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Aloha, Oahu
Eric Rosen
2/1/2011

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We don't have much of a winter here in Los Angeles, but what we do get—clouds, rain, short days—can get downright depressing. That's when we start looking westwards to the tropical islands of Hawaii, America's Pacific playground.



Oahu, the most populous of the islands, and home to Honolulu and the famous beach of Waikiki, also has some of the most exciting new hotels, restaurants and spas.

So if all those episodes of the new *Hawaii Five-O* have you dreaming of a trip to Oahu (and Alex O'Loughlin's abs), it's time to book your ticket.

Hotels

We know you head to Hawaii for the beach, but you've got to rest up somewhere after a day on the waves, and these fabulous resorts, new and old, provide perfect settings for travelers to make the most out of their trip.

Honolulu has some of the best hotels in the island chain, including classics like the recently refurbished **Royal Hawaiian**, but there are also two new Honolulu hotels generating a lot of buzz these days.

The **Edition Waikiki** is a joint venture from Marriott and boutique hotelier Ian Schrager, and is positioned as a hip "urban resort" that gives you the best of the beach and the city all in one location. Not only does it have a private beach and an outdoor movie theater, but it also has special touches in the 353 guest rooms like enormous 46-inch LCD TVs, Frette linens, specially programmed iPads, a restaurant by Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto, a hidden lobby bar that you reach through a bookcase and the newest hotspot in town—Crazybox nightclub. This is definitely where jetsetters in the know come for some under-the-radar R&R. And if you're looking to use your Hawaiian vacation as an excuse to get fit, the hotel also runs custom-designed surfing and bikini boot camps, so be sure to stretch.

The other new hotel that's making waves in the city is the **Trump Waikiki**, a gleaming new 38-story tower right on the beach, whose 462 luxury guest rooms and suites boast perfect views of Diamond Head and the Pacific. This hotel is great for families traveling together, since many of the rooms and suites have residential touches like full kitchens with state-of-the-art appliances, though you'll find us hanging out at the sixth-story infinity pool or in the Spa at Trump. That is, before we settle into the elegant Wai'olu Ocean View Lounge for a cocktail or dinner at BLT Steak.

If you're hoping to take the whole brood along, consider waiting until **Aulani**, a Disney Resort & Spa at Ko Olina on Oahu's less developed, rugged west coast, opens at the end of August. The 21-acre resort will have 360 guest rooms, 481 Disney Vacation Club Villas, several pools, a snorkeling lagoon, four restaurants, two lounges and a sparkling new 18,000-square-foot spa, as well as distinctively Disney touches like a storytelling firepit, character meet-and-greets and pool parties.

Besides the new and recent openings, several existing properties are undergoing major renovations. The **J.W. Marriott Ihilani Resort and Spa** is redoing all its 387 guest rooms and suites with a fresh palette of bright Hawaiian colors and native-inspired art work, as well as a newly redone Ihilani Spa, all of which is set to reopen

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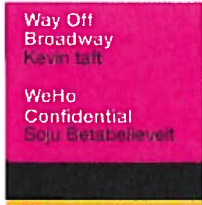
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any day now. Its signature restaurant, Azul, features locally sourced, seasonal, organic produce and meats that come from Hawaii whenever possible.

The SpaHalekulani at **Halekulani** has recently unveiled a new spa treatment called Waianuhea that draws up on the healing waters of Gray's Beach, a place said to have spiritual healing energy, for its new roster of treatments such as the Paaki Salt Ocean Scrub and the Hawaiian Lomi Massage.

Restaurants

All that surfing and sunning is bound to work up an appetite, and Oahu is a great place to indulge since it has a thriving and diverse food culture that draws inspiration from all over the Pacific Rim.

There are three new restaurants at the **Royal Hawaiian Center**. Five-O Bar and Lounge, which will have live music daily, a Japanese buffet opening in August and Il Lupino Trattoria and Wine Bar from restaurateur Wolfgang Zwieger.

