



# How to Save Thousands of Dollars on a Hawaii Vacation!

Save Money on Hotels,  
Flights, Food, and Fun  
Things to Do

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## Contents

Contents .....	2
Save money on hotels, flights, food and fun things to do. ....	3
Budget-Happy Times of the Year to Vacation in Hawaii .....	4
Save Hundreds on Airfare .....	4
Be Flexible with your Departure and Arrival Airport .....	5
Booking at Budget-Happy Websites.....	5
Saving with Flyer Points.....	6
Get the Best Deals on Accommodations.....	7
Bidding on Hotels.....	7
<b>Rental Car or Public Transportation? .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Renting a Car .....	9
Public Transportation by Island.....	9
Oahu Public Transportation .....	9
Maui Public Transportation .....	11
Big Island (Hawaii Island) Public Transportation.....	11
Kauai Public Transportation .....	12
Save Hundreds with Hawaii Vacation Packages.....	13
Vacation Package Finds .....	14
Saving Money on Fun Things to Do in Hawaii .....	16
The Hawaii Entertainment Book Activities Savings .....	17
The Go Oahu Card for Active Oahu Vacationers .....	17
Take the Bite out of Hawaii's Food Expenses .....	17
Save on Souvenirs.....	18
In Conclusion .....	19

# How to Save Thousands of Dollars on a Hawaii Vacation!

Save money on hotels, flights, food and fun things to do.

**Aloha, 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 visiting Hawaii for the first time.

This ebooklet is an answer to all the requests from people looking asking for my personal advice on saving money on their Hawaiian vacations.

**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.

But I think you are going to be surprised when you find out how easy it is to save thousands on your Hawaiian vacation!

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

# Budget-Happy Times of the Year to Vacation in Hawaii

Airline fares fluctuate daily and accommodations prices go up and down, depending on many rooms are empty, but there are two times of the year you can count on saving money on your Hawaii vacation.

These are the travel seasons known as the "low season" and shoulder season." For Hawaii these travel season are generally...

Low season: November to mid December and January to March

Shoulder season: April to May and mid September to October.

Peak season (when prices are highest): June to mid September and mid December to January.

As you may have noticed the Hawaii tourism seasons follow traditional school holidays. When the kids are out for summer vacation, spring break or winter holiday, airfare and hotel prices are at their highest.

So to get the best savings, take the children out of school and vacation during a low or shoulder season. They will learn a lot! If you're not sure about that, take a look at all the cultural activities in my other ebooks, not to mention the science – marine biology at the aquariums and on the boat tours, volcano logy and lots more. If you're on Oahu, take them to Bishop Museum!

Besides saving you hundreds, traveling during low and shoulder seasons makes it so much easier to book rooms and activities.

## Save Hundreds on Airfare

Your biggest expense after lodging is likely to be airfare. Even when flying from the West Coast, most spend around \$600 per person, round trip. A family of three could easily spend close to \$2,000. From the East Coast, this

family would likely spend around \$3,000. This chapter shows how you can save over \$1,000 just on airfare alone.

Flying during low season or shoulder season is one way to save hundreds on airfare. Here are some more cost cutting strategies...

## **Be Flexible with your Departure and Arrival Airport**

If you are vacationing on one of the Hawaiian Islands other than Oahu, you will often save by booking a flight that takes you first to Honolulu International (HNL) where you'll transfer to an inter-island flight. Most mainland flights go here first.

Generally you will save much more booking online. And a great deal of money can be saved if you are flexible with your departure airport. If you don't find good fares from the airport nearest you, check a few others. Then compare the savings in driving to an airport that is farther away or flying from closer to home.

When comparing these costs, check out [AirportParkingReservations.com](http://AirportParkingReservations.com). You can not only get good parking deals here, and you can also get Park/Sleep/Fly deals where you drive to an airport, park your car, get shuttled to a nearby hotel and then shuttled to the airport in time for your flight. This kind of service can save you money and headaches if you're not flying from a nearby airport. If you just need a one way rental car to the airport, [Expedia](http://Expedia) lets you do this.

