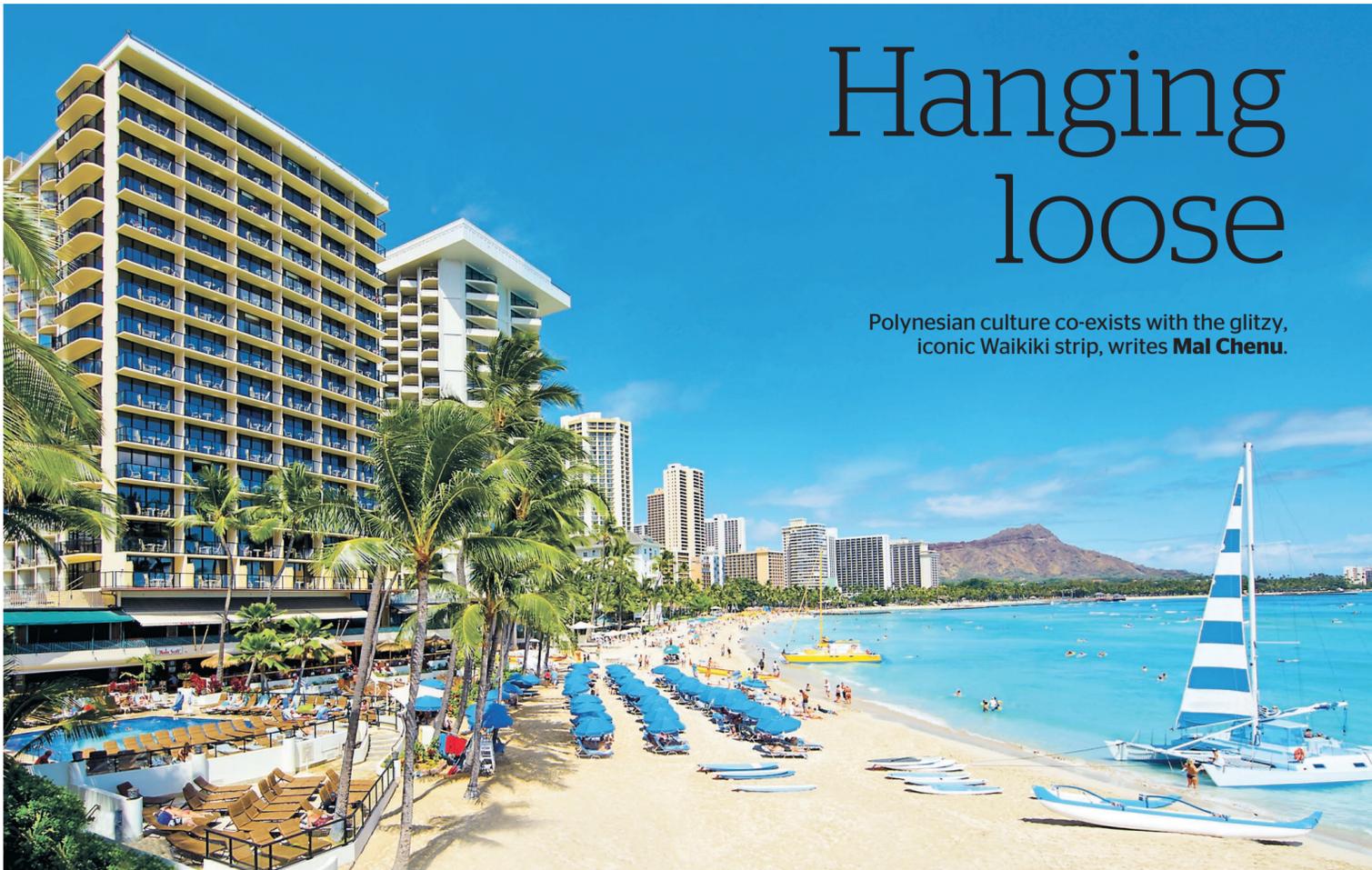


Beach HAWAII

THE AMERICAS EDITION



Hanging loose

Polynesian culture co-exists with the glitzy, iconic Waikiki strip, writes **Mal Chenu**.



Five more things to do on Oahu

EAT LIKE A LOCAL

Poke (pronounced poh-keh) bars are everywhere, serving up bowls of traditional raw-fish salad. Originally consisting of sliced ahi tuna, sea salt, seaweed and kukui nut, bowls now typically come with avocado, cucumber, onion, tomato, kimchi and soy or wasabi sauce. Hawaiian shave ice is also big here and favoured flavours include guava, pineapple, coconut cream, passionfruit, lychee, kiwifruit and mango. Spam is popular, too. Seriously. The annual Waikiki Spam Jam street festival attracts thousands and restaurants risk their reputations by creating spam specialities.

HIKE DIAMOND HEAD

This volcanic crater (aka Le'ahi) looms large at the eastern end of Waikiki and is a popular hike. The steep rocky climb winds up a 1.3-kilometre slope through spindly forest before stairways push on to the summit, bringing views of Oahu's south-eastern coastline and the islands of Molokai, Lanai and Maui.

SHOPPING

There aren't many beaches where you can wander off the sand and into Tiffany & Co., Coach, Gucci, YSL, Chanel and more. Lesser shops knock out Aloha shirts, jewellery, macadamia nuts, Kona coffee, dried pineapple and mango treats and various surfboard-themed kitsch. Not far away in downtown Honolulu is Ala Moana, the biggest open-air shopping centre in the world. Bargain hunters should head to Waikoleo Premium Outlets, about an hour from Honolulu.

