports.

Again, you'll get the best rates by booking online and being flexible with dates and times.

You can generally save more by shopping for your airfare separately from your hotel and car, but sometimes an air/hotel/car package deal is the better value. After you check airfares at discount sites like [Expedia](#), [Priceline](#) and [Hotwire](#), and at [Hawaiian Air](#), (if applicable to your departure airport) click on their "vacation packages" tabs and compare.

Cruises

Hawaiian cruises don't depart from the mainland. That would be just too much time at sea and with inclement weather. The main port for Hawaii's cruise ships is located in Honolulu, so if you decide to take a cruise, you'll be flying there. You can find these cruises by searching at the discount sites like [Expedia](#), [Priceline](#) and [Hotwire](#).

If you want to take a cruise, but you don't want to spend your *entire* vacation cruising from island to island and taking day tours, you could start or end your vacation by staying at a hotel on Oahu or on the island that interests you most, which brings us to the next chapter...

Where to Stay in Hawaii

Hawaii has seven inhabited islands: Oahu, Maui, Kauai and Hawaii Island (more so known as the Big Island) are the major ones. Molokai and Lanai are small, very rural and mostly visited via Maui's ferries. Tiny Ni'ihau off Kauai is privately owned and only a few tours (highly supervised) are allowed. We'll be focusing on Oahu, Maui, Kauai and the Big Island.

Which Island?

It can be hard to choose! To help you decide, here's an overview of each island with its major highlights.

Oahu - The Gathering place

Oahu, the most visited of the Hawaiian Islands, is home to the state capital and the well developed city of Honolulu with its Waikiki Beach. Pearl Harbor and Diamond Head are here too. So is the famous North Shore with the world championship surfing contests. Oahu has more easily accessible beaches than any of the other islands, and the multitude of attractions, cultural shows, nightclubs, events, activities and people makes Oahu a good bet if you want to do a lot and enjoy the high energy of crowds. If you want a quiet moment or scenic beauty, Oahu also has some nice beaches and waterfall hikes away from it all.

Maui – The Valley Isle

The second most popular island with visitors is well-known for its beautiful beaches, "Heavenly Hana Highway" and Lahaina Town. Maui's beaches are

one of the reasons this island is so often voted among or as the best in the world. Maui has more swimmer-friendly beaches than any of the other islands. Lahaina Harbor is most famous for its whale watching cruises. While the Humpbacks hang out around all of the Hawaiian Islands from December through April, they favor Maui and are easy to see here even from the highway with binoculars. Maui is also famous for its dormant and quite huge and scenic Haleakala Crater and the amazing sunrises up there, and it is second only to Oahu in arts & entertainment.

Kauai – The Garden Isle

The oldest of the inhabited islands, Kauai offers the most scenic wonders including the deeply sculpted, towering cliffs of the Na Pali Coast and the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific," Waimea Canyon. Kauai's scenery is featured in many movies and television shows – South Pacific, Blue Hawaii (Coco Palms scenes), Gilligan's Island, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Lilo and Stich, and about 95 more. Kauai also has more white sand beaches than the other islands. The Garden Isle is the smallest of the four main Hawaiian Islands (only 550 square miles) and there is one main road, so to stay out of gridlock, you need to avoid before and after work traffic. Other than this, it is easy to get away from the crowds on beautiful Kauai. If you're looking for mostly outdoors fun and a laid back atmosphere, Kauai just might be the perfect island for you.

Hawaii Island (Big Island) – Volcano Isle

Hawaii Island is larger than all of the other inhabited Hawaiian Islands put together, so to avoid confusion with its namesake, the state of Hawaii, it is called the Big Island. While each of the main Hawaiian Islands is quite diverse, the Big Island has *11 of the 13 world's climate zones* (it's only missing the arctic and sahara).

The Big Island is best known for Hawaii Volcanoes National Park with its active Kilauea Volcano. When conditions are right you can see the lava from a land viewing site, and the rest of the time there's almost always viewing by helicopter or boat. It is the youngest of the islands and the volcano continues to create new land. This is why the Big Island has so many black sand beaches. Other famous attractions include Mauna Kea, the world's

tallest mountain (counting from beneath the sea to its snow capped peak) with the largest telescopes in the world, a green sand beach, Kona's world class deep sea fishing and the famous Kohala resorts.

Where on the Island?

Climate – Leeward & Windward

Each island has a Leeward and Windward side. In Hawaii, the prevailing winds blow east to west (tradewinds), and the mountain ranges prevent the Leeward sides (that face west) from getting the full results of these winds. So the Leeward sides are sunny and dry, while the Windward sides get more rain, are lush and a bit cooler. Along with the Leeward side, the southern ends of the islands are also sunny and dry. Conversely, the northern ends are greener and slightly cooler.

