

Under the Sea



by Cheryl Chee Tsutsumi

Take the plunge and discover Hawaii's hidden underwater snorkeling hot spots.

For water lovers vacationing in Hawaii, the Pacific Ocean is a big blue playground. With beautiful coral reefs to explore and lots of fascinating marine life to see up close, snorkeling is a popular pastime. But where can you go to avoid the crowds? Four of Hawaii's water experts reveal their secret locations.

OPEN WATERS ON OAHU

Tori Cullins, a partner in Wild Side Specialty Tours, gives us the scoop on an overlooked spot in the Gathering Place.

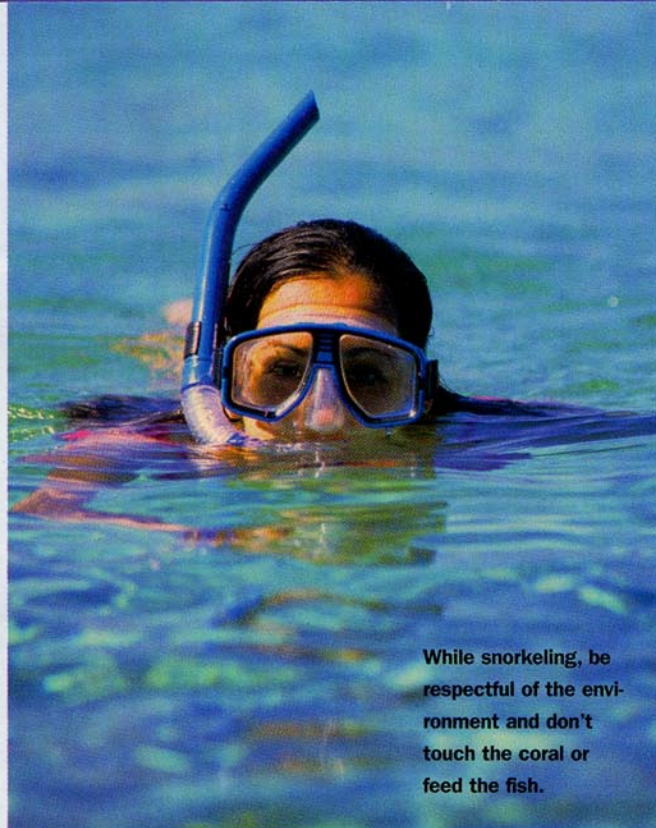
"The JW Marriott Ihilani Resort & Spa Hotel at Ko Olina, on the leeward coast of Oahu, borders an important historic site, Lanikuhonua, which has a small beachfront cove protected by large boulders and three natural lagoons," she says. "These are the 'sacred pools' where Queen Kaahumanu (Kamehameha's favorite wife) supposedly bathed and participated in religious rites.

"About 100 yards off Lanikuhonua is probably the most extensive, best-preserved reef on the leeward side of Oahu. It has massive fan, antler and lobe coral heads that date back centuries, and is the home of extensive communities of marine life, including *honu* (green sea turtles), *moi* (threadfin fish), *lauwiliwili* (milletseed butterflyfish), *hinalea lauwili* (saddle wrasse), *kibikibi* (Moorish idol), *mamo* (Hawaiian sergeant majors), *oili uwuwuwi* (fantail file-fish), scarface blenny and Hawaiian white-spotted toby.

"Snorkelers should be aware, however, that there is no lifeguard on duty in the area. Also, ocean conditions during the winter season can get very rough."

MAUI COUNTY MUSTS

Randy Coon, co-founder and president of Maui-based Trilogy Excursions, takes us below the surface for two of Maui County's serene, often-unnoticed spots.



PHILIP ROSENBERG

While snorkeling, be respectful of the environment and don't touch the coral or feed the fish.

"There's a nice stretch of reef between Olowalu and the cliffs south of Lahaina where you can snorkel in about two to three feet of water," Coon shares about the waters off Maui. "Because the water is shallow, especially at low tide, you need to watch out for sharp coral and lava. This area is best for snorkeling during the winter months when the ocean tends to be flat on the south shore. It also can be good during the summer months as long as there is not a large south swell, which reduces the visibility and even can be dangerous.

"Be sure to bring an underwater camera if you have one. Angelfish, wrasses and *weke* (goatfish) are quite common here. Green sea turtles also can be seen from time to time, and during the

SNORKELING SAFETY TIPS

To ensure you have a safe, enjoyable snorkeling experience in Hawaii, it's wise to follow these safety tips.

- Practice in shallow water.
- Check the equipment carefully and know how it functions.
- Learn how to clear water from the snorkel.
- Learn how to put your mask back on while you tread water.
- Be careful not to swim or be carried by a current too far from shore or the boat.
- Never snorkel alone.
- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim.
- Be knowledgeable of the water environment you are in and its potential hazards, such as deep and shallow areas, currents, depth charges, obstructions, and where the entry and exit points are located. The more informed you are, the more aware you will be of hazards and safe practices.
- Pay attention to local weather conditions and forecasts. Head for land at the first sign of bad weather.

- Do not drink alcohol when you engage in water activities. Alcohol impairs your judgment, balance and coordination; affects your swimming and diving skills; and reduces your body's ability to stay warm.
- Protect your skin: Sunlight contains two kinds of ultraviolet rays. UVA increases the risk of skin cancer, skin aging and other skin diseases. UVB causes sunburn and can lead to skin cancer. Limit the amount of direct sunlight you receive between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., and wear a sunscreen with a sun protection factor containing a high rating (at least 15).
- Look but don't touch when you come across coral reefs. Do not rub up against it, step on it or drop anchor on it. Coral is a living thing and only nine instances of abuse can kill it. Also, it is against the law to break, damage or remove any stony coral from the ocean.

Courtesy of the American Red Cross. Peruse the website for more information: www.redcross.org/services/hss/tips/healthtips/safetywater.html