



To get the real feel of Hawaii, sign up for surf lessons at Waikiki. PICS/RISHAAD SAAM MEHTA

Hold your breath in Hawaii

When you think Hawaii, let your imagination move beyond its idyllic beaches. Rishaad Saam Mehta rides its crystal waves, goes on giddy mountain hikes and gapes at deep canyons to find that the state is ideal for adrenaline junkies



The Waikiki beach at Hawaii is a popular surfing destination

Hawaii

Best time to visit:
August-November

You need: 4 days

THINK Hawaii and I bet you're conjuring up a tropical paradise surrounded by the blue-green Pacific Ocean, complete with sun-kissed beaches and shady palms. If your imagination can get more vivid, you'll throw in garlanded hula girls and beach bars serving up fancy mai-tais.

Hawaii is definitely all that and much more. There is a side to the state that comes alive to travellers like me, who think lounging by the beach, doing absolutely nothing is a waste of time. If you go looking for it, Hawaii can be quite the destination for an adrenaline rush.

Ride the wave

Surfers from the world over come to cash in on the huge waves in the seas of Hawaii. If you've ever wondered how to ride these magnificent waves, or the art of he'e nalu as surfing was called by the ancient Hawaiians who actual-



ly invented the sport, Hawaii is the place to get started.

Surf lessons and board rentals are available at almost every tourist beach here. And, trust me, if you put your heart into it first thing in the morning, even if you're a first-timer, you'll be riding a wave before noon. While Waikiki is a popular choice, Oahu's (the island which is home to Honolulu) North Shore features some splendid surf beaches. Another sport you could give a shot is Stand Up Paddling (SUP), which is easier than surfing but requires an acute sense of balance.

Giddy hikes

After you've mastered the waters, it

is quite something to discover what Hawaii's giddy mountain hikes have to offer.

Volcanic upheavals in Hawaii present splendid hiking opportunities. Two and a half miles from Waikiki is the Diamond Head State Monument. A volcanic tuff cone, the trail to the summit is a steep 0.8 mile-hike to the top. It goes through several tunnels and up dizzying staircases, so be assured that the views to greet you will be stunning. The emerald Pacific down below is so clear that you can see the underwater coral reef.

But you haven't done the best, yet. The walk to the Diamond Head State Monument is a fairly simple one. To take it to the next level, hop on to a flight and head to the island of Kauai. The Na Pali Coast here offers some stunning treks, as does the rim of the magnificent Waimea Canyon.

Labelled the Grand Canyon of the Pacific by Mark Twain, Waimea Canyon was formed when Wai'ale'ale, the island's original broad dome volcano, was still the consistency of a not-yet-set pudding and slumped along an ancient faultline which then solidified into a sharp, east-facing line of cliffs. Later on, another shield volcano, Lihue, developed the island's east side producing new lava flow that drummed against these cliffs. That is why when trekking through the floor of this mind-boggling canyon, you will notice that the dramatic scenery is rendered even more the-



When it rains, the Waimea Canyon Waterfalls are a sight to behold



The Na Pali coast is draped in beautiful, aquamarine colours



The drive through Waimea canyon is spectacular, especially on a clear day

atrical by the fact that the western canyon walls are taller, thinner and more eroded.

Hire a car and drive to the Waimea Canyon. The drive through the Canyon State park is spectacular, especially on a clear day. Even when it rains, the waterfalls are truly a sight to behold.

There are plenty of trails that lead into the Canyon. The Kukui trail is very scenic but is also quite a workout. Strong legs and a brave heart is what you need, because this is one of the steepest trails on Kauai. If that's a bit much then just one mile down the trail is a bench with a stunning view. The Iliau Nature Loop is a flat 0.3 mile walk, close by, with great views.

Into the deep

While the Na Pali coast affords great trekking, the Pacific that borders it offers colourful snorkelling and scenic kayaking opportunities. While there, I marvel at the towering and craggy and multicoloured cliffs of the Na Pali coast which look stunning from the water.

