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Out & About

with kids

ISSUE 20 AUTUMN 2009

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NOOSA
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HEAVENLY HAWAII

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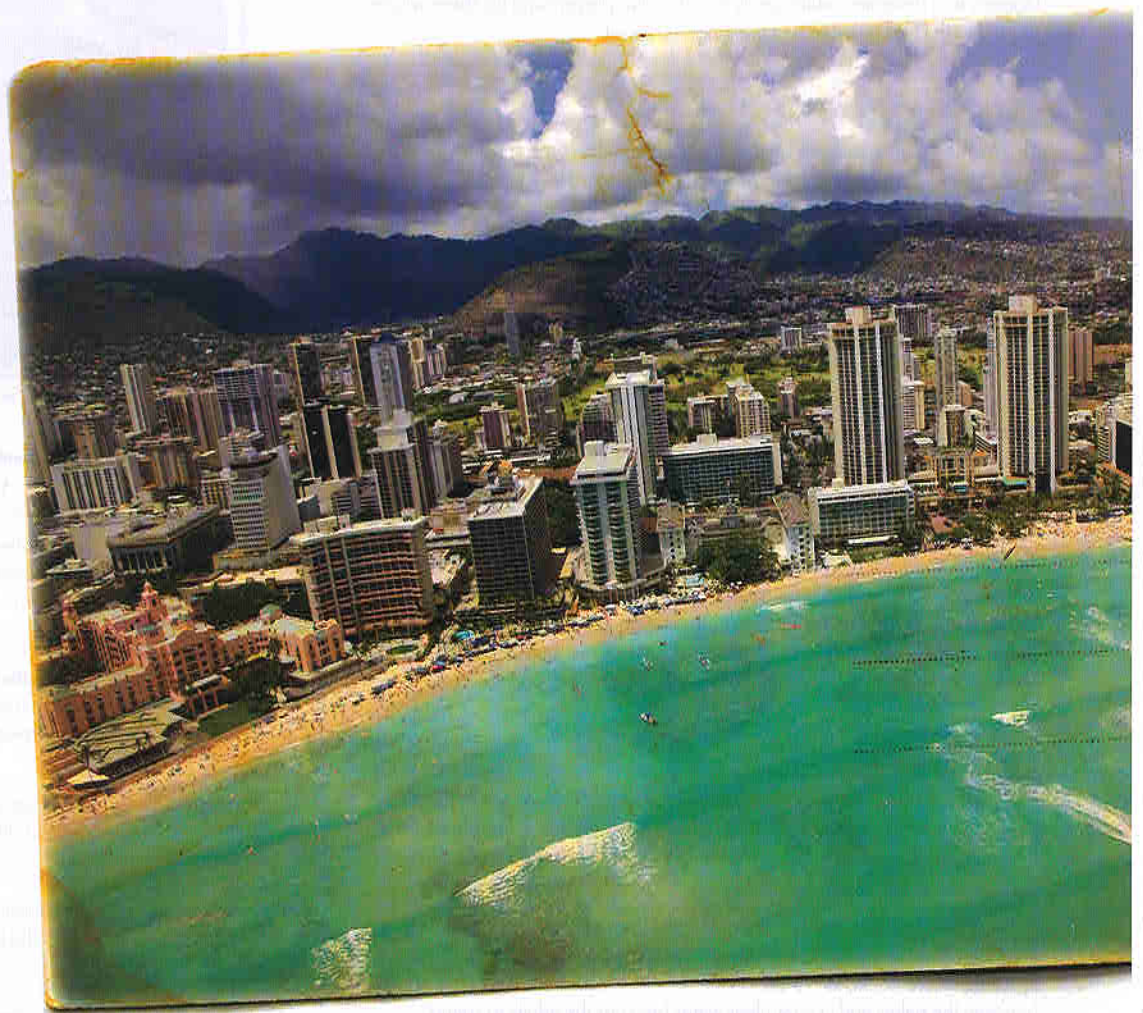
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ENDLESS SUMMER



Hawaii conjures images of a young Elvis, beautiful girls with leis and surf breaks that never end. Now, a half-billion-dollar renovation of the Waikiki beachfront, on the island of Oahu, has restored this iconic tourist attraction to its former glory.

