



OAHU
Honolulu

HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

Retro Hawaii

From tiki bars to tropical shirts and the sweet sound of the ukulele, Hawaii's aloha spirit is alive and well

WORDS CARRIE HUTCHINSON



Still the
best fun on
water

A wave picks up the canoe and plummets it towards the shore. The riders squeal and whoop, but there's no cause for concern. "Even if it fills up with water it will never sink," says Ted Bush, owner of Waikiki Beach Services. "It's the only vessel in the entire US Coast Guard fleet that doesn't require life jackets.

"This is the highlight of everyone's trip," he continues, as another four people and boat crew push an outrigger into the water. "People feel a sense of history." It's no wonder. The first outrigger canoes, which seated up to 80 people and all their supplies, were thought to have reached the Aloha islands in about 200AD.

"Dudie Miller, who was the captain of the Hui Nalu canoe club, recognised the only real water men were the canoe guys," says Ted of the precursors to the Waikiki Beach Services. Back in the 1920s and '30s there were just two hotels on Waikiki's sands, including the freshly minted, Spanish-style Royal Hawaiian, both owned by the Matson company. As Ted tells it, every day Dudie's team rescued guests from the ocean, so he approached the owners and proposed: "Why don't

I have my beach boys watch all your people on the shore?" The Hui Nalu canoe club became Waikiki Beach Services in 1955, and still operates from the Royal Hawaiian.

Step back in time

Today, Ted and his team of 101 beach boys also offer surf, stand-up paddleboard and swimming lessons, and operate the Royal Hawaiian's pool services. The days when Ted could look back from the water and see an unobstructed view of the lush mountain range behind Honolulu are now a fond memory. But even a slightly intrepid visitor willing to stray beyond the glitz and glamour will discover there's still a little of the original aloha spirit to be found.

Of course, there's the Royal Hawaiian, also known as the 'Pink Palace of the Pacific', celebrating its 90th birthday this year. While it now boasts WiFi, mod cons and a newer tower building, its level of service and palm-groved charm remain the gold standard on the island. On Monday evenings, it also hosts the only beachfront luau on Waikiki. On any other night, go next door to Duke's Waikiki – named after monster-wave surfer Duke Kahanamoku – and order the signature mai tai for a little taste of old Oahu. >>



TOP TO BOTTOM: The 'Pink Palace of the Pacific', decor at the Surf Jack Hotel, Luau at the Royal Hawaiian. LEFT: Waikiki Beach Services' canoe.

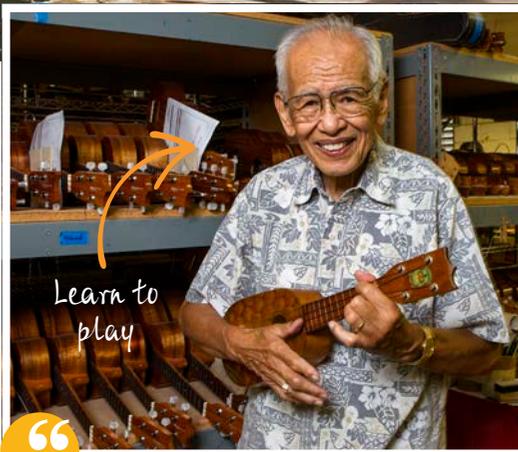




The cocktail hour

For the first-time visitor to Honolulu it can seem as though tiki style is a long-distant memory. Head off the main drag in Waikiki though, and you'll discover Arnold's Beach Bar and Grill. Plant yourself on a stool and choose from the list of mai tais, tiki teas and margaritas, all just US\$6 during a happy hour which conveniently spans 10am to 6pm. Need an alcohol-free refresher? Head to Waiolo Shave Ice's original outlet, which opened in 1940, and try the delicious *haupia* (coconut), a local favourite.

Located in an unlikely industrial zone and founded in 1957, La Mariana Sailing Club is the last of Honolulu's original tiki bars, with a fountain, locals propped up at the bar, a man playing classic tunes on a keyboard and vintage Hawaiiana decor. The food, including classic Hawaiian dishes *pupu* (appetisers), salmon



Learn to play

My kids all have to take ukulele lessons

sashimi, *ahi* (tuna) poke and *tako* (octopus) poke, are excellent (and served in huge portions).

