

# Oahu and the Big Island, Hawaii

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December, 2008

This was my first trip to Hawaii and will surely not be my last. I was able to conveniently fly direct from Portland to Honolulu on Northwest Airlines and my travel companion, Erin also flew direct from Chicago on United. We planned to spend two days in Waikiki and then two days on the Big Island to have a short, but diversified trip.

We stayed at the Wyland Waikiki for the nights of December 3,4. The staff was incredibly friendly and helpful and took the time to really make us feel comfortable. We were in a one bedroom suite in the "Quiet Tower" which was removed from the busy Royal Hawaiian Ave. We had no problems at all with outside noise and this tower has the only Salt Water pool on Oahu! The hotel is modern and fresh, inspired by the marine art of Wyland, whose art is displayed throughout the hotel. The property is not directly on the beach, but is an easy 10 minute walk away. It is right in the heart of Waikiki with plenty of shopping and eating right at your foot steps. There seems to be a Coach store on every corner! Our first night we ate at the Ocean House, which is located inside the newly refurbished Outrigger Reef Hotel. It is located directly on the beach and eating fresh fish by the light of the tiki torches while listening to the crashing waves couldn't have been any better! Oh and the Mai Tai's helped also!

I spent the morning checking out various hotels in the area, while Erin soaked up some rays on the beach. The weather was perfect, 80 and sunny, a very welcome change from the grey December skies of Portland. We spent the afternoon shopping and hanging out by the pool. We did not rent a car while in Waikiki because the public transportation is very easy to use and most things that we wanted to see were within walking distance of our hotel. That night we wanted a very laid back and relaxed dinner, so we went to LuLu's, which is located near the ResortQuest Waikiki Beach Hotel. It is very casual with great food and live music. They have bar style seating that wraps around the perimeter of the restaurant, so a great view of the ocean at sunset is very feasible!



View from Diamond Head

The next morning we set out early to climb Diamond Head. We took the bus again (#22, 23 will get you there) which costs \$2 each way. It is a pretty mild 40 minute hike. I could not fit my sneakers in my suitcase, so I climbed it in flip flops, something I wouldn't necessarily recommend doing! Once you get to the top, the view of Honolulu is fantastic. It makes for a great morning activity. We arranged a transport to the airport with out hotel the night before for \$10 a person and before we knew it, we were on to the next leg of our trip, the Big Island!

The inter-island flight on Hawaiian Air was only about 25 minutes and we even made friends with chef Sam Choy while in air! Even though it is a short flight, you do still need to be at the airport about 90 minutes in advance to clear security and agriculture checks. When we landed in Kona, it wasn't at all what I expected. It was desert like with black hardened lava everywhere. I learned that Kona has 5 distinct climates! Once we got driving North on Highway 19, we saw the gorgeous coast line which was more what I expected. We stayed for 2 nights at the beautiful Mauna Lani resort on the Koahala Coast. This area consists mostly of resorts, unlike Kona to the South.

Our first night we enjoyed a Luau at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, which was only about 10 minutes from our hotel. It is a huge, but very nice property which even has a monorail and boat to take guests from one area to the next! The Luau was great fun with excellent traditional food and dancing. We sat directly in front of the stage and were even brought up on stage to be the guest dancers! Embarrassing, but all in good fun! I would really recommend a luau while you are in Hawaii. It really gives you a sense of their traditions which are really passed down through the generations.

The Mauna Lani is a spectacular property. It is a resort, but not overly large which I really enjoyed. The grounds were pristine and the service was definitely first class. We had a very large ocean view room with two double beds. It took us about 2 minutes to walk from our room to the beach! You really felt like you were away from all of the hustle and it is completely relaxing.

In the morning we had breakfast and toured The Four Seasons Hualalai. It is an unbelievable property and I can see why Conde Nast ranked it the 26th best hotel in the world! They are undergoing many renovations which will include making 40 ocean view suites. I also toured Kona Village and I have never been to a property like that before. You feel like you are completely cut off from the rest of the world and there to enjoy all things natural. With all individual bungalows on 82 acres of ocean front property, a stay there would really be an experience. That night we went over to the Queen's Shopping area, near the Hilton. It is a great area with plenty of shopping and dining. There just happened to be a special event going on that evening where each of the restaurants was showcasing their favorite dishes. We had samples from all of the 10 restaurants and they just got better and better as we went along. It is a great place for casual, yet very tasty dining.



View from Mauna Lani

On our last morning, I decided to conquer my fear of actually going in the ocean and decided to snorkel. I thought that there really isn't a better place to try snorkeling than in Hawaii! A few minute walk from the Mauna Lani is a bay where the water is calm and it turned out to be a really great experience! Our last stop before leaving Hawaii was to take a look at the new Mauna Kea resort which has gone through a complete renovation due to the earthquake damage it suffered in October, 2006. It is slated to soft open on December 18 and is stunning. It is located at the far northern end of the Kohala Coast and will be trying for a 5 star rating once it opens completely in April.

I absolutely loved my time in Hawaii. It was great to have the combination of busy Waikiki and tranquil Kona. Of course next time I will want to spend more time since there is so much to see and do, but this was a great introduction to what the islands have to offer. That being said, even just spending four days was very refreshing and a relatively economical getaway from it all. Erin and I both sadly took red eye flights back to our respective cold weather homes and talked about how soon we could go back!