Trip notes

FLY

Hawaiian Airlines flies to Honolulu from Sydney daily and from Brisbane three days a week. See hawaiianairlines.com.au

STAY

Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort is a 635-room beachfront property at the quieter western end of Waikiki. An emphasis on traditional Hawaiian culture extends to daily activities, wedding vow renewal ceremonies and local musicians performing at Kani Ka Pila Grille and The Reef Bar & Market Grill every night. Rooms from around \$316 plus taxes a night. See outrigger.com

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Mal Chenu was a guest of Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort.



Cooling dip: Swimming below a waterfall in the Waimea Valley. Photo: Alamy

Clouds pass through the property, rather than over it.

The turtle cleaning station is just 750 metres off Waikiki Beach. Around a dozen placid reptiles are gathered in sweet suspension just four metres below us as algae-eating fish go to work, bobbing in and out of the coral, cleaning carapaces and other hard-to-reach places. Here, at the aptly named Turtle Canyon, green sea turtles surface periodically right beside snorkellers for a gulp of air and photo ops before descending again for more attention.

Of more interest to some passengers on this excursion aboard the Holokai Catamaran is Josh, the shirtless crewman. He stands on the bow and his six-pack tightens as he blows a hearty note on the puu, or conch shell. Sunnies are lowered, cameras are raised, cougars form queues for selfies and the tip jar fills.

This is all somehow emblematic of Waikiki. Natural wonders, islander culture, bodies beautiful, plenty of photos and a mercantile imperative.

Waikiki Beach is wedged between luxe hotels and top-end shopping on one side and sweeping, gentle Pacific waves on the other. The recognisable Diamond Head volcanic cone looms away to the left, completing the postcard. Tourists from everywhere are crammed together cheek by towel on the thin strip of sand catching rays, sipping fruit drinks, gazing at waves.

It's easy to understand how surfing, long-boarding in

particular, originated here. An appropriately bronze statue of local legend Duke Paoa Kahanamoku and his long board stand on the sand at Waikiki central. His arms are extended in welcome and drip with fresh leis. The Duke took surfing from here to the world and he was even the local sheriff for 30 years. It is said he once rode a Waikiki wave for 1.8 kilometres. Apocryphal or not, the waves at the main break – known as “Canoes” – are perfect for beginners and those looking for an extended, easy ride. We catch a couple in an outrigger canoe with Faith Surf School and our flurry of furious paddling is rewarded with serene glides along mellow breaks. As we de-canoe, Captain Isaiah

gives us the shaka, as does just about everyone during our visit. The now universal “hang loose” hand signal of extended thumb and pinky finger with the three middle fingers curled underneath was invented here and is steadfastly Hawaiian zeitgeist.

One of many places named for Kahanamoku is Duke's in the Outrigger Waikiki hotel, where the mai tais are another local legend. The Barefoot Bar at Duke's is the place to be on the weekend and Hawaiian recording star Henry Kapono plays the Sunday session unless he is touring. This is also the home of Hula Pie, a sumptuous share dessert of ice-cream, Oreo cookie crust, hot chocolate fudge, macadamias and whipped cream.

Another top spot for a bevvy is the Maui Brewing Co in the Waikiki Beachcomber hotel. Hawaii's largest craft brewer boasts an “all local ingredients, all organic” line-up and we take on a tasting of four flagship beers, including the award-winning Coconut Hiwa. MBC is a gastro pub too, proclaiming they make everything from scratch every day. “The only freezer we have is for the ice-cream.” The food is excellent too, especially the pork belly bao in plum sauce and The Silversmith pizza with local macadamia gremolata.

We are staying at the Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort, right on the sand. The sublime location is away from the busy part of the beach and the blue expanse is more

alluring without the crowds. The hotel makes a point of showcasing traditional culture and guests can join lessons in Hawaiian petroglyphs, folklore, wood carving, lei and bracelet making, ukulele and hula.

Hula instructor “Aunty” Luana's fluid undulations are hypnotic and she shows us how to sway, step and wave to the “hukilau” (pulling in the fishing nets) song. She explains the significance of the moves, including the hands to the heart.

“Everything Hawaiian comes from the heart.” I complete the steps successfully, as defined by not treading on the three-year-old next to me. It's actually an unexpectedly calming experience, except for the hukilau ear worm I suffer for the remains of the day. Luana says Outrigger Reef's attitude and respect for traditional culture attracted her to work here and 17 years later she is still pleased.

Our ukulele lesson begins with the correct pronunciation (oo-koo-lay-lay) and the slightly disappointing factoid that the instrument is actually Portuguese. We learn a song called *Utupalakua*, about a pretty place on a mountain. Most ukulele songs are about pretty places somewhere or other.

Another cultural highlight is our trip to Nutridge Estate, where manager David Millwood gives us a Honi Honi greeting, a forehead-to-forehead welcome that comes with a kukui nut lei. The kukui is the state tree of Hawaii and were used to make the first candles. Hence,



Paradise: (Clockwise from main) Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort with Diamond Head in the background; statue of Duke Paoa Kahanamoku at Waikiki Beach, O'ahu; Giovanni's white van is the oldest and one of the best known shrimp trucks on Oahu; resort pool; surfing; making a lei; drinks.