The best fares are almost always found from Los Angeles (LAX), San Francisco Airport (SFO), Portland (PDX), Seattle-Tacoma (SEA), San Diego (SAN) and Las Vegas (LAS). I've seen roundtrip fares this past year at my favorite discount sites (I'll show you them in a sec) as low as \$250 from some of these airports.

## **Booking at Budget-Happy Websites**

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. I like to search the discount sites also and compare to find the best possible deals. My favorites are [Expedia](#), [Priceline](#), and [Hotwire](#).

The more flexible you can be with your dates and times, the easier it will be to find good deals. Many mistakenly believe that the farther out you book, the better savings. Well, ok, this is true in most cases. But not with Priceline or Hotwire. With these two you can get fantastic last minute deals.

To get the deep discounts with Hotwire, you can choose a general time, but the specific time of the flights and the airline carrier won't be revealed until after you book. This is also the case when bidding at Priceline, but I find the savings well worth it. At Hotwire you can save up to 40 percent. And at Priceline, using their bidding option, you can save around 50 percent.

Before bidding at Priceline, I look at the average fares for the general time period I want to travel and bid half of that. I also check at the [bidding for travel](#) forum to get an idea of accepted and declined bids. If you're new to Priceline, be sure to read their "New to Priceline" page.

No matter where you are searching for airfare, remember that rates fluctuate from day to day, even from hour to hour. Fortunately, many of the booking sites have flexible search options so you can quickly skim through various fares in a general time frame.

## **Saving with Flyer Points**

Another way to save money on airfare is to use a credit card that offers points for airfare. My husband and I used this strategy and it paid for my round trip ticket from Hawaii to the mainland. We chalked up points by using our credit card for things like our auto insurance and life insurance with the credit card, and then paying the whole thing off each month with a check to the credit card company. The key is paying off that monthly balance and using a credit card that has a good interest rate and low fees.

(Frequent Flyer programs are good money savers also, but if you don't fly enough the points won't help with your Hawaii vacation.)

For specific tips on saving money while flying from island to island, check out my free ebooklet, *Hawaii Hopping for Fun! – Visiting more than one island in Hawaii the smart way*. You can download it at <http://www.hawaii-lisa.com/> or access it directly: [http://www.hawaii-lisa.com/books/Island\\_Hopping.pdf](http://www.hawaii-lisa.com/books/Island_Hopping.pdf)

## Get the Best Deals on Accommodations

*\*\*\*\* Note, if you really want to save money on accommodations, consider camping. My friend Cindy has a lot of experience camping in tents and in Yurts on Oahu and thinks it's the very best way to go:*

<http://coconutroads.com/CampMalaekahana.html> \*\*\*\*\*

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Basically, I use the same booking sites for our family's hotel rooms as I do for our airfare: [Priceline](#), [Hotwire](#), and [Expedia](#). I also use [Hotels.com](#)

While you can find nice, 3-star budget hotels and sometimes even decent 2-star ones, why not use a discount site and get a 4-star for the same price? You'll save hundreds while having an awesome vacation!

The discount sites often place the condos alongside the hotels, so for simplicity's sake, I'll just say "hotel."

### **Bidding on Hotels**

Like with airfare, when you bid on hotels at [Priceline](#), you must be flexible. You can designate the rating level, but the exact hotel you will be buying if you win the auction will be a surprise until you are locked into purchasing it. It works about the same way at Hotwire for their deep discounts, except you're not bidding. Before I use Priceline's "Name your Price" or Hotwire's "Deeper Discounts" I search for hotels I really like, check how they are rated there, and then input that star level when I bid (or purchase at Hotwire).

Also, before bidding at Priceline, I check the going rates for other hotels in the category I'm searching. Then I bid 50% of that. If the bid is rejected, I raise it \$50.

I have personally bid and got a \$55 room price at the Royal Kona Resort and \$120 at the Waikoloa Marriott. My friend got *\$110 at the Waikoloa Hilton* and \$85 at the Hapuna Prince. (All of these hotels are on the Big Island.) These are truly mind-blowing deals when you look at the rack rates for these hotels. Even during low season in the recession, the lowest rate at the Waikoloa is \$255 and most are over \$300.

Finally, here are some good sites for vacation rentals and more condos:

[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).

[Hawaii's Best Bed-and-Breakfasts](#) now also offers listings of condos and vacation rentals.

