



Discover pristine turquoise water at the Four Seasons O'ahu at Ko Olina's protected lagoon. PHOTOS: CURT WOODHALL

FAMILY TRAVEL

# DISCOVER HAWAIIAN CULTURE DURING AN OAHU ROAD TRIP

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

At the halfway point of our hike, we crest Palehua and are gifted with sweeping views of Pearl Harbor, Waikiki Beach and Diamond Head. It's a spectacular scene and well worth our half-hour trek through Waianae's heavily forested uplands. Throughout our journey with Hawaii Forest and Trail, our guide Kekai has shared stories about Oahu's rich history and the importance of preserving local culture and the island's indigenous and endemic flora, fauna and wildlife.

Our fascinating adventure began at the Ku'ilioloa Heiau on Pokai Bay — an ancient sacred site that was once used to teach the art of ocean navigation. From here we travelled to MA'O, an organic farm dedicated to teaching sustainable agricultural practices and Hawaiian culture to underprivileged youth in the Waianae community. Touring the packing plant, we learned how MA'O harvests fresh produce daily for some of Oahu's top restaurants and organic grocers. After sampling bounty from the field, we feasted on a homestyle Hawaiian lunch of Kalbi beef and MA'O greens at the Ka'aha'aina Cafe. Hiking Palehua, a Wao Akau (realm of the gods) completed the half-day Farm to Forest tour.

Best known for world-famous Waikiki, Oahu is a tropical wonderland brimming with pristine bays, lush rainforests and immersive cultural experiences. As the parent of a sassy seven-year old, who I suspect was a dolphin in her former life, we chose the island for its multitude of soft white sand beaches and stunning turquoise water. While swimming, sandcastles and sun topped our itinerary, educating our child about Polynesian history and culture was also a priority.

We booked the family-friendly Farm to Forest tour through the Four Seasons O'ahu at Ko Olina, located on the island's west shore. The oceanfront resort overlooks one of the most visually stunning lagoons I've ever seen. Given its protected location, the water is perfectly calm and ideal for swimming and paddle boarding. Four Seasons also excels at interlacing local culture into every guest experience. Resident artists are just one example of this.

While I'm typically craft-averse — unless there's a glue gun involved — I decided to embrace my daughter's love for art by enrolling in a Hawaiian Lauhala weaving class. What I thought would be a stress-inducing activity — making an intricate bracelet from tiny strands of hala leaf — was surprisingly cathartic, and my daughter was thrilled with the masterpiece I created.

Local culture can also be discovered at one of my favourite places, the Naupaka Spa. For keiki (kids), the Hawaiian Princess Hula treatment — a trip highlight for our daughter — is an adorable pampering session that includes hair styling and a hula outfit for girls. For weary parents, the spa's healing and massage therapies will nourish both your skin and soul. After dropping our daugh-

ter off to craft at Camp Kohala kids club, my husband and I indulged in post-hike lomilomi couples' massage and practically floated out of the spa.

If your kids are water babies, I highly recommend the Keiki Snorkel and Scuba PADI Bubble-Maker Demo with Trident Adventures. The class, which takes place in the Four Seasons' serenity pool (for kids under the age of 10) or ocean lagoon (ages 10 and up), is led by a gregarious retired Navy SEAL, who is beyond fabulous with children. After learning the basics poolside, our kiddo donned her wetsuit, mask, flippers and scuba tank and took to the water with divemaster Stephen, where she had a blast searching for sunken treasure.

To harness Hawaii's epic surf culture, we drove to Turtle Bay Resort on Oahu's historic north shore. Set on almost eight kilometres of beachfront, the property boasts epic views of the area's big surf. From here, you can take a short drive to watch the pros at Waimea Bay, Banzai Pipeline and Sunset Beach. Or, give the sport a try and catch a wave alongside a four-legged furry friend with Hawaii Surf Dogs, located on-property.

We chose a land adventure and saddled up for an oceanfront trail ride with the resort's stables. Days at the bay are best spent snorkelling or lounging by the waterslide pool to watch the kids unleash their boundless energy. Spectacular sunsets, a hallmark of Turtle Bay, are only enhanced by the nightly live entertainment and mai tais at The Point restaurant.

If a luau is on your to-do list,

Toa in Waimea Valley is my hands down favourite. Tickets include access to the park's picturesque gardens and waterfall, so arrive early for a hike and swim. Before the main event starts, you'll have a chance to learn about Hawaiian culture through interactive demonstrations, like coconut cutting, poi preparation and traditional games. Although it's a simple spread when compared to larger luaus, the buffet dinner of kalua pork and huli huli chicken is one of the best I've had. After dinner you'll enjoy performances, featuring live music that celebrates dance styles from across the Polynesian islands.

Waikiki completed the final leg of our road trip. The bustling beach hot spot is also home to Oahu's only Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star hotel, Trump Waikiki.

We chose it for its condo-style suites with full kitchens, infinity pool and family-friendly amenities, including a special kids breakfast buffet and in-room camping experience.

Our daughter was over the moon to sleep beneath the stars (LED) in her own pup tent, complete with faux fire and marshmallow roasting kit.

Guests also have access to complimentary fully stocked beach bags, which help simplify the short walk to Waikiki beach. Before playing in the surf, swing by an ABC Store for a bag of beach toys and keiki-sized boogie board — two relatively inexpensive purchases that promise hours of fun. We made a day of it by renting an umbrella and lounge chairs from Waikiki Beach Services in front of the



Learn to scuba with a Navy Seal at the Four Seasons O'ahu at Ko Olina.

Royal Hawaiian. Our locale made it easy to pop into the iconic hotel for one — or two — of its famous Royal Mai Tais.

When you're craving off-the-beach family friendly attractions, the Honolulu Zoo and the Waikiki Aquarium are walking distance of most hotels and are usually crowd-free. In the evenings you'll find plenty of entertainment and

buskers in Waikiki. The buffet at Kai Market, in the Sheraton, is our go-to on a Thursday for its delicious local oxtail soup action station and live music. Afterwards, wander along Kalakaua Avenue, for window shopping and people watching.

To follow Mhairri's family travel adventures visit [arrivalstravel.com](http://arrivalstravel.com).

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