Sushi Izakaya Shinn just opened in December with a menu that mixes traditional Japanese izakaya (small plate) fare with more contemporary cuisine.

And for those who just love novelty T-shirts, the **Hard Rock Café Waikiki** just opened in its new location in November, with a massive 13,000 square feet of space housing the restaurant and store.

Any foodie will tell you that the place to eat in Honolulu is **Alan Wong's**. This upscale culinary "studio" is incongruously located on the third floor of a nondescript office building, but don't be fooled—it's been a Hawaii landmark for 15 years now, thanks to bold dishes like seafood cakes with caper mayonnaise and tsukemono relish. Our other top pick is Town Restaurant (townkaimuki.com) for its fantastic menu of organic produce and protein.

Some of the other fabulous restaurants in town include Indigo, Le Bistro, 3660 On the Rise and Side Street Inn.

See

Most folks head straight for the beach, but Honolulu has some amazing history to it. Explore that mythic past by taking a tour of the **Iolani Palace**, the official seat of Hawaii's monarchy and the only royal residence on American soil.

The **Waikiki Aquarium** is set to open its new exhibit on the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, complete with a living reef ecosystem, later this spring.

Kualoa Ranch, meanwhile, where folks can come for lessons in native Hawaiian culture and crafts, as well as adventure pastimes like horseback riding and ATV excursions, has started hosting guests in the evenings for a Hawaiian-style backyard barbecue dinner, with ancient chants and live hula performances.

The **Waimea Valley** has been a sacred place for more than 700 years, and is home to dozens of ancient archaeological sites, a 150-acre botanical collection and a variety of cultural activities. The park is also now offering Saturday hikes through the dramatic landscape on the last week of each month, with guides who will teach hikers about native plants and animals on the way to the Waimea Waterfall.

On the water, **Atlantis Navatek Cruises** is offering an all-new Whale Watch Breakfast Cruise now through the end of March. The cruise lasts two hours along Oahu's south shore, and includes a continental breakfast and guaranteed whale sightings. **Star of Honolulu** also offers an Early Bird Whale Watch Cruise through the first week of May, with a trained crew of naturalists to answer guests' questions about the native marine life.

Events

It's a big year on Oahu, with a host of fun events you won't find anywhere else. The most imminent is the **Dole Cannery Shops'** inaugural **Hawaii Chocolate Festival** on Feb. 26, which will include exhibitor booths showcasing exotic goodies like chocolate vodka and chocolate pearls, as well as live entertainment, chef demonstrations, a Chocolate Spa and the Cocoa Café.

March 8 is the annual outdoor **Mardi Gras Street Festival** in Honolulu's downtown arts district, while the following week is the **Honolulu Festival**, Hawaii's premier cultural event, which is celebrated to promote peace and understanding between the people of Hawaii and nations of the Pacific Rim. It features performances, art demonstrations and a parade.

March 21-27 is the Ala Moana Center **Shop A Lea** weeklong spring shopping event, while April 22-23 will be the 2011 **Kahala Food and Wine Classic** at the Kahala Hotel and Resort. At the end of the month, on March 30, the **9th Annual Waikiki SPAM Jam** will take place on Kalakaua Avenue in Waikiki, with two entertainment stages, dancers, local musicians, vendors and food stalls, all celebrating Hawaii's processed lunch meat of choice.

Single, family, land, sea—no matter who you are and what you're looking for, Oahu has something to offer all



POLLQUESTION

What's your favorite way to shop?

- Top dollar for top fashions
- There's nothing like thrifting
- Bargains, discounts and sales, oh my!
- Only the occasional splurge

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kinds of travelers this winter.

For more information about Oahu and up-to-date news, check out visitoahu.com, follow the Oahu Visitors Bureau on Twitter at [@OahuVB](https://twitter.com/OahuVB) or become a Facebook fan at facebook.com/OahuHawaii.


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