## Rental Car or Public Transportation?

There are two practical ways for vacationers to get around Oahu, Maui, Kauai or the Big Island: a rental car and public transportation. Oahu has excellent bikeways, but I wouldn't advise limiting yourself to a bike for your entire vacation. And bicycling all over Maui, Kauai or the Big Island is just plain dangerous. So we'll look at car rentals and the various public transportation services in this chapter.

Also if you or someone you're traveling with has a disability, check out this resource guide, published by the State of Hawaii to help those with

disabilities and health conditions to get around the islands. In some cases, their tips can save a great deal of expense.

<http://www.hawaii.gov/health/dcab/docs/TravelHawaii.pdf>

And for those in need of wheelchairs on Oahu, check out the free to rent, [beach going, Landeez wheelchair](#) at the Honolulu County site.

## **Renting a Car**

This isn't going to be a huge part of your vacation budget, but you can save around hundred bucks by shopping at these discount sites: [Hotwire](#), [Priceline](#) (bid to save more, especially if close to your vacation dates) and [Expedia](#).

I've consistently found the best rates at Hotwire (but do still compare). Searching on Dec. 17, 2009 for Jan 12, 2010 to Jan 19, 2010, I found: \$13.95 daily or \$142, weekly for a mid-size (\$12.95 for a compact). Last month, searching less than two weeks out I found a compact for \$8.95.

## **Public Transportation by Island**

Unless you're vacationing on Oahu, I recommend you get a rental car, but this section will outline the bus offerings on all four major islands.

### **Oahu Public Transportation**

While you can find really good rates at the discount sites for rental cars, there are a couple other budget things to factor in when you rent a car: gas and parking. Waikiki must have the most expensive, difficult parking in the world.

When our entire family vacations there, we rent a car just because that's what my husband likes to do. But when my son and I go alone, we take a shuttle to the hotel and use the bus and Waikiki trolley. And then sometimes

I will rent a car for the day, just to go places that take too long to get to on the bus.

Oahu has a fantastic public transportation system, called of all things, [The Bus](#). They've won several awards for America's Best Transit System.

The Bus stops at practically every attraction on the island. I can't think of any it doesn't take you too except for the Pali lookout. In Honolulu, a bus comes along around every 10 minutes, and outside Honolulu, they still stop regularly. I think the longest I waited was 30 minutes. So unless it's the last bus of the day (for most routes, this is late at night), you needn't worry about missing the bus.

You can tour the entire island for only a few dollars, or you could buy a monthly pass or a 4 day pass. A \$25 four-day visitor's pass (\$10 for ages 6 to 17 and disabled, \$5 for seniors).

So let's say you have two adults and one 9-year old. That's \$120 for eight days. You can get a rental car for this amount, but when you add \$10 + each day for parking, and gas at over \$3 per gallon, The Bus is clearly going to save you some serious bucks. On the other hand, if there's say four adults (none seniors), not so much.

My suggestion: add up the bus pass or fare prices for those you are traveling with and then compare to the best rental car rate you rate you fine, then estimate gas and parking (often around \$10 per day at the hotels) and add.

In my opinion, The Bus works best for people staying in Waikiki or Honolulu since these are the central hubs - but a visitor staying practically anywhere on Oahu can take advantage of this. It also works well if nobody in your family likes to drive and all want to sit back and enjoy the scenery.

Now, a few logistics to consider. You cannot board with luggage. However, it's really easy to catch a shuttle from the airport to your hotel - many hotels provide this at no charge. If they don't, you will pay about \$8 to \$12 per person.

When you get to the airport, just pick up a courtesy phone at baggage claim for a shuttle or go out to the taxi flagger for a taxi. The Taxi will run you \$30 to \$40 to Waikiki.

If you're going to utilize The Bus, check their site for a list of things you are allowed to bring on board – probably everything you'll need to bring with you, unless you have a surfboard.

[Waikiki Trolley](#) This is a fun way to get around Waikiki but does cost more than The Bus. We like to ride it around at night, just for fun, but as far as buying a 4-day pass, I'd go with The Bus because it takes you all over the island and for less.

