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Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort Immerses Guests in Hawai‘i’s Cultural Renaissance through New A‘o Cultural Center and Herb Kāne Lounge

Partnerships with Polynesian Voyaging Society and Bishop Museum alongside artists Kamea Hadar and Marques Hanalei Marzan share Hawai‘i’s rich culture in a contemporary manner



Left: Outrigger Hospitality Group President & CEO Jeff Wagoner and Kumu Blaine Kia | Center: Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort General Manager, Markus Krebs, Kumu Blaine Kia and Outrigger Director of Cultural Experience Luana Maitland | Right: Artist Kamea Hadar
Click [HERE](#) for imagery | Click [HERE](#) for B-roll | Click [HERE](#) for a video on the new mural by Kamea Hadar

HONOLULU – Today, [Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort](#) held a traditional Hawaiian blessing and dedication ceremony for a collection of art pieces and features of the property that celebrate Hawaiian culture. At the heart of the event was the official opening of the new A‘o Cultural Center, twice the size of the original space, it serves as the hub of the resort’s cultural programming. The Herb Kāne Lounge – which has been updated with a new open-concept design and an original fiber art sculpture – was also blessed. The events today mark a significant step forward in the flagship property’s \$80 million transformation.

“We’ve always sought to let Hawai‘i’s host culture be the steward of the guest experience at Outrigger Reef and we’re happy to strengthen this commitment even further through the new A‘o Cultural Center and Herb Kāne Lounge,” said Markus Krebs, general manager of Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort. “Both the lounge and cultural center are places where all can make meaningful connections with some of the most profound aspects of the Hawaiian cultural renaissance.”

A‘o Cultural Center

The A‘o Cultural Center connects visitors to Outrigger’s longstanding partnerships with Hawai‘i organizations including the Polynesian Voyaging Society (PVS) and the Friends of Hōkūle‘a and Hawai‘iloa. It will serve as the central place from which to explore the property’s newest artistic features and original works created by a list of cultural practitioners on the leading edge of contemporary Hawaiian art and design.

The renewed center will be anchored by a virtual exhibit designed by digital artist Kari Kēhau Noe picturing the legendary sailing canoe Hōkūle'a. Through immersive projection, visitors are given the impression that the model of Hōkūle'a is sailing along the moving seas. As the canoe sails, various elements of the art of Polynesian navigation are highlighted, providing an engaging educational experience. The sail of the canoe model is made from pieces of the actual sail 32A that Hōkūle'a used on the Mālama Honua Worldwide Voyage. A model of the sailing canoe Hawai'iloa, which was expertly restored by artist Ka'ili Chun, is at the cultural center on loan from Friends of Hōkūle'a and Hawai'iloa.

"The A'o Cultural Center exhibits will bring the genius of Polynesian wayfinding to life for kama'aina and malihini visitors to the Outrigger. It is part of Outrigger's stalwart support of PVS and our mission," said PVS CEO and Pwo navigator Nainoa Thompson. "On this date in 1975 Hawai'i's first voyaging canoe in 600 years, Hōkūle'a, launched into the waters of Kualoa, O'ahu, realizing a quiet dream long-held by our co-founder Herb Kawainui Kāne. And so selecting this date to mark the rebirth of the Herb Kāne Lounge and A'o Cultural Center at Outrigger Reef is a fitting tribute to Hawai'i's rich voyaging past and its bright future."

The center will also serve as the hub for guests to engage in a spectrum of Hawaiian cultural activities. Led by 20-year veteran cultural director Luana Maitland, guests will be able to glean from her vast knowledge of the arts of Hawai'i and participate in hula lessons; try their hand at Hawai'i's official instrument, the 'ukulele; make a lei or kukui nut kupe'e bracelet and much more.

Starting on Saturday, March 12, the resort will resume its quarterly O Ke Kai series with the Friends of Hōkūle'a and Hawai'iloa – a unique opportunity for guests to meet renowned navigators and canoe builders, hear storytelling and enjoy hands-on demonstrations of traditional tools and artifacts.