Main Areas for Hotels & Condos

Oahu - The best place to stay in my opinion is Waikiki. This could be that being from Hilo where that's not a lot to do, I really appreciate the high energy and offerings of Waikiki. This is the major hotel area of Oahu also. The weather's almost always perfect, and if you don't plan on leaving Waikiki much, you don't even need a car. If you more interested in the North Shore, there's the Turtle Bay Resort and lots of nice condos and vacation rentals.

Maui – One of my favorite areas to stay on Maui is at Kaanapali, just a few minutes north of Lahaina. Here luxury hotels line a long stretch of golden sand beaches on Maui's upper Leeward side. South of Lahaina, Kihei offers lots of choices in condos as well as pretty, white sand beaches. Kihei is also quite crowded. Some of the best bed and breakfasts are found in upcountry Maui, which is very picturesque with its rolling green hills, flower and produce farms and awesome views of the coast. Hana isn't a place to go to for hotels, but it's a beautiful drive.

Kauai – The Garden Isle has three major places to stay: Princeville, which is secluded on the lush and incredibly beautiful North Shore near the Na Pali; Poipu on the beach lined sunny and arid South Shore, close to Waimea Canyon; and the Coconut Coast on the Windward side with its coconut lined roads, golden sand beaches, and the popular Coconut Marketplace.

Big Island – The Kona and Kohala areas on the Leeward side are where you'll find the most and best hotels. Kona has more budget hotels and condos than Kohala, and Kohala has the most awesome luxury resorts, including the Four Seasons and the Waikoloa Hilton. Both of these areas have mostly sunny days. Kohala is the driest area on the island and has the best beach on the island, Hapuna Beach. Kona beaches are small pockets of sand and rock, but Kona has the most things to do on the island. Hilo on the Windward side is closer to the volcano and has beautiful gardens, but it's lacking in hotel choices (my favorites are listed in the Big Island guide).

Which Hotel

Once you've decided on the island you want to visit and what part of the island you'd like to stay on, you can search for accommodations in these areas. Types of accommodations you can easily find include hotels, resorts, condos, vacation rentals and B&Bs.

Here are some good sites for conducting vacation rental and condo searches:

[VRBO Vacation Rentals by Owner](#) What I especially appreciate about this site is I can search by the specific areas on an island, using their maps.

[Home Away](#) This one lists all kinds of properties – condos, vacation rentals, B&Bs, cottages, and so on. You can search by property type as well as criteria like budget and luxury, oceanfront, etc. Another thing I like here is that you can opt to have images show on your search returns (without needing to click through).

You'll also find condos at the air/hotel/car discount sites like [Expedia](#), [Priceline](#) and [Hotwire](#). And you can find B&B's as well as condos at [Hotels.com](#).

Besides browsing the results at these sites, you can search by specific hotel or property if you know what to look for. For the best properties I have found in Hawaii and organized into categories, like "best for families," "most romantic," and so forth, check my ebooklet guide to the island you want to visit. If you haven't done so yet, you can download them (these are free also) from my [Hawaii Guide Books](#) page.

Another way to search for hotel deals is to start with a hotel brand that sounds really good to you. And then check both the hotel chain's site for deals and enter it into the search at the discount sites to compare.

My favorite hotels in Hawaii almost all happen to be part of chains. On the Big Island: it's the Hilton Waikoloa. On Oahu: the Waikiki Hyatt, the Hilton Hawaiian Village and for family/budget: the Waikiki Banyan. On Maui, it's the Wailea Marriott, and on Kauai, the Kauai Beach Resort and the Grand Hyatt.

Hawaii's Most Popular Brand Name Hotels

Note: (*Don't pay rack rates* – use this list to look for specials and when searching the discount sites):

[Outrigger Hotels](#) This classic Hawaiian chain has both hotels and condos on Oahu and the Big Island, and it has condos on Maui and Kauai. Voted by *Travel & Leisure* magazine to be among the top family-friendly hotels in the United States. Budget to luxury.

[Hilton Hotels and Resorts](#) Grand and luxurious. The Hilton Waikoloa Village on the Big Island with its Dolphin Quest program is my favorite hotel of all time. And there's two on Oahu.

[Hyatt Hotels and Resorts](#) The Hyatts are also quite grand – large pools, expansive beaches, and big price tags. There's one on Oahu, one on Kauai, and one on Maui.

[Seaside Hotels](#) These are all close to the ocean, and *very* inexpensive. Of course, you will give up some amenities, but if you are looking for cheap on Maui, Kauai and/or the Big Island, you've found it.

[Aston Hotels](#) These range from budget to luxury and are on Oahu, Maui, Kauai on the Big Island. Be aware that some of the Astons in Waikiki are just barely still in Waikiki - but these are still only about four blocks from the beach, and can save you big money.

[Marriott Hotels and Resorts](#) These are all luxury hotels. There are three on Oahu, two on Kauai, one on the Big Island, and one on Maui.

What to Do in Hawaii

No matter which island you visit, you can expect to find many interesting and fun things to do. Here are activities popular on all the islands, followed by activities specific to each island.