### **Maui Public Transportation**

The Maui County funded bus system is way better than it used to be, but it's still a far cry from Oahu's bus. It's commuter routes were created more with workers in mind than tourists, and to see if they go to places you want to go to and at the right times, you'll need to download the schedule for each one separately. If you want to check them out, go to [Maui County's bus page](#).

The fares are good - from \$1 each time you board to *free*, depending on the route. The commuter routes are in operation seven days a week and include: Haiku-Wailea, Makawao-Kapalua, Wailuku-Kapalua, Kihei-Kapalua and Wailuku-Kahului.

### **Big Island (Hawaii Island) Public Transportation**

Because everything is so spread out on the Big Island, I really recommend you rent a car, unless you are going stay at a resort for the entire vacation and maybe take a day tour or two (but then the day tours are no way to save lots of money).

If you're budget though is really tight, it is possible to see many of the island's attractions via the bus, provided you plan extremely well. Unlike on Oahu, if you miss the bus here, chances are you are stuck.

In all fairness, the Hele On (means "to go" bus, Big Island's County Mass Transit service, has come a long way. We now have more than one one

route! Actually there are 12 routes I think, and sometimes more than one bus per route.

Where can you get to on the Hele On? Many of the beaches, attractions, shopping centers and restaurants. You can even get to the Volcano National Park's (but once dropped off at the Visitor Center, you'll need to walk around the rest of the park, and it's a big park.)

On a positive note the Hele On is free to use. You can check out the schedules, etc. at <http://www.heleonbus.org/>

If you are using the bus and are visiting Hilo Town and want to get around more efficiently within its urban area, check out the Shared Ride Taxi program at the bus page linked above. You can get door to door service for as little as \$2. Not bad, considering the bus is free.

Bottom line though is unless you are really pinching pennies, I'd rent a car on all islands except Oahu.

### **Kauai Public Transportation**

Unlike the other islands, there are many popular attractions on The Garden Isle that you cannot reach by bus, Waimea Canyon and the Na Pali trailhead for two. If you are going with a Na Pali boat tour, there might be a shuttle though. Kauai's bus system is so small, I suggest you really do your homework on this and plan everything just right or rent a car. You can check out the routes at the [Kauai County's Transportation Agency](#).

And again the best deals for rental cars, in my opinion, are [Hotwire](#), [Priceline](#) and Expedia, generally in that order

# Save Hundreds with Hawaii Vacation Packages

Now that we've looked at airfare, hotel and car rental deals...

While you can often get a better deal if you take the time to shop/bid for hotel, air and car separately, there are plenty of exceptions. So when you are on those discount sites, take a few more minutes to check out the vacation packages.

And of course, booking a package is more convenient – you can even include activities and dining, if you like the offerings. Personally, I prefer to leave my activity and dining options open rather than book them ahead of time. For this chapter, we'll stick to the primary purpose of the ebooklet, which is to show you how you can *save thousands on your Hawaii vacation*.

Here is where I find the best deals on my vacation packages:

**Note:** For the best deals on vacation packages be as flexible as possible. For example, select "anytime" for flights and let them choose your car model and airline carrier.

[Expedia](#) is a vacation package leader on the Web. They are continually updating Hawaii packages, and when I can't find a package with a hotel I want, I can almost always find it at Expedia just because they have so many! I always stop here first, check out the prices and then compare at the other sites. Another cool thing about Expedia – they are on the cutting edge of multiple destination vacations, and cutting edge is where it's at for me.

So far, while [Hawaiian Air](#) offers multiple island packages, Expedia is the only major booking site I know of that lets you book more than one destination in a package. To date, you can include two islands.

[Pleasant Holidays](#) - They have several types of packages and lots of ways to customize (I like that!).

[Hawaiian Air](#) - As mentioned above, Hawaiian Air offers both mainland-Hawaii and inter-island "build your own package" deals. Unlike most airlines, Hawaiian Air also frequently has very competitive fares too.

[Priceline](#) – The best savings here are in the "Name your Price" option – bidding on hotels or airfare. You can't bid on packages, but once in a while you still find a better package deal than elsewhere. Certainly worth checking.