WORDS: TRACEY SPICER

Driving from **Honolulu** airport to **Waikiki**, along the LA-style six-lane highway, our expectations are low. Crumbling 1970s hotels and resorts cry out for a lick of paint; divas who've seen better days. But closer to the beachfront everything becomes shiny and new, the result of a US\$535 million renovation. The jumble of two-dollar-shops and cheap T-shirt stalls has been replaced by wide marbled boardwalks lined with the sort of high-end boutiques usually seen on New York's Fifth Avenue.

At night, the Waikiki Beach Walk comes alive with fortune tellers, sketch artists, balloon twisters, a guy with an endangered macaw, and dozens of human placards advertising a shooting gallery with 'live ammunition!' We are in the United States, after all. This bizarre bazaar spills into a marketplace selling everything from the classic hula girl lamp stand to ukuleles and pareos (sarongs).

Surf's up

Waikiki's waterfront is actually a string of beaches connected by a boardwalk, with large sticky grains of sand and gentle waves - perfect for building sandcastles or teaching young kids to swim. It has earned its superlatives: at sunset, for example, the view along the beaches to the dramatic Diamond Head is breathtaking.

Surfers say it's the best place in the world to learn, so I grab an 11-foot (3.3-metre) malibu and head out with instructor 'Uncle Donald' (from the Surf Academy by Dane Kealoha) and five young Japanese students while the kids lick rainbow-hued shaved ice-cones on the sand. To be honest, it's not my first time surfing. I suffered a devastating 'fin chop' at Byron Bay several years ago (okay, it was only one stitch), ending a promising career on the world surfing tour.

At 63, Uncle Donald is a local legend; known as the 'Spirit of Aloha', he nurtures locals and tourists alike, even giving away his board to one young wannabe. It's a long, stable ride, so I tune in and drop out, fantasising about being Gidget, walking along the board in a tiny bikini. After an hour of ducking and weaving around other learners (perennial hazards at Waikiki) I decide that I am quite gifted. Unfortunately, the photographic evidence reveals a flabby middle-aged woman, bum thrust out like she's sitting on a toilet. Not a good look.

Hula girls

Once the kids and my husband Jason stop laughing we wander over to the Kuhio Beach Hula Mound, near the statue of the Duke, for the dusk torch-lighting ceremony and hula show.

There's more entertainment back at our hotel, the recently refurbished **Outrigger Embassy Suites**. Each evening, we wander up to the family-friendly pool deck for free cocktails, spirits, beer and nibbles, while watching some of Hawaii's finest singers and slack key guitarists.

"The free drinks are very popular with Australians and New Zealanders" according to Outrigger's PR Director, Nancy Daniels.

Supersize Me

There are plenty of family eateries here, but most involve fatty burgers and fries. **Yard House**, beneath the **Embassy Suites**, is an excellent alternative, with a tapas-style menu featuring traditional Hawaiian dishes like seared ahi sashimi. The kids are given colouring books and crayons, while Dad peruses the biggest draft beer menu in the world.

Down a side street, we find **Gyu-Kaku**, a fabulous Japanese barbecue restaurant, where you cook the food on a hot plate in the middle of the table. Arancino, a bolt-hole Italian café around the corner makes an unusual, but delicious, gorgonzola and green apple pizza. For lunch most days we grab cheap salad wraps or sushi from one of the big grocery chains, Pantry or Foodland.

Pearl Harbor

It's easy to forget that Hawaii is the first line of defence for the west coast of the United States. If it wasn't for **Pearl Harbor**, America might not have been drawn into the Second World War, and we could all be speaking Japanese.

We take a tour that begins with a surprisingly unbiased film about events leading up to the bombing on 7 December 1941. A ferry then takes you to the **USS Arizona Memorial**, built over the sunken ship that entombs some 1177 seamen. Back on the mainland, the kids clamber over decommissioned submarines, torpedoes and anti-aircraft missiles. Taj must have been paying attention during the film, because he immediately grabs the sub's phone, yelling, "Hello? It's me. I want to be rescued".

Nearby is the **Bishop Museum**, which specialises in science, history, culture and space. At the mini-volcano, kids can press the 'magma' and 'gas' buttons to simulate an eruption, or play on the slides and tunnels inside.

