



Hawaii Hopping For Fun!

Visiting More than
One Island in Hawaii
the Smart 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 like getting married in Hawaii and visiting Hawaii for the first time.

This ebooklet is an answer to many requests from people who really wanted some personal advice about island hopping on their Hawaii vacation.

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 a vacation to Hawaii that will take you to more than one island – good decision. I'm really excited for you!

If you already know exactly what islands you want to visit, this is the perfect guide for you because it provides the "How."

... getting straight to the point, let me just tell you that my recommended way to travel between the islands is with [Hawaiian Air](#).

Now if you haven't yet decided on your destination islands, you can learn more about each island and saving money on them by reading my free guides to Oahu, Maui, Kauai and the Big Island.

Find them here (<http://www.hawaii-lisa.com/answers/hawaii-guide-book/>)

Briefly: Oahu (Waikiki island) has the most things to do, Kauai is known for its amazing scenery and endless, pristine white sand beaches, Maui has the Hana Highway and the best whale watching, and the Big Island is most known for its active volcano and its Kohala resorts.

The two tiny islands of Molokai and Lanai are quiet, mostly rural and have their own treasures – Molokai is best known for its mule rides to Kalaupapa and Lanai for its excellent diving. These two islands are typically visited for day or overnight tours via boat excursions from nearby Maui.

All of the Hawaiian Islands have wonderful beaches and climate. Most visited in order: Oahu, Maui, Big Island, Kauai, Molokai, Lanai.

How to Island Hop Overview

There are *many* ways to visit more than one island:

- Book each leg of your journey yourself: airline reservations from mainland from island to island, lodging, car rentals, and activities.
- Book a hotel/air/car vacation package.
- Book only air/car through a discount site, and reserve your accommodations with the hotel itself or a B&B, timeshare, etc.

- Use one or more of the above methods and then a tour company for day or overnight island tours.
- Use the services of a travel agency company to book everything from air to activities.
- Stay on Oahu and spend part of your vacation on a 7-day Island to Island Cruise out of Honolulu.
- Combine some of the above into a package that you create.

Lots of choices! To help you plan the best Hawaiian vacation ever, I've broken all this down into the following chapters. I recommend starting at [Hawaiian airlines](#) and seeing what kind of prices and times are available right now.

Remember when planning your island hopping that it takes time to pack, unpack, and wait at airports (the flights themselves are pretty short – most around 30 minutes). I don't like to recommend more than one island for every 5 to 7 days in Hawaii, because that is too much packing and being at airports for my taste within that time period.

I do outline some options in this guide for those who can't/don't want to spend this long on a given island. Either way...The bottom line is if you make your priority having plenty time to relax and enjoy your vacation (rather than checking off a "things to see and do list" as fast as you can), you can make this your best Hawaii vacation ever!

I frequently do the research and the math, and normally, on a Hawaii vacation you save money when booking a package that includes your flight, car, and hotel compared to booking each of these separately.

But sometimes for various reasons it works out better to book separately. You may want to customize more. Some own a timeshare on one island or want to stay at places that the packages don't include. Or you could just end

up finding better deals through specials offered by the hotels, airline (most likely Hawaiian), etc.

So we'll start by looking at the individual booking options and then move on to tours and packages.

Booking Your Flight, Hotel and Car Independently

Booking your Flight – General Information

Which Airports are Best?

Oahu – Easy. There's one major airport: Honolulu International HNL.

Maui – For flying directly from the mainland, there's one choice: Kahului (OGG). You can also island hop to Kahului. This is located in Central Maui and is just a few minutes from the beginning of the Hana Highway. It's about an hour Lahaina and Kaanapali. Kapalua (JHM) is located near Lahaina and Kaanapali, is closer to Kihei and serves inter-island flights. If you're planning on visiting various areas of Maui, go with the best airfare prices, otherwise take into account time and gas.

Big Island – Whether just island hopping here or flying direct from the mainland you have two choices: Kona Keahole International Airport (KOA) and Hilo International (ITO). If the Volcano National Park is the epicenter of your Big Island visit, know that Hilo's much closer (about 45 minutes opposed to 2 1/2 hours from KOA).

Airfare Prices

Generally, you'll get the best fares for times when the kids are in school: from the West Coast around \$350 and East Coast around \$700. Prices

almost *double* in the summer and around the major holidays: Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's and spring break.

