



BEYOND the beach

SUSAN GOUGH HENLY

Oahu may be known for its nightlife and resorts along Waikiki Beach, but the Hawaiian island delivers so much more. From swimming with dolphins to kayaking with sea turtles, from climbing volcanoes to exploring organic farms, there's plenty here to keep even the most active traveller happy.

Ready to go?" asks skipper and marine biologist Tori Cullins. Without answering, we slip off the back of the 10-metre motor catamaran *Alakai* and merge into the dolphin highway. We had been watching a pod of about 300 spinner dolphins cruising beside the boat. And now it is time to see if they wanted to play.

They sure did. For the next 20 minutes they zipped under, beside and around us and did their signature spinning leaps high into the air. Despite having a snorkel on I find myself laughing. I also find myself with a mouthful of water. But it's such a thrilling experience that I don't care.

Many people visit the Hawaiian island of Oahu, plonk themselves on the beach at Waikiki and never leave. And adrenalin lovers often overlook the island entirely, touching down only to take off for the wilds of Kauai and the fiery lava flows of the Big Island. But there's much more to this piece of paradise than high-rise resorts. Oahu offers plenty of opportunities to get in touch with your inner adventurer.

WEST COAST

There are six of us are cruising down the west coast of Oahu on one of Tori's Wild Side specialty cruises – our swim with the spinner dolphins is just the beginning of the experience. Over the next three hours we also see pilot whales and Pacific bottlenose dolphins and, in the water again, we watch half-a-dozen green sea turtles having their shells cleaned by surgeonfish and cleaner wrasse in one of those marvellous marine symbiotic relationships. Tori explains these and other fascinating facts about Hawaii's sea life as we feast on homemade chicken salad sandwiches, macadamia nut cookies and fresh pineapple. It's an experience I won't forget in a hurry.

SOUTH COAST

On the south coast, start your day before dawn to avoid the crowds climbing Oahu's famed Diamond Head. The hike involves about 175 steps on two sets of stairs but the rewards are worth the effort: stunning views of Waikiki



OAHU A GO GO

Clockwise from above: Dancers performing the Haka at the Polynesian Cultural Center; lush Kualoa Ranch occupies 1,600 hectares on the east coast.

Opening spread: Swimming with spinner dolphins off the west coast of Oahu.



as well as a peek at the tuff crater, which is known as Leahi, or “brow of the tuna,” in Hawaiian.

Another south coast highlight is to follow in the wake of trailblazing Hawaiian surfer, Duke Kahanamoku. Take a surfing or stand-up paddle boarding lesson at Waikiki, where the waves are generally manageable and the setting is pretty special.

EAST COAST

The drive around the southeast coast of Oahu is spectacular – wild and deserted with mountains descending to the sea. Our first stop is Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve, which is an almost circular bay within a drowned volcanic cone. You can rent snorkelling gear here to see Hawaii’s green sea turtles as well as an abundance of tropical parrot, trumpet and angel fish.

A little further along the coastline is a lovely 3.2 kilometre hike to Makapuu Point Lighthouse. On a clear day, you can see all the way to the islands of Molokai and Lanai and, by the red-roofed white lighthouse, vistas of the entire east coast as far as Kailua and Olomana Peak. If you are here during the

whale migration season from November to May, you may also see humpback whales breaching.

Heading north, there are a number of beaches along the east coast that are popular for their white sands and small, consistent shore breaks, which are perfect for swimmers and beginner surfers. These include Waimanalo Beach, Bellows Beach and Kailua Beach. Waimanalo is the heart of “old Hawaii,” where you might see houses flying the red, green and yellow Hawaiian sovereignty flag. You may even hear the popular Hawaiian song Waimanalo Blues on the radio, a lament for the old, paved-over Hawaii. The pretty beach community of Kailua is U.S. President Barack Obama country and the place he brings his family to every summer. I love the community feel at the beach, with families cheering their kids during outrigger canoe races.

As you continue north along the coast the landscape becomes lush and greener with large wetlands, streams and ponds. One must-do adventure is to take a two-hour trip with Nakoa Prejean on a traditional ocean sailing canoe. Everyone joins in paddling around the island of Mokolii, or Chinaman’s Hat, while guides regale you with stories of these canoes that

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“Kualoa Ranch is geared to preserving a landscape that the ancient Hawaiians cherished as one of the most sacred places on Oahu.”

brought the first Hawaiians here from the Marquesas. There’s also time for snorkelling with honu, or green sea turtles, at Mokoli.

Close by is Kualoa Ranch, a 1,600 hectare working cattle ranch established in 1850. It is now geared to preserving a landscape that the ancient Hawaiians cherished as one of the most sacred places on Oahu. It is also the setting for numerous movies and TV shows including *Jurassic Park*, *Godzilla* and *Lost*. There are a host of adventures on offer here including horseback riding and ATV tours to see the movie sets and spectacular landscapes as well as a boat ride across one of Hawaii’s most well-preserved fishponds followed by an exploration of some magnificent tropical gardens.