This is also why I find myself bouncing along the waves in a rubber raft powered by two brutish 154-bhp outboard motors. These bad boys give the raft the ability to leap from wave to wave. If you are prone

to seasickness you would throw up your insides, but if not, this is fantastic adventure. The raft zooms across the Pacific from Port Allen to the Na Pali coast — a distance of approximately 35 miles — and along the way we stop to dive into the refreshing green waters to cool off or to swim alongside dolphins and sea turtles. While the latter cannot care less about our presence and remain unflustered and dignified, the dolphins are mighty excited to have us around and chatter away, some of them leaping clear out of the water in jubilation. Since the raft is very manoeuvrable and nimble, our captain explores little sea caves and hidden coves before we find a good reef and dive into the water with snorkels, masks and fins. It is a fascinating, psychedelic world underwater, with brave fish swimming up to my face and inquisitively peering into my mask.

Later that afternoon, as I sit on a beach under the sun, with a burger and cocktail, I realise after the high of four previous days that I am actually doing the quintessential Hawaiian holiday thing for the first time. But the Hawaii I will always remember and cherish is the one which gave me gooseflesh every other second.

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Could there be a better sight than surf boards for hire at Hawaii?

FACT FILE

GETTING THERE: Indian citizens need a US visa to visit Hawaii. Hawaii is an easy add-on to a US west coast trip. Flights from San Francisco to Honolulu take about 5 hours and cost approximately ₹35,000. The most convenient and comfortable way to get to San Francisco is by an Emirates via Dubai flight. It takes a fascinating 'short cut' over the North Pole getting you three fourths around the world in just 16 hours.

WHERE TO STAY: A good place to stay in Honolulu at Waikiki is the Park Shore Hotel. It's cheaper than the 4 and 5-star hotels in the vicinity. For details, log on to www.parkshorewaikiki.com.

In Kauai, Hotel Kauai Shores has big rooms, a soon to open pizza parlour and a serene beach. For details, log on to www.aquaresorts.com/hotels/kauai-shores-hotel.

WHAT TO DO: Done Tours Hawaii runs a private and customisable Circle Island Tour around Oahu. They show you fabulous beaches, lovely trekking trails interspersed with an interesting cultural commentary and there is no fixed duration so the whole day is yours. You can surf, trek, swim and lounge on a beach as long as you want (www.donetourshawaii.com)

Kauai Sea Tours offers a range of tours to the Na Pali coast. You can opt for the luxurious and comfortable catamaran which is definitely a smoother ride. But I'd choose the fast and more exciting raft any day. For details, log on to www.kauaiseatours.com

plan now



Singalila Trek

WHERE: UTTERAY, SIKKIM

WHY GO: The Singalila trek offers the best spots from where you can get rare glimpses of the four summits — Everest, Makalu, Kangchenjunga and Lhotse

WHAT TO SEE: View peaks in Tibet and Bhutan. The rhododendron and oak forests make this trek spectacular. Also visit the Singalila National Park

WHERE TO STAY: Log on to www.sikkimtourism.gov.in
WHEN TO GO: September



Supernatural Assam

WHERE: JATINGA VILLAGE

WHY GO: This one's grim — to view the macabre sight of several migratory birds falling dead

WHAT TO SEE: On moonless nights in September and October, between 6.30 pm-9 pm, migratory birds drop dead in Jatinga village in Assam, and no one knows why. While there, also visit Kamakhya Mandir and the unforgettable Kaziranga Park

WHERE TO STAY: www.assamtourism.org
WHEN TO GO: September, October



Festivals galore

WHERE: BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA

WHY GO: Two festivals, Old Craftsman's Days and the coronation ceremony at St. Martin's Cathedral

WHAT TO SEE: Old Craftsman's Days is all about remembering the past in Bratislava, and traditional Slovak souvenirs are on sale by locals. The coronation is a grand affair few miss

WHERE TO STAY: Log on to visit.bratislava.sk/en
WHEN TO GO: September



High on the arts

WHERE: LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

WHY GO: The historic city of Ljubljana comes alive with festivals and performances. No art lover would want to miss this high

WHAT TO SEE: Visit its many concerts, the Medieval Days festival, Codelli Classic Cars Festival and the Ex Ponto Theatre Festival

WHERE TO STAY: Log on to www.visitljubljana.com
WHEN TO GO: September