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.

You'll almost never save buying directly from the airlines, except for [Hawaiian Air](#). They serve several West Coast airports, as well as Phoenix Arizona and Las Vegas. They also have inter-island services and often have special deals.

If you're staying on Oahu for part of your vacation, you will usually save by making this the destination for your mainland flight, although increasingly there are very good fares to be found to and from Maui. Flying direct to the Big Island and Kauai often costs the same as if you flew to Oahu and then took an inter-island flight.

Booking Your Island Hopping Flights

When you book your own inter-island flights, you can choose from major airlines, [Hawaiian Air](#) and Go!, as well as Mokulele (now a partner of Go!) and airlines with smaller planes.

[Hawaiian Air](#) and [Go!](#) airlines are pretty much equal in prices. Their fares have been running around \$60 *one way* when you book online. Hawaiian Air has a more user friendly site (I think), and they do consistently earn high marks for their customer service. My general opinion about these two is to book with whichever one is most convenient for you.

Keep in mind that fares can fluctuate widely with the time of day. For example, searching [Hawaiian Air](#) for Dec. 3, 2009, Honolulu to Hilo, I found \$58 one way fares for early morning, late morning and some afternoon and evening, while a few of the other flights in the afternoon, evening and around 8 a.m. were \$104 one way. Big difference there! Seats generally cost less during the times of day that local commuters are least likely to travel.

Inter-island fares don't go up as much around holidays as mainland fares – unless you're traveling on the holiday or the day before or after. For example, searching for fares on Dec. 21, 2009 for Honolulu to Kahului, Maui at Go! Airlines, I found several \$64 ones, but fares for Dec. 24, 2009, except for two in the evening were \$84 to \$220. Note, when using Go! In order to get varying times and their fares, you need to check "flexible dates."

[Mokulele](#) which entered a partnership with Go! in October provides a more user-friendly site. Here you can search by date and get varying hours, like at Hawaiian. Checking fares for the same day and flight from Honolulu to Maui on Mokulele, fares varied from \$58 to \$79, and morning flights were still available (searching on Nov. 20) for December 24 at \$58.

When you're island hopping you don't necessarily need a round-trip ticket, and none of these three airlines require that for these one-way prices.

[Island Air](#) has a fleet of 37-seat *turboprop* planes. I flew with them to Molokai and the plane was *small* and the views are awesome because they fly lower than the jets used by Go!, Hawaiian and Mokulele. Island Air has an outstanding reputation for reliability and safety, and their fares are comparable. The only drawbacks I see are that they don't fly into Hilo and they don't have as many flights.

Checking fares from Honolulu to Kona for Dec. 21, 2009 (the same day I checked for Hawaiian Air above), the search returned a 1 p.m. flight for \$64, which is about where their regular fares generally start and is the same as some of those for the Dec. 21 HNL to Hilo Hawaiian Air flight. That was the only flight with empty seats. Island Air compared well to the others for holidays, with a morning and afternoon Christmas Eve day flight, each at \$64. Like its competitors, Island Air offers specials from time to time.

When booking your flights with any of these airlines, you will save by booking online.

Booking Your Mainland – Hawaii Flight

If you're flying from the West Coast you will often find the best deals with [Hawaiian Air](#). I just checked and found some December \$259 roundtrip fares for LAX – HNL. Since they fly inter-island too, you could book all your flights with them if the price and times are right.

I like to search the discount sites also and compare to find the best possible deals. My favorites are [Expedia](#), [Priceline](#), and [Hotwire](#). This year, I've seen fares as low as \$250 – *roundtrip*. Remember the best deals at Hotwire are found within a couple weeks of departure, just the opposite of the other sites. My free island guides go into a lot more detail on mainland flights.

Booking Your Rental Cars

Again I like to search at [Expedia](#), [Priceline](#), and [Hotwire](#).

When I bid on rental cars (or anything) at Priceline I usually start at about 50% of the normal low rates for that time of year. That could mean bidding at \$8 to \$15 per day.

Sometimes you'll find a good deal with the actual car rental company because they often run specials. All of the major car rentals are in Hawaii and can quickly be found online.