As you head towards the northeast tip of the island, make a delicious stop at Kahuku Farms for farm-harvested vanilla bean

ice cream, tangy lilikoi sorbet or thirst-quenching fruit smoothies and mango iced tea. If you are there on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, you can also take a tractor-pulled wagon ride through one of Oahu’s most beautiful farms to learn about its history and the crops grown here.

NORTH SHORE

At the physical and emotional heartland of the North Shore, the funky little town of Haleiwa is often described as the surfing capital of the world. Hawaiian for “house of the Frigate bird,” the town began its life in the early 1900s as a service town for the surrounding sugar plantations. Today, its architectural heritage is strictly preserved so that now even McDonalds is disguised in a shack. This is a laid-back place of surf shops, retro diners, shave ice stands, and boutiques selling shell jewellery and bone art. Don’t spend all your time in town, however, for the real attraction is the coastline to the east, often coined “the eight mile miracle,” with breaks at Banzai Pipeline, Sunset Beach and Waimea Bay blazed into every serious surfer’s subconscious.

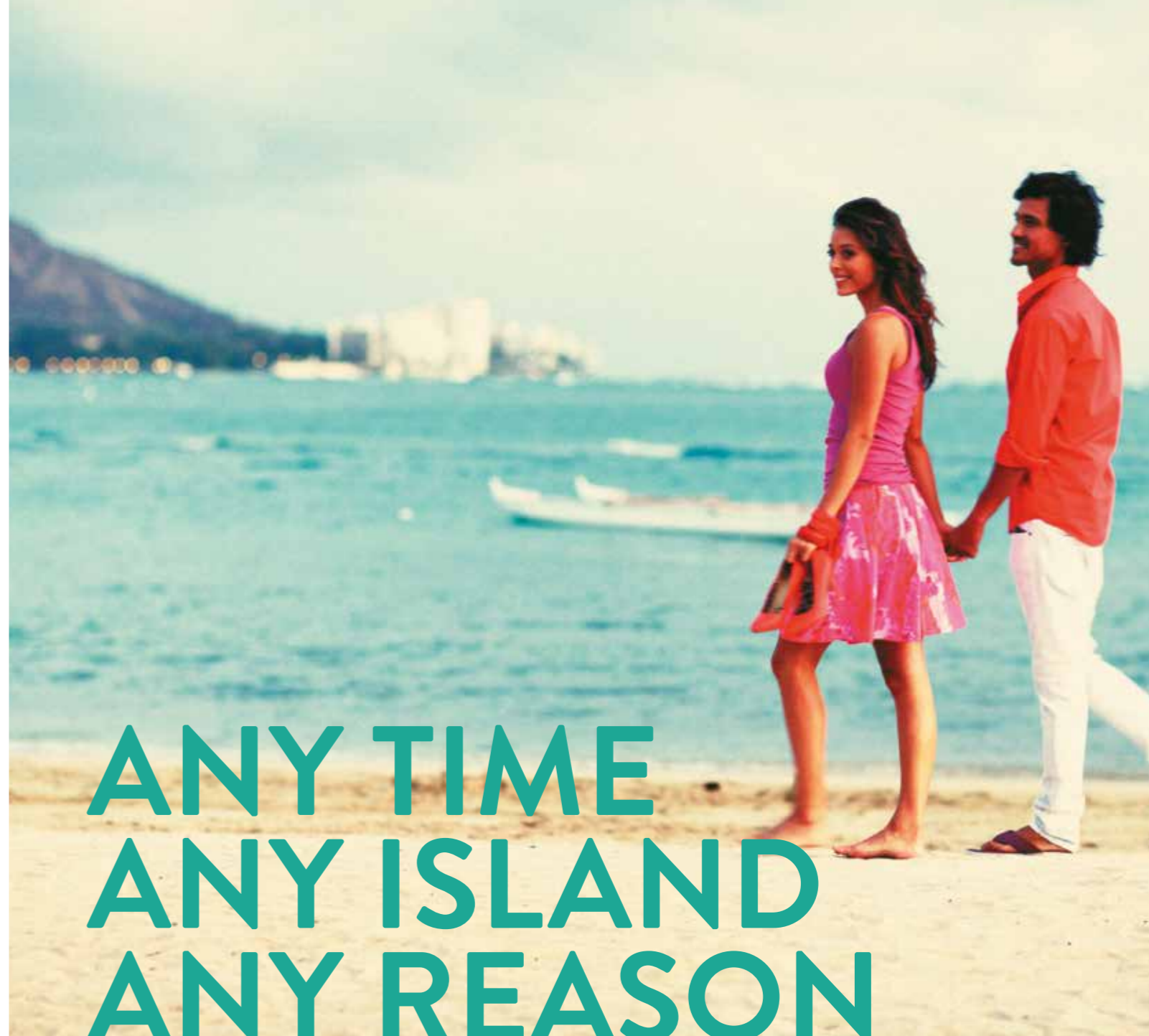
Each winter, swells generated in the North Pacific Ocean deliver monstrous, magnificent and often extremely dangerous waves to the North Shore. Be warned – this is

ANIMAL INSTINCTS

Above: Laniakea Beach on Oahu’s North Shore is home to an impressive turtle sanctuary.

