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 with *Kitty Bean Yancey, Laura Bly and Jayne Clark*

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## USA TODAY readers name Honolulu Best American Destination

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By Laura Bly, USA TODAY

A drumroll and a few strums of a Hawaiian steel guitar, please: Honolulu is the winner of USA TODAY's "Best American Destinations" sweepstakes.

The NCAA bracket-style contest, which launched five weeks ago and generated more than 70,000 votes, started with 32 U.S. destinations. Readers could vote once a week for their favorite spot, which advanced to the next round based on popularity. Orbitz.com provided a weekly prize of a \$500 Orbitz.com airfare credit and a grand prize of a \$2,000 credit.



CAPTION By Jewel Samad, AFP/Getty Images

In one bracket, Honolulu faced off against major U.S. cities including New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, New Orleans, San Antonio, Texas, Orlando, Las Vegas, Miami, Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle and Minneapolis-St. Paul.

The other bracket, led by Yellowstone National Park, included several other national parks plus Charleston, S.C.; Savannah, Ga.; Branson, Mo.; Santa Fe, N.M.; Park City, Utah, San Antonio and Aspen, Colo.

Jay Talwar, senior vice president of marketing for the Hawaii Convention and Visitors Bureau, cheerfully admits to stacking the deck via a Twitter and Facebook campaign that tapped into both the state's exotic reputation among visitors and a "hometown sense of pride." (In the pre-social media days, notes Talwar, Hawaii residents "lit up the switchboards" to help keep *American Idol* finalist Jasmine Trias going as far as third place.)

"We quickly saw a lot of local residents and Hawaii fans across the country pledging their support to vote for Honolulu by retweeting HVCB's Twitter updates and posting individual messages on their Facebook pages," adds tourism spokesman Nathan Kam. "As we monitored the online buzz, we felt we might have a bit of an edge over the Yellowstone 'community' since the black bears, elk, and bighorns didn't seem to be very active in social networking."

So, ho'omaika'i (congratulations) to Honolulu. While it's probably the least favorite part of my favorite state - that iconic view of Diamond Head and the mai tais at the Halekulani Hotel notwithstanding - I can see why it's a winner.

Posted Jul 2 2010 4:37PM

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