[Hotwire](#) – As with Priceline, you'll find the best deals closer rather than farther from your vacation dates. Still, this is a decent site for packages, and as you'll see in my examples below can save you hundreds.

It may seem like a huge pain to do all this shopping around, but when you want to save thousands of dollars, you gotta make the effort. It's well worth it believe me. Once it's all booked, you get to enjoy Hawaii :-)

## **Vacation Package Finds**

Just to give you some fresh examples, I searched today (Dec. 17 2009) for a hotel/air/car package. I entered the following criteria (just for example): Roundtrip from Los Angeles (LAX) to Honolulu (HNL). Two adults, one child. Departing Jan. 12 2010. Returning Jan. 19 2010. 4-star hotel. And to get better deals, I left flight times and car model open. And these are some of the deals I found...

### **Oahu**

#### **Hilton Hawaiian Village Beach Resort**

[Hawaiian Airlines](#) was the winner here: \$2760 for the family of three. Expedia wasn't far behind at \$2786. Priceline, which doesn't include packages in their "Name Your Price" (bidding) was the loser: \$3750.

#### **Outrigger on the Beach**

[Expedia](#) wins with a \$2451 package. Priceline was the priciest at \$2835.

### **Waikiki Marriott**

[Priceline](#) delivered here: \$2358! Hotwire loses this one at \$2756.

Remember, like Priceline, Hotwire's best discounts normally aren't found in packages. Their "deep discount" search works best not only closer to departure but only for hotels and flights, each separately.

### **Turtle Bay Resort** (on the North Shore)

That said – surprise. [Hotwire](#) had the hands down best rate here: \$2809! Expedia wasn't far behind with a \$2826 package. These were \$100 less than Pleasant Holidays and *hundreds less* than Hawaiian Air and Priceline.

### **Maui - Wailea Beach Marriott Resort**

[Pleasant Holidays](#) had a waaay better price: \$3433 for the family of three package. Expedia and Hotwire: \$4076 and \$4147.

### **Kauai - Marriott Kauai Resort**

[Priceline](#) had the best deal here at \$3283. Pleasant Holiday's price wasn't quite as pleasant: \$3716.

### **Big Island (Hawaii Island) – Hilton Waikoloa**

[Priceline](#) offered a really mind blowing deal at \$2583! That's only \$123 per night, including air and rental car for my all time favorite Hawaii hotel :-)  
The total vacation when you add food and activities would be thousands less than a typical Hawaii vacation. Pleasant Holidays bombed at \$3726.

So this gives you an idea of the type of prices you can get from package deals that include along with air and car, an amazing luxury hotel/resort (in my opinion).

Still, while you're on these sites, also look at the hotels, air and car individually. At Priceline use that forum I mentioned earlier to check winning bids. I add these up to see if a package can beat the grand total. You can search for other star ratings too; it just so happens that our family favorites are all 4-star so that was my search criteria.

# Saving Money on Fun Things to Do in Hawaii

Hawaii has lots of things to do that don't cost anything or that cost very little. Take the beaches for example. All have free access to the public (except Hanauma Bay's nominal fee). It costs nothing to enjoy the beaches, people watch, body surf, swim, relax...

Many of the cultural activities like the festivals are also free. To save big time opt for the more authentic choices. For example, Bishop Museum on Oahu is awesome. My family and I could spend all day in there because it's that interesting and fun. And the entry fees here are far less than say the Polynesian Cultural Center.

Oahu has the lowest cost activities. Just by vacationing on Oahu instead of one of the other islands, you can save lots.

And here is a list of activities and places to see that are free or low-cost:

**Historical/Cultural Places & Events** - Each island has lots of places where you can learn about events that have made Hawaii what it is today from heiau (ancient temples) and Iolani Palace to Pearl Harbor (USS Arizona and USS Missouri memorials). And there's almost always some sort of festival or another in Hawaii. Events are listed at [GoHawaii.com](http://GoHawaii.com).

**Outdoors Recreation** - Swimming, surfing, hiking, snorkeling, kayaking, sunset cruises, dolphin and whale watching, strolling through botanical gardens and hiking can be done on all the islands.