Sweet sounds

Depending on your point of view, the ukulele is either a cherished stringed instrument or a torture device. These days, thanks to muscians such as Jake Shimabukuro, many folks realise it's the former. You'll find these fans lining up at Kamaka

Hawaii for the free factory tour (Tuesdays to Fridays at 10.30am). Founded by Sam Kamaka in 1916, the company is still a family affair, with a fourth generation now creating the distinctive pineapple ukulele, with its oval body and rich sound, as well as the more easily identified pinch-waisted ukes.

"My kids all have to take ukulele lessons," says Fred Kamaka Jr, who's running the tour today because his 92-year-old father, Fred Sr, is feeling a little under the weather. "When they're five, they get a Pineapple because that's the ukulele my grandfather created.

Eventually they graduate to a concert ukulele, and my daughter got a fancy tenor one for her graduation." You can take home one of the fine instruments, formed using a local acacia wood called *koa*, although it will set you back at least US\$995.

Wear it well

Of all the artefacts of Hawaii's past, the one most people associate with the islands is the aloha shirt. First designed in the mid-1930s, they are experiencing a revival. Retro retailers Tin Can Mailman and Barrio Vintage stock the finest preloved Hawaiian shirts and dresses in their Chinatown store, and a new wave of designers is reinventing the attire for a new age. Roberta Oaks, who also has her shopfront in Chinatown, arrived in Hawaii from Missouri and started her business after buying a sewing machine in a garage sale. Inspired by nature, architecture and artists such as >>



Pegge Hopper and Georgia O’Keeffe, she designs some of her own fabrics to create a different style of aloha shirt.

“I was the first to do a modern take,” she says. “I refined the cut and brought a fashionable and youthful feel to something that had become an old man’s shirt. They were fun in the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s, and then they got really bad. We made them fun again.”

Sleep in style

Roberta has also collaborated with another venture bringing style to the retro scene, the Surfjack Hotel & Swim Club. The 1960s motel was completely gutted and, under the guidance of Honolulu-based design company The Vanguard Theory, has been fitted out with local art, mid-century furniture and retro detailing by Hawaiian designers. Matthew Tapia’s ‘Wish You Were Here’ mural on the bottom of the pool is a stand-out, and one of Waikiki’s most Instagrammed sights. Roberta is responsible for



the retro-cool design of the women’s staff uniform. As well as providing guests with a sense of the aloha spirit – there’s live music in Mahini & Sun’s restaurant and bar, classes in making floral crowns and excursions to nearby farms – the hotel’s open-air, surf-shack vibe lobby area has become a hub for the local creative scene, ensuring the true sense of Hawaii is set to endure. ✈

Travel info

Jetstar has great low fares to Hawaii from Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.

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Diggin’ the scene: retro Hawaii on screen

- In his time as a movie star, Elvis was the leading man in a string of movies set on the Hawaiian islands. *Blue Hawaii*, filmed in 1961, was the first and, depending on your point of view, the best of the bunch. Check it out today and you will see Waikiki Beach the way it used to be.
- In the same year, Deborah Walley stepped into Sandra Dee’s espadrilles to film *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* on location at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. Between bouts of teenaged romantic confusion, *Gidget* puts everyone to shame with her surfing prowess.
- An instant hit when it was released in 1953 and still loved today, *From Here to Eternity* follows three American soldiers (played by Burt Lancaster, Montgomery Clift and Frank Sinatra) based in Hawaii before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The classic scene of Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr entangled on the shoreline was shot at Halona Cove on Oahu’s southeast coast.
- Before Alex O’Loughlin and Scott Caan became Steve and Danno in 2010, *Hawaii Five-0* played on small screens around the world for 12 years from 1968. During its time, the series starring Jack Lord and James MacArthur was one of the first TV series to be shot mainly on location (rather than a sound stage).

A young Elvis in *Blue Hawaii*. TOP LEFT: Browsing the racks at Roberta Oaks. INSET: Hawaiian kitsch from Tin Can Mailman.