Historical Sites & Cultural Events

History - Hawaii is steeped in history and legend from when centuries ago the first Hawaiians landed their canoes at South Point on the Big Island, to Captain Cook's discovery of the islands and later the formation of the Hawaii Kingdom by King Kamehameha, the missionary era, the overthrowing of the Hawaiian monarchy, Hawaii's statehood and Pearl Harbor. Each island has historical sites and tours that give insight into the many events that make Hawaii what it is today from heiau (ancient temples) to Iolani Palace on Oahu.

Cultural Events - Traditionally the Hawaiian people love festivals and so does the state of Hawaii. The most popular and significant of these events are the state-side Aloha Festivals and the Big Island's Merrie Monarch Hula Competition and Festival. You'll find events listed by island at GoHawaii.com, the State's official website.

More Fun - The following activities are popular on all four of the main islands: surfing, snorkeling, scuba diving, kayaking, golf, deep sea fishing, horseback riding, sunset cruises, dolphin and whale watching, cultural/historical tours, relaxing on a beach, going to luau and last but not least sight seeing. You'll also find Hawaiian music everywhere (lots of free concerts), nightclubs, fantastic restaurants, craft festivals, great shops and lots more to do.

Most Awesome Things to Do on Each Island

Note: See the individual guides (again [free at Lisa-Hawaii.com](http://free.at.Lisa-Hawaii.com)) for lots more recommendations – this is just to give you an introduction.

If you decide to vacation on the Oahu or Maui, I recommend you get the [Hawaii Entertainment book](#). However, if you will just be on Kauai or the Big Island, it won't be much good for you. You can read my [review](#) here.

You also might be interested in the [Go Oahu card](#) if you are staying on Oahu. Read [my review for that here](#).

Oahu – As mentioned previously, Oahu has tons to do! For starters there's the Bishop Museum and Iolani Palace for those interested in Hawaiian culture and history. Also there's Pearl Harbor (USS Arizona and USS Missouri memorials), the Polynesian Cultural Center, Wild Side Specialty Tours (swim with dolphins), learning to surf at Waikiki, watching the pros surf 20 foot waves on the North Shore, taking a sunset Waikiki sail, snorkeling at Hanauma Bay Marine Preserve, kayaking at Kailua Bay, hiking Diamond Head and strolling through gorgeous botanical gardens. And also just walking around Waikiki and taking the trolley at night is good fun!

Maui – Drive the Hana Highway and stop along the way to hike into waterfalls, taking the downhill bike ride from Haleakala (woohoo!). Better yet, take the downhill bike ride after catching the sunrise at the crater! More awesome things to do: stroll through historical Lahaina, attend the really fantastic Old Lahaina Luau, watch the whales, watch the kids play in the fantasy pool at the Grand Wailea Marriot, take a snorkel tour at Molokini

Crater, take the short ferry ride to Molokai or Lanai... On Molokai, ride a mule to the Kalaupapa Peninsula. On Lanai, scuba dive in the cathedrals or four wheel up the Munro Trail. Back on Maui, explore the Iao Needle area and its Kepaniwai Park and Heritage Gardens. Save time for Maui's beaches!

Kauai – Enjoy the spectacular scenery of the Na Pali from a boat, helicopter or hiking trail. Take a look at Waimea Canyon, the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific." Play at Poipu Beach with the kids. Go snorkeling at Ke`e. Take the cheesy but fun and scenic Smith Family boat ride up the Wailuku river to the Fern Grotto, a natural amphitheater where the "Hawaiian Wedding Song" is performed. Dozens of movies have been filmed amidst Kauai's stunning scenery, so the Hawaii Movie Tours are pretty popular. And if you've always wanted to learn how to stand up paddle (a combination of surfing and paddling) you can learn on the calm waters of the Wailuku River.

Big Island – Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is the number one Big Island attraction and one on my favorites list too. It's got history, culture, a science museum, an active volcano and wonderful hiking. Outside the park, watch lava flow into the sea from the Kalapana viewing area or from a helicopter or boat. Go to a green sand beach. Check out the turtles at Punalu`u Black Sand Beach. In Hilo view lovely botanical gardens and drive up the Hamakua Coast, stopping at Akaka Falls State Park to view the 400-foot falls. Head on to Waimea and the sprawling Parker Ranch. In Kohala, enjoy two of the world's most beautiful beaches: Hapuna and the Mauna Kea Beach, and check out the dolphins at the Waikoloa Hilton. In Kona, take a snorkeling cruise at Kealahou Bay and have a world-class deep sea fishing adventure.

In Conclusion

Now that you have an overview of what to expect on your Hawaii vacation, remember to check my other [free guides](#) for more details on each island and specialty topics like "Saving Thousands on your Hawaii Vacation" and "Island Hopping." Drop me a line if you want to share any stories or ask any questions: lisakleinweber@gmail.com

And have a fun vacation!

Aloha,

Lisa