Booking Your Hotel

Booking Your Hotels through Discount Sites

Shopping for travel reservations through [Expedia](#), [Priceline](#), and [Hotwire](#) is a fantastic way to save money on hotels! I detail this in my free island guides and include in these the best deals I found for specific hotels and condos.

Hotel Chains

Usually a chain's hotels will be pretty consistent in their offerings, and you will only need to deal with one company for all your island accommodations. You can often find good deals when the hotels are most hurting for visitors. Here are a few to get you started:

[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. Check for specials like "4th night free."

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

[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 4 blocks from the beach, and can save you big money.

Note that many of the Hawaii hotels offer room/car and even room/car/flight packages, but do compare to see if the deal is really a good one.

Island Hopping Fun By Boat

Inter-Island Cruising

Honolulu is the main port for Hawaii cruises. A popular and lower cost one is the 7-day "[Pride of Aloha](#)" offered by [Norwegian Cruise Line](#). Check the discount booking sites too. The lowest fares I found today were in January: about \$600 for inside cabins and \$700 for ocean view. I found these prices at the NCL site, [Hotwire](#) and Expedia. Bidding on Priceline, you might even do better.

While taking a cruise doesn't follow my "no less than 5 days per island" preference, the advantage here is that you're *not* packing and unpacking and waiting at airports with each new island you visit. You stay in the same room and go on day trip tours. The drawback may be (considering on your preferences) that you spend more time at sea than on the islands. To see more of the islands, I recommend spending the rest of your vacation on a favorite island or two – even more convenient if Oahu is one of them!

Tip - If you're not into the tour/activity add-ons offered by the cruise, check out one of tour companies listed later or tour coordinators like [Shore Trips](#)

Maui Cruises

Because Maui is so close to its sister islands of Molokai and Lanai (all one county too), you can easily find one-day and overnight cruises. Many of these are specialized: snorkeling, scuba diving, whale watching and fishing are all very popular. You can find these by searching online, but they are too small to be offered through the large discount sites.

From Maui – Molokai and Lanai Ferries

Lahaina Cruises has ferries to Molokai, Monday through Saturday. It's about 90 minutes to Molokai on their [Maui Princess](#), a 100-ft yacht, and depending on which cruise you take you'll arrive around 7 or 9 a.m. The ships back to Maui depart at 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., so you'll have an entire day on Molokai. You only have to check in about 15 minutes ahead of time. So what do you do when you get off the boat? Well Lahaina Cruises offers rental car

packages, but these are pretty spendy at \$207 for driver, \$90 each additional adult and \$45 for each child, and they also offer guided tours (\$207 per adult and \$144 per child).

Otherwise, one way it's about \$52 per adult and \$26.20 per child.

If you want to save money, you could book a car yourself (or four-wheel) and if you wanted to stay overnight, a hotel, and then plan your own activities (maybe one of those famous Molokai mule rides). The [Molokai Visitors Association](#) site can help with all this.

The [Maui – Lanai ferry](#) operates seven days a week with five departure times from Lahaina Harbor, and it takes about 45 minutes. Rates are one way \$30 per adult and \$20 per child. They also offer a variety of packages. Lanai is most popular with scuba divers and hunters. For more information about Lanai and possible day adventures, here's their official [visitors site](#).

And here's my portal page to my [Molokai and Lanai](#) reviews and articles.

Best Tours for Island Hoppers

While I do recommend staying at least 5 days on each island you visit, if you really want to make more island hops than this allows, there are day-tour providers that will book your flight, pick you up at the airport, whisk you off for the tour and get you back on time for your return flight. Many also offer the same service only for overnight tours in which they also book your hotel. Generally, you will spend more this way than booking your own flight and activities with smaller businesses.

For example, Polynesian Adventures is offering a one-day Big Island Volcano tour on the Big Island for \$252 per adult. If you booked your own inter-island flight, you'd spend about \$130 air fare, and about \$30 for a one-day rental car (without the weekly rate discount), plus gas, but you'd not be paying extra for each person in the car. I found one for \$25 at Expedia when checking for a return time late enough to allow for after dark lava viewing.

So in this case the tour prices don't really justify themselves, not if you're just looking for lower cost. However, sometimes you do find good deals with these tour companies. I've often seen activities such as luau for less than at the venue. And if you want to relax and let the tour guide take care of everything (and the departure time works for you – some leave reeealy early as in pre-dawn), this may be the way to go for those short island hops.