Shop 'til you drop

Now the kids are satisfied, we can indulge in some adult fun in one of the world's best shopping destinations. At the Waikale Premium Outlet Mall, you can buy brand names for about one-sixth of the Australian price. Choose from Adidas runners for \$20, Citizens of Humanity jeans at \$100, or Gymboree baby jumpsuits for a couple of bucks apiece.

The kids ride in a groovy car-shaped shopping trolley to wander through Saks Fifth Avenue, Calvin Klein, Armani Exchange and Banana Republic. Hubby's abiding memory of our shopping trip is a delirious wife, wandering the aisles of Banana Republic, arms piled high with bargains.



The Duke

Duke Kahanamoku was a Hawaiian Olympic swimming champion who popularised the modern sport of surfing. His exhibition at Sydney's Freshwater Beach in 1914 is regarded as the most important day in the development of surfing in Australia.

In awe: Taj at the breathtaking Pearl Harbor memorial

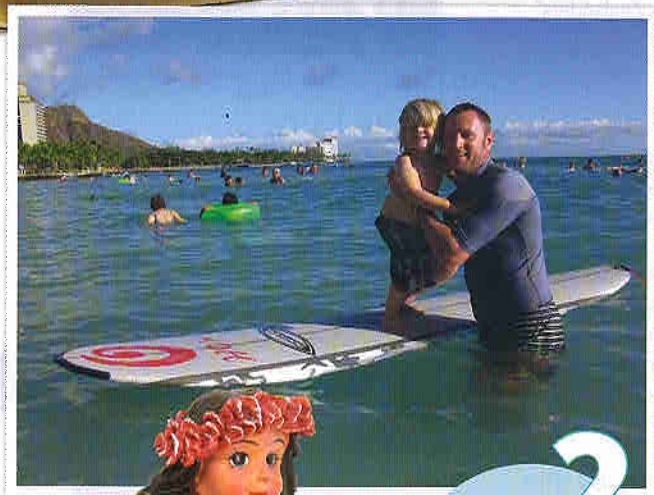


Mark Twain on Hawaii

"The loveliest fleet of islands that lies anchored in any ocean."



For quintessentially
Hawaiian fun, you just can't go
past dancing!



Did you know?

Green sea turtles are no longer endangered in Hawaii, moving to the 'threatened' category. But in the past few years, they've begun developing cancerous tumours. No-one knows why.



Culture culture

No trip to Hawaii is complete without experiencing a traditional feast known as a *luau*. In Waikiki, the best version is at the sprawling **Hilton Hawaiian Village**. With 3000 rooms in six towers, the Hilton is a paradise for families, boasting the biggest pool in Waikiki, the widest stretch of beach, 20 restaurants, 90 shops, plus a menagerie of imported animals, including flamingoes and little penguins.

At the luau, a bevy of hunky, half-naked men carry the roasted pig from the pit oven and I find it hard to drag my attention away from their 'six-packs': "Eye candy for everybody", giggles Dara Young, PR Manager of the Hilton Hawaiian Village. Later, hubby is coaxed up on stage to dance with scantily-clad Hawaiian and Tahitian babes.

"You just lived my dream, man!" marvels one bespectacled bloke, as Jason wanders bashfully back to the table.

The following day, we hop on an **Atlantis Submarine**, which leaves from the Hilton. Plummeting 36 metres below, you are literally swimming with the fish, exploring shipwrecks and artificial reefs designed to regenerate the marine environment.

Dolphins and turtles

Hawaii is one of the few places in the world where you can swim offshore with dolphins. The endemic species is the spinner dolphin, so-called because they leap out of the water, performing a series of twists and twirls. Due to environmental concerns **Wild Side Specialty Tours** runs only small boats and, instead of using sonar, the crew looks for shearwater birds which hover over the pods. As marine biologist Tori explains, "If it's not good for the dolphins, we get you out of there, fast".

Suddenly, the call goes up: "We got 'em!". Quickly donning snorkelling gear, we slip into the sea, arms by our sides to mimic the movements of these magnificent creatures. I feel as though I'm part of the 40-strong pod, swimming in their slip stream amid the eponymous "eee, eee".