I Ka Wa Ma Mua, Ka Wa Ma Hope – a Mural by Kamea Hadar

Adjacent to the cultural center is an original mural by famed Hawai'i artist Kamea Hadar. Known for his large-scale portraiture, Hadar's piece *I Ka Wa Ma Mua, Ka Wa Ma Hope* (Through the Past is the Future), depicts a traditional *wa'a*, or sailing canoe, being crewed by children. The next generation depicted are children of influential Hawai'i figures of the last century, including Hana Kakinami, great-granddaughter of Native Hawaiian writer, poet and cultural historian John Dominis Holt IV; La'iku Blankenfeld, the grandson of PVS navigator Bruce Blankenfeld; Steel Scott, the great-grandson of Elmer Scott who founded Scott Hawaii in 1932; and Kawena Kamakawiwo'ole, the grand-niece of the great musician and songwriter Israel Kamakawiwo'ole. Hadar's own daughter, Nova Hadar, is also pictured at the steering paddle of the *wa'a*.

"We as parents and elders do not yet know where our *keiki* will arrive or even the nature of the canoe they will be sailing, but we do know that like in a *wa'a* the next generation are all in this together," said Hadar. "This mural illustrates this traditional, yet forward-looking perspective. We hope that the impact of generations past, as well as our current generation, will give our *keiki* the tools to carry on our legacies and be positive stewards of our future earth."

Herb Kāne Lounge & Eia Hawai'i, He Moku, He Kānaka – a Sculpture by Marques Hanalei Marzan

The legacy of the late artist, historian and founding member of PVS Herb Kawainui Kāne has been featured throughout the resort for decades and has now taken on new life in the renovated Herb Kāne Lounge, featuring earthy textures and an updated, modern design. The lounge includes four original paintings from Kāne and faces an expansive mural of a traditional sailing canoe that runs the length of the check-in desk.

A unique work by fiber artist Marques Hanalei Marzan is also featured in the lounge. The sprawling piece called *Eia Hawai'i, He Moku, He Kānaka* (Here is Hawai'i, an island, a people), is an intricate woven sculpture of the Hawaiian Islands that stretches across the lounge. It speaks to the interconnectivity of communities across Hawai'i, while also recognizing the ancestral ties and enduring relationships to Oceania. The work is inspired by Marshall Islands navigational stick charts that were used to teach oceanic seafaring practices and the knot-making practices of Hawai'i. Through these two physical manifestations of indigenous knowledge, Marzan creates a dialogue within his work that speaks to the evolutionary continuity of culture.

Ocean Connections

True to the Outrigger name, the hotel's connection to the ocean and care for the marine environment is incorporated in many layers. Upon arrival, visitors walk through the iconic canoe hale entrance. There, guests encounter *Kalele*: a 100-year-old outrigger canoe restored by the Friends of Hōkūle'a & Hawai'iloa. A stone pathway carved with Hawaiian phrases will then lead guests alongside a bubbling waterway – symbolic for the life-giving streams and springs that Waikiki was named for.

In keeping with Outrigger's commitment to ocean and reef conservation, the hotel also partnered with marine scientist and artist Ethan Estess. His sustainable sculpture *Coming Home*, which stands prominently at the resort's entrance, is a partnership with Hawai'i Pacific University's Center for Marine Debris Research. Estess collected mounds of discarded fishing nets that were repurposed into this colorful mural of Diamond Head, which is meant to inspire individuals to be more sustainable and consume less single-use plastics. As an embodiment of Outrigger's commitment to conservation efforts through Outrigger's ZONE (OZONE), \$3,000 was donated to The Center for Marine Debris Research after the mural was unveiled.

Outrigger also partnered with the premier institution of Hawaiian and Pacific culture, Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, to curate art pieces in the guest rooms and throughout the resort that honor Hawai'i's past and lend a residential feel to the property.

The first phase of Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort's \$80 million transformation was completed in April 2021 and included renovated guestrooms and the reimagined Kani Ka Pila Grille. The second phase of the property, including the Diamond Head Tower, Waiola Wellness Wing and Coral Kids Club is slated to be complete by fall 2022. The anchor restaurant, Monkeypod Kitchen by Merriman, is expected to open by the end of 2022.

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For nearly 75 years, Outrigger Hotels and Resorts has charted a journey of discovery – expanding from Hawai'i to premier resort destinations including Fiji, Mauritius and Thailand. The privately held hospitality company invites guests to 'Escape Ordinary' with authentic Signature Experiences and the [Outrigger DISCOVERY loyalty program](#). Outrigger's multi-branded portfolio includes Outrigger® Resorts, OHANA Hotels by Outrigger®, Hawaii Vacation Condos by Outrigger®, Kapalua Villas Maui, and its newest addition, Honua Kai Resort & Spa Maui while also managing select properties from top international hotel brands including Embassy Suites® by Hilton, Best Western® and Hilton Grand Vacations®. Find out more at [Outrigger.com](#) or visit [@OutriggerResorts](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

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