The following tour companies can arrange your tour/activities, air, car (if you're staying longer and want to do some of your own exploring) and hotel if you're staying overnight.

- [Roberts Hawaii](#) One of the biggest and oldest tour companies in the islands offering day tours and overnights to Maui, Kauai, and the Big Island. Check out their "island hopping" tours, like the Hana one (not everyone wants to drive that road!).
- [Polynesian Adventure Tours](#) Another large tour company, offering two different tours on each of the outer islands, plus options from each of the outer islands to another island. Check their "One Day Fly Away Tours" and their "Overnighter Packages".
- [Best Value Travel](#) Overnight trips to Maui, Big Island, Kauai, and Molokai.
- [Aloha Island Tours](#) Day tours to Maui, Kauai, and the Big Island.

Best Island-Hopping Package Deals

As with individually booked hotels, air and car rentals, it pays to be flexible. If for example, the search has an option under times of day for "anytime," selecting this can make a huge difference in prices you see.

[Hawaiian Air](#) has inter-island "build your own package" deals. After clicking on "vacation packages" scroll down to the bottom of the form where it has an "options" link. Just to check current deals and offer you an example, I built one for two persons that included 7 nights in Waikiki and 5 in Kona on the Big Island. The search returned the Hilton Hawaiian Village for Waikiki and my favorite hotel, the Waikoloa Hilton, for Kona (It's on the Kohala Coast just above Kona).

The total was \$2167 per person (including tax). There are links under the hotel room rate charts to click for alternative hotels. So I tried the newly renovated, 3-star Waikiki Aqua Wave and *kept the Waikoloa* on the Big Island. This brought my **grand total down to \$1798** per person (taxes included) for the 2 week island hopping vacation, including all air fare, hotels and rental cars. They also offer activities to add if you wish, such as a volcano helicopter tour for \$211, but I found a special at the Blue Hawaiian site for \$183 (They've been featured in National Geographic and have an excellent safety record).

Be sure to select "multiple destinations" for these island-hopping packages and after you add your last destination click to add "return flight" information, inserting your mainland airport so that it makes it a round trip.

[Panda](#) Searching with the same dates, general locations and the two adults as at Hawaiian, I was offered a **\$1784 package**; *however the hotels were both 2-star only* and one of the two was in Hilo, about a 2-hour drive from the Kona airport.

So, underneath each hotel, there's a link to view alternatives. While it reads "view others in Hilo" it did return several for Kona. I upgraded to the 3 1/2 star Outrigger Keahou Beach Resort in Kona and to the Outrigger's Ohana Waikiki West on Oahu. **Grand total: \$2079** per person (taxes included), so almost \$300 more than the Hawaiian package and no Waikoloa Hilton or any 4-star hotels offered this time for that matter. Do compare though because prices change with dates your checking.

[Pleasant Holidays](#) – On the good side, they have lots of customizing options. For example, next to each hotel there are alternative hotels and the savings or increased spending for each one is listed and you can click through to detailed descriptions. This all makes comparing and customizing your package easier. A major drawback though is they don't have an "anytime" search option, and if a flight time isn't available, they don't give alternatives. You have to guess, changing your search each time. The site was very slow and kept crashing my Firefox. After several attempts, I lost patience.

[Expedia](#) – So far, this is the only major discount site I know of that lets you book more than one destination in a package. They allow two. For the best deals, select "anytime" for flights. This isn't the default. So comparing to what I found with Hawaiian Air and Panda packages, Expedia gave me a 3-star hotel in Waikiki and the 4-star Waikoloa Hilton on the Big Island Expedia with air and cars for the **grand total: \$3870 per person** (taxes included). So, you're paying more for the good hotels and you're getting the good hotels.

In Conclusion

Remember to check my other [free guides](#) for more details on shopping for traffic deals, and then use what you learn to find the package deals or to build your own island hopping vacation. Have a fun vacation!

Aloha! Lisa

p.s. Do you know about the [Hawaii Entertainment Book](#)? I review it every year. ([my review is here](#)) It can help you save money on activities and food on Oahu and Maui (big money on meals if there are two of you).