Exploring Oahu

Take some time to discover the history and culture of Hawaii

You came to Honolulu for the American Association of Orthodontists’ annual meeting, and while you’re here for all the latest in education and important interactions with your colleagues, you certainly don’t want to miss the natural beauty and culture surrounding you on this beautiful Hawaiian island.

With the exhibit hall doors closing each day at 3:30 p.m., be sure to take this opportunity to get out and explore Oahu.

With Waikiki as a central hub, you can explore the legendary North Shore one day and spend the next on the east side snorkeling at Hanauma Bay, a protected marine sanctuary with tons of colorful fish. Thrill seekers can Skydive at Mokuleia while daydreamers can relax peacefully on the beach.

Here are some tips and activities to consider when exploring Oahu.

The North Shore

If there is such a thing as a perfect wave, you’ll likely find it on the North Shore. The big, glassy winter waves of this legendary surf mecca attract the best surfers in the world.

Stretching for more than seven miles, the beaches of the North Shore host the world’s premier surfing competitions, including the Super Bowl of wave-riding, the Vans Triple Crown of Surfing.

To get to the North Shore, drive along northwestern Kamehameha Highway (Highway 83) from Haleiwa to Sunset Beach. From Waikiki, it takes about 45 minutes to get to Haleiwa and an hour to get to the beaches.

Top places to visit in the North Shore:
- Waimea Bay: Waimea Bay is the birthplace of big wave surfing and is the venue for the Quicksilver in Memory of Eddie Aikau Big Wave Memorial. This surf competition pays homage to legendary surfer Eddie Aikau and takes place only when the epic Waimea waves are at least 20 feet high.
- Banzai Pipeline (Shukai Beach): The merciless waves of Pipeline break just 50 to 100 yards off the beach over a shallow reef, making this one of the most dangerous surf spots in the world.
- Sunset Beach: The northernmost surf spot on the North Shore is Sunset Beach. The long wave breaks here are the setting for the O’Neill World Cup of Surfing, the second contest in the Vans Triple Crown of surfing.
- Haleiwa: This laid-back surf town with a country feel is the gateway to the North Shore, filled with restaurants and shops.
- Waikiki: World-famous Waikiki was once a playground for Hawaiian royalty. Known in Hawaiian as “spouting waters,” Waikiki was introduced to the world when its first hotel, the Moana Surfrider, was built on its shores in 1901.

Today, Waikiki is a vibrant gathering place for visitors from around the world. Along the main strip of Kalakaua Avenue, you’ll find shopping, dining and entertainment.

At legendary Waikiki Beach, a statue of Hawaiian hero Duke Kahanamoku welcomes you with open arms. Regarded as the “Father of modern surfing,” Kahanamoku grew up and surfed in Waikiki during the turn of the century. Discovered as a swimming sensation, he won Olympic gold medals in the 100-meter freestyle in 1912 and 1920, then went on to act in Hollywood and use his fame to spread the popularity of surfing.

Waikiki has a variety of beaches to explore. The main stretches include:
- Waikiki Beach: This is the classic shoreline behind the Sheraton Waikiki, the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and the Moana Surfrider.
- Kahina Beach: When the world thinks of Waikiki, this golden stretch of sand along Kalakaua Avenue is what comes to mind. To the east, Kapahulu Pier extends into the Pacific, giving you a view of the Waikiki shoreline.

Pearl Harbor

Pearl Harbor, named for the pearl oysters once harvested there, is the largest natural harbor in Hawaii and the only naval base in the United States to be designated a National Historical Landmark.

The aerial attack on Pearl Harbor resulted in 2,390 dead and hundreds wounded, and drove the United States into World War II. Today, these attacks are honored by memorial sites.

- USS Arizona Memorial: At 8:06 a.m. on Dec. 7, 1941, the USS Arizona was hit by a 1,760-pound armor-piercing bomb, which ignited its forward ammunition magazine. The catastrophic explosion that resulted sank this massive battleship in nine minutes, killing 1,177 crewmen. Begin your tour at the Visitor Center where you can view a film about the attack and view plaques honoring lives lost on that fateful day. You’ll then take a boat shuttle to the USS Arizona Memorial, a floating memorial built over the sunken hull of the Battleship USS Arizona, the final resting place for many of the ship’s crew.
- Battleship Missouri Memorial: General MacArthur accepted the unconditional Japanese surrender that ended WWII on Sept. 2, 1945, on the Surrender Deck of the Battleship Missouri Memorial. Today, the massive “Mighty Mo” is a living museum, with exhibits spanning three wars and five decades of service. Explore the decks of this 60,000-ton battleship, three football fields long and 20 stories tall. Stand on the Surrender Deck and view the documents that ended the war. Take a tour and get special access to restricted areas. And don’t miss the ship’s most stunning feature: towering 16-inch guns that could fire a 2,700-pound shell 23 miles.

( Source: Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau)