

Having grown fond of urban vacations in recent times, I had forgotten about the virtues of a "real" holiday until I returned to Honolulu recently. There really is nothing better than to "fly and flop" in a place which was created for that very purpose.

The sandy shores and perfect blue sea at Waikiki are a weary worker's dream, and combined with the dramatic cliffs of Diamond Head, and viewed from a high hotel floor, they become a photographer's dream also. Spectacular sunrises, and even prettier sunsets are the order of the day, and it doesn't take long at all to relax and (mai tai in hand of course!) slip into holiday mode. A day spent by the ocean, under a coconut tree, book and drink in hand, watching the surfers is a day well spent indeed!

Away from the beach - but only a few steps - Waikiki's commercial precinct buzzes night and day, with hordes of happy holiday makers. The smell of coconut based sunscreen fills the air, tiki torches (lit at dusk each day), line the beachfront pathways, and when the sun goes down, the street entertainers come out in the many open areas, conducive to sitting round and listening. There is something truly wonderful about a place where the evening temperatures are warm enough to remain in your day clothes. Sightseeing and activities abound, and range from scenic road tours on the island of Oahu, and luau cultural shows to all manner of water-based activities. Then there are the outer islands which many visitors use in a holiday combo with Honolulu.

There are myriad places to eat - usually casual, bistro style meals - with menus on which there is truly something for everyone. Turnover is such that food is always fresh, and satisfying, with prices we are used to paying for casual fare.

While a true family destination, Honolulu is just wonderful for couples, singles, and groups of girlfriends hitting the shops - more of which later!

Hotels can be "tricky", and you should seek the advice of an expert before booking, and you cannot reliably use price as a guide - in any bracket. For example, beachfront properties all price their rooms according to the degree of ocean view. Clearly ocean views come at a premium, but in many cases without a standard of room to match the price. With a couple of exceptions, hotels are quite old. Again, you need an expert to help you with one which may be old but loved, and well maintained.

But, sun, sand, and surf aside, remember Honolulu is America!!! That means American shopping: in itself, sufficient reason for lots of Australians to visit, and Honolulu has the utterly fabulous Ala Moana Shopping Centre, an outdoor mall with 300 shops, and a massive expansion underway. Here you find several iconic departments stores, and all manner of boutique stores, some famously branded, others not. There are also the Waikale outlets - seemingly exclusive to Australians on the day I visited. Here also, there is a massive extension underway. Like all outlets, Waikale is "hit and miss" however the hits were pretty good, and judging by

the swag of bags on our return bus, there were plenty of them! There are several other outlet stores, sports warehouses, Walmart, Costco and the like. It's a perfect place for a bunch of friends to spend a week shopping "America Style" without having to go all the way to the mainland. Fly Hawaiian Airlines and get a whopping 64 kilo baggage allowance!

With no jetlag, direct flights from Melbourne/Sydney/Brisbane, and a favourable exchange rate, all boxes are ticked. Put it on your list.