Kauai calling

For those who want even more adventure, Kauai is a must-visit. Top of the list is the 28-kilometre Na Pali Coast with its dramatic mountains plunging directly into the sea. You can explore this ruggedly beautiful landscape in a variety of ways including by kayak, catamaran, helicopter or on foot. The most popular day hike is a 13-kilometre trek, half of it along the dramatic coastline and the other half up to the stunning 100-metre Hanakapi’ai Falls. There is also a fun kayak trip up the Wailua River to another terrific waterfall plus hiking around Waimea Canyon, often called the Grand Canyon of the Pacific. Local guide Danny Hashimoto offers stellar insider adventures.



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pro-surfing territory, and even the best of the best have met their maker trying to ride the thumping waves here.

Take Waimea Bay, for instance. In summer, the deep blue water is velvety and as flat as a sheet of glass. I swim here surrounded by schools of flying fish scooting over the surface and am amazed at the bravado of people hurtling themselves into the water from nearby Jump Rock. In winter, it is an entirely different place. The cold-season break at Waimea Bay was key to the development of big wave surfing; the Quiksilver Big Wave Invitational in memory of Eddie Aikau honours the legendary surfer and the North Shore's first lifeguard. The competition is only held when the waves are larger than six metres.

An entirely more low-key option is a walk through Waimea Valley, which is deeply rooted in Hawaiian history and culture. It is home to one of the finest collections of Polynesian plants in existence including taro, banana and sweet potato. There is a pretty waterfall at the end of the valley.

Another highlight, closer to Haleiwa, is the turtle sanctuary at Lanikea Beach. More than a dozen turtles call this cove home as they love to feed on the limu seaweed on the rocky headland. Local turtle conservation volunteers monitor the beach to ensure no one touches them but you are free to swim in the clear warm water where the turtles often glide right past you. The day we are here two turtles haul themselves onto the beach for a serious sunbaking session. Luckily they didn't need sunscreen, like we did. •

Photographs courtesy of Susan Gugh Henly and Hawaii Tourism.

ONE DIRECTION

Above, from left: A performer pointing the way at the Polynesian Cultural Center; Kualoa Ranch is the setting for a number of Hollywood blockbusters, including *Jurassic Park*.

travel facts

GETTING THERE

Hawaiian Airlines, Jetstar and Virgin Australia all fly to Honolulu.

- Jetstar. 131-538; jetstar.com
- Hawaiian Airlines. 1300-669-106; hawaiianairlines.com.au
- Virgin Australia. 136-789; virginaustralia.com

WHEN TO GO

Anytime. The temperatures are a comfortable 25-28 degrees Celsius year-round.

WHERE TO STAY

- Aqua Hotels & Resorts. 1-808/924-6543; aquaresorts.com
- Aston Hotels and Resorts. 1-808/924-2924; astonhotels.com
- Hilton Hawaiian Village. 1-808/949-4321; hiltonhawaiianvillage.com
- Hyatt Regency Waikiki Beach Resort and Spa. 1-808/923-1234; waikiki.hyatt.com
- The Modern Honolulu. 1-866/970-4161; themodernhonolulu.com
- Trump International Hotel, Waikiki Beach Walk. 1-808/683-777; trumpwaikikihotel.com
- Turtle Bay Resort. 1-808/293-6000; turtlebayresort.com

WHAT TO DO

- Faith Surf School (Waikiki & North Shore). faithsurfschool.com
- Hans Hedemann Surf School (Waikiki & North Shore). hanshedemannsurfschool.com
- Hawaiian Ocean Adventures. hawaiianoceanadventures.com
- Kahuku Farms. kahukufarms.com
- Kauai Quest. kauaiquest.com
- Kayak Kauai. kayakkauai.com
- Kualoa Ranch. kualoa.com
- Napali Catamarans. napali.com
- Safari Helicopters. safarihelicopters.com
- Waimea Valley. waimeavalley.net
- Wild Side Specialty Tours. sailhawaii.com

FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact the Hawaii Tourism Authority for tips on travelling to the American island state. discoverhawaii.com.au and gohawaii.com

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