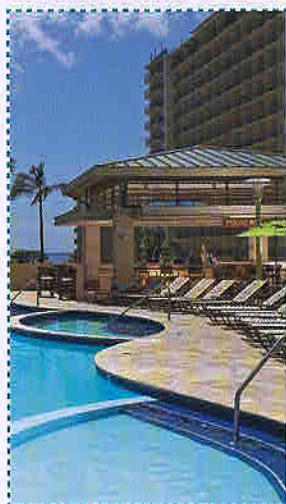
Nearby, we find four green sea turtles, including a tiny baby. Scientists have no idea about the lifespan of these prehistoric creatures; it could be up to 200 years. One old guy, resting on the ocean floor, spots me and swims up – a graceful archangel, slicing his flippers through the water. Even though his snake-like head is just inches from my face, I resist the temptation to give him a kiss, as they're prone to herpes.

This is one of the most extraordinary holiday experiences of my life.

Mahalo – thank you

By the end of our trip, the eager-to-please four-year-old is adopting an American accent, encouraging everyone to “have a nice day”!

We decide to spend the last day doing our favourite thing: lazing on a particular stretch of Waikiki beach, renowned for its healing properties. Paddling in the shallows, we spy one, two, three giant green sea turtles just metres away. As the sun sets, we reflect on our endless summer. Warm Hawaiian hospitality combined with efficient American-style service and stunning natural beauty makes this an ideal family destination.



Outrigger Hotels

Comprising 24 properties, including the **Embassy Suites - Waikiki Beach Walk**, **Outrigger Reef on the Beach** and **Ala Moana Hotel**, this is the largest locally-owned hotel chain in Hawaii. The Embassy Suites, right in the middle of Waikiki, have just been renovated in 1950s style, featuring hula girl lamps, retro cane furniture, and carpets with a pineapple motif. With one- and two-bedroom suites and balconies overlooking the beach, it's the perfect accommodation for families. You can also stay in a self-contained condominium at the **Outrigger Regency** on Beachwalk.

Try to book a window seat on your flight into Hawaii – with a view like this, it's worth getting to the airport early!

GETTING THERE

Hawaiian Airlines, a partner in the Virgin Blue loyalty program, offers quick, efficient and comfortable passage to Honolulu three times a week. The flight leaves Sydney mid-evening, arriving in Oahu mid-morning on the same day, because you cross the International Date Line. It's a non-stop nine-hour flight, so not too far, even for little kids. Once in Honolulu Airport, there are dedicated queues for parents with small children. Connecting flights take you to the neighbouring islands of Maui, Kauai and The Big Island.

www.hawaiianairlines.com.au

For more information and great ideas on how to see and do Hawaii, make sure you contact Creative Holidays

www.creativeholidays.com



WHEN TO GO

The off-season is the best time to visit Hawaii. From mid-April to mid-June and from September to mid-December prices are cheaper, and you avoid the hordes of American tourists.

VISA

Australians will need authorisation to travel to the United States prior to boarding a US-bound airplane or cruise ship. This may be obtained online.

www.esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta/esta.html

MONEY

Hawaii's currency is the US dollar. At the time of writing, the exchange rate was 1.00 AUD = 0.71 USD.

WHERE TO STAY

Outrigger Hotels

Embassy Suites - Waikiki Beach Walk

www.embassysuiteswaikiki.com

Other Outrigger properties

www.outrigger.com

www.outriggercondos.com

Hilton Hawaiian Village

www.hiltonhawaii.com

GETTING AROUND

Car hire

vroomvroomvroom can find the best deal for you, anywhere in the world.

They organised a medium-sized

SUV for us from Alamo

Rent A Car in Hawaii!

www.vroomvroomvroom.com



Buses

\$2 will take you anywhere you want to go in Honolulu.

Trolleys

Pay a daily flat rate to ride on these hop-on, hop-off trolley cars.

WHAT TO DO

Surf Academy by Dane Kealoha

www.hyattsurfacademy.com

Pearl Harbor

www.arizonamemorial.org

+1 808 422 5664

Bishop Museum

www.bishopmuseum.org

Atlantis Submarine

www.atlantissubmarines.com

Wild Side Specialty Tours

Swimming with dolphins.

www.sailhawaii.com

WHERE TO EAT

Yard House

www.yardhouse.com

Waikiki Luau on the Lagoon

www.hiltonhawaii.com

MORE INFORMATION

Oahu Visitors Bureau

www.visit-oahu.com

For your perfect escape, call Escape Travel on 1300 559 864 or visit escapetravel.com.au