On Oahu, watch the surfing championships on Oahu's North Shore, take the kids to the Honolulu zoo and Waikiki Aquarium. On Kauai, hike the first (fairly easy) first two miles of the Na Pali Trail and/or checkout Waimea Canyon (Grand Canyon of the Pacific). On Maui, drive the Road to Hana. On the Big Island, visit Volcano National Park.

**A&E** - Hawaiian music and hula are easy to enjoy for free or the cost of a drink or two in places like Waikiki. On all of the islands, music and hula are

performed at many of the parks, shopping centers and resorts' public areas. If you're into the visual arts, there are mesmerizing galleries and cool crafts shows on all the islands too.

## **The Hawaii Entertainment Book Activities Savings**

One way I love to save money on activities is with the [Hawaii Entertainment Book](#). If you decide to vacation on the Oahu or Maui, I recommend you get this because there are dozens of activities you can save money on with this coupon book. However, it's not of too much use on Kauai or the Big Island generally. There are some coupons though. [Check out my review where I list them](#). *Using the book on Oahu or Maui for a week or two can save hundreds on activities.*

## **The Go Oahu Card for Active Oahu Vacationers**

I like the [Go Oahu card](#) available just for Oahu. I have bought it and used it. It is ONLY good for very active travelers though. The way I recommend you to use it is to get it for a portion of your vacation – like if your vacation is a 7 day vacation, get the 3 or 5 day card and do three or more activities on those days you use it, and do your relaxing (lounging around on the beach or snorkel or shop or hike) on days that you are not using it. [Here's my full review on it](#).

In my experience, it saves you money if you are doing 2-3 activities per day.

## **Take the Bite out of Hawaii's Food Expenses**

It's really easy to save money on food in Hawaii if you don't mind packing sandwiches for your outings and making use of a kitchenette for part of the vacation. Hawaii has a Safeway too, so you can make use of your Safeway card if you have one. Foodland is a good Hawaii based supermarket chain for saving money, and they will give you their discount card.

Some of Hawaii's food cost 50% more than on the mainland, especially dairy (over \$6 for a gallon of milk) and convenience foods like boxed cereals (\$7 for a regular size box of Honey Nut Crunch). But the stores have sales on all of these items, and again, you can often save with your Safeway card, Foodland's Makai card. You can also bring items like cereal and favorite snacks from home, and then use the empty luggage space on the way back for souvenirs.

**Then to save money on dining out (you can't go on vacation and prepare all of your own meals) I like to use the [Hawaii Entertainment Book](#).**

**As mentioned in the "Activities" chapter, the coupon book works best for Oahu or Maui and can easily save you hundreds in food and activities.**

**On Oahu alone, there are at least \$1000 worth of dining out savings! Pretty cool. [See the available coupons here.](#)**

You can also save a lot also by eating local style. No poi required. Take the plate lunch for example. This is quite filling and normally costs about \$7. Plate lunch wagons and take out restaurants offer many variations, but normally it includes a meat, such as teriyaki beef, one scoop of macaroni salad, and two scoops white rice. Many, like L&L Barbecue offers healthy substitutes, along with traditional fare.

Another way to eat more local style and save money is by shopping at the grower's markets for island produce, cheeses and meats and fish. Hawaii has many grower's markets. Kapiolani on Oahu is very popular and good. These are also great places to find souvenirs and gifts to bring home.

## Save on Souvenirs

This is really easy if you shop like you would at home to save money. Walmart and Kmart have big souvenir sections, so if you go there and buy all your souvenirs you could save lots of money and time.

Then there are some of the Hawaii based venues where you can save on souvenirs. Hilo Hatties is one. They have really cute low-cost trinkets, plush toys and such. For clothing though, you'll find Hawaiian wear at lower costs at the big box discount stores. Ross' is also in Hawaii, and depending on the season, you can find lots of Hawaii tank tops and such here.

Oahu's International Marketplace and Aloha Swap Meet still have good buys. And that's about it. Really you can leave Hawaii with sacks full of fun and really nice souvenirs without spending the hundreds or thousands that the typical tourist family spends on shopping!

### **In Conclusion**

Well, that's a wrap. I think if you follow my tips, you and your family will save thousands on your Hawaii vacation. Remember to check my other [free guides](#) for more details on the individual islands. And have a fun vacation!

Aloha!