

FREE DESTINATION GUIDE

HONOLULU

United States (Hawaii)



Waikiki sparkle, Diamond Head views, and the North Shore an hour from the city.

SAFETY: US Domestic: no State Dept advisory

Travelling with ActorTonyB & Nala The Shih Tzu

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Top Sights

- **Waikiki Beach.** The famous two mile curve of sand; surf lessons here run on gentle, forgiving waves made for beginners.
- **Diamond Head State Monument.** The crater hike above Waikiki; reservations are required, so book the early slots for cool air and clear views.
- **Pearl Harbor and the USS Arizona Memorial.** Book the free memorial tickets on recreation.gov the moment the window opens; they go fast.
- **Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve.** A volcanic crater turned snorkeling sanctuary; reservations required and it closes Mondays and Tuesdays for the reef to rest.
- **North Shore Day Trip.** Waimea Bay, Haleiwa town, and winter's giant surf watching at Banzai Pipeline (from the sand, with respect).
- **Iolani Palace.** The only royal palace on US soil, and the best single stop for understanding Hawaiian history.
- **Bishop Museum.** Hawaii's great museum of culture and science; give it a full morning.
- **Manoa Falls and the Lyon Arboretum.** A rainforest walk 15 minutes from Waikiki that feels like another island entirely.

Local Tips

- Reserve Diamond Head, Hanauma Bay, and Pearl Harbor tickets the day booking windows open; walk ups are rare.
- Reef safe sunscreen is the law in Hawaii; buy mineral based (zinc or titanium) before you go or on arrival.
- TheBus is genuinely good and cheap; a rental car matters only for North Shore and windward days, and Waikiki parking is pricey.
- Sunrise is the local superpower: hike early, beach early, and let the afternoon be for naps and shave ice.
- Book luaus and catamaran sails ahead in high season; sunset sails sell out first.
- Learn the wind logic: trade winds cool the afternoons, and the leeward (west) side is drier than the windward (east) side.

Customs & Etiquette

Do

- Live the aloha you came for: patience, waves to drivers, and mahalo said often and meant.
- Remove your shoes when entering a home, and ask before walking onto private land or kapu (restricted) areas.
- Give honu (sea turtles) and monk seals serious space: stay at least 10 feet from turtles and 50 feet from seals; it is the law, and fines are real.
- Pack out everything at beaches and trails; caring for the aina (land) is everyone's job here.

Please Don't

- Do not take sand, lava rocks, or coral home; it is disrespectful in Hawaiian culture and restricted in protected areas.
- Do not touch or stand on coral while snorkeling; fins up, float, and let the reef live.
- Do not honk your horn; Hawaii drivers barely use them and it marks you instantly.
- Do not underestimate the ocean: never turn your back on the surf at blowholes and rocky shores, and swim at lifeguarded beaches.

Things to Know Before You Go

Currency. US dollar (USD). Cards everywhere; island prices run high, so budget a Hawaii premium on groceries and dining.

Language. English and Hawaiian. You will hear aloha (hello and goodbye), mahalo (thank you), and ohana (family) daily, and using them back is welcome.

Best time to visit. April to June and September to mid November: warm water, thinner crowds, and better prices. Winter brings the big North Shore surf and the rain.

Getting around. TheBus circles the island for a few dollars. Rent a car for a North Shore day, and walk Waikiki: everything is within a mile.

Five phrases that open doors

Aloha	Hello, goodbye, and love in one word
Mahalo	Thank you
Ohana	Family, including the one you choose
Mauka / Makai	Toward the mountains / toward the sea, how locals give directions
Pau hana	Done with work, time to relax

What to Bring

- Mineral reef safe sunscreen (zinc or titanium based); Hawaii law restricts common chemical sunscreen ingredients.
- Water shoes or reef walkers for rocky entries and waterfall trails.
- A dry bag for boat days and a sand proof pouch for the beach.
- A light layer for evening trade winds and aggressively air conditioned restaurants.
- Your snorkel mask if you own one that fits; rentals add up over a week.
- An appetite for early mornings: sunrise is when Oahu does its best work.

What to Expect

Weather: 75 to 85 F nearly all year. Brief showers pass fast, mostly on the windward side; Waikiki stays famously dry.

Pace: island time with city polish. Service is friendly and unhurried, traffic to the North Shore is real, and nobody is in your rush.

Costs in practice: Hawaii premium is real on groceries, dining, and parking. Beaches, hikes, and sunsets, the best parts, are free.

How tourists are received: warmly, with respect returned for respect. Learn the etiquette in this guide and locals will treat you like a guest, not a crowd.

What NOT to Bring

- Chemical sunscreens with oxybenzone or octinoxate; sale is restricted in Hawaii and reefs pay the price.
- Fresh fruits and plants to take home without declaring them; USDA agriculture inspection screens bags leaving Hawaii and undeclared items are confiscated.
- Sand, lava rocks, or coral as souvenirs; culturally disrespectful and restricted in protected areas.
- A mainland schedule mindset; build slack in, the island rewards it.

Safety Rating

US State Dept advisory level: US domestic destination (no State Department advisory applies)

State Department advisory levels rate foreign countries, so no level applies to Hawaii. Honolulu is one of the safer big beach cities in the US; the serious risks here come from the ocean itself: shore break, rip currents, and high surf injure more visitors than anything else. Heed lifeguards and posted conditions every single swim.

Three practical safety moves

- Swim at lifeguarded beaches and ask the lifeguard about conditions; if in doubt, do not go out is the local rule.
- Never leave anything visible in a rental car at beaches and trailheads; use the trunk before you arrive, not after.
- Know your limits on hikes: ridges are narrow, muddy after rain, and rescues are common for the unprepared.

Advisory levels change. Check the current rating for your destination at travel.state.gov before you book and again before you fly. Summary reflects the advisory in effect in October 2026.

Budget Snapshot

Rough per person daily ranges in US dollars, including lodging, food, local transport, and activities. Airfare not included. Treat these as planning estimates, not quotes.

Tier	Per day (USD)	What it looks like
Budget traveler	\$160 to \$220 per day	Waikiki hostel or budget hotel a block off the beach, TheBus days, plate lunch counters, free beach time.
Mid range	\$300 to \$430 per day	Beachfront hotel, a catamaran sail, luau night, rental car for the North Shore day.
Comfort	\$540 plus per day	Luxury resort, private surf lessons, spa day, and premium dining in Kapahulu and Kaimuki.

Ready to Go?

You have the sights, the tips, the customs, and the budget. Now put dates on it. Compare flights, stays, cars, and activities for Honolulu in one place, with live prices and traveler reviews.

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