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There are few things more relaxing than sitting poolside at the historic Royal Hawaiian Hotel on Waikiki Beach. **CURT WOODHALL**

FAMILY TRAVEL

FINDING ALOHA ON OAHU

Expensive dinners and COVID-19 testing 100% worth it, **Mhairri Woodhall** writes.

Eyes closed, with Hawaii’s mid-morning sun warming my face, I hear Pi’iali’s gentle voice guiding me back from my dream-like state.

Awakening from the Mūhala Sound Journey, led by ancestral intuitive energy realignment practitioner Pi’iali’i Lawson, felt like dancing on clouds. It was peaceful, joyous and wholly transformative, even though I was only “gone” for 30 minutes or so.

When I registered for Ko Olina’s guided sound bath experience at Four Seasons Oahu, I had no idea what to expect — in all honesty, I thought an actual bath would be involved. But it was so much better than soaking in a tub. The meditative practice, incorporating crystal sound bowls, chimes and a tuning fork, bathes participants in sound to reduce stress, relieve anxiety, calm the mind, and realign and balance the body. Clearly, after the year we’ve had, I needed this cathartic journey. It unleashed my subconscious, bringing me to tears.

Hawaii is restorative, and just being here evokes a sense of calm. The Four Seasons Resort flawlessly showcases the island’s healing power with its #FSWAYFINDERS immersive cultural experiences.

On this trip, my daughter Brooklyn and I enrolled in the resort’s resin workshop, led by artisan Christian Bendo. We designed mini-wooden surfboards, using varying techniques including pyrography (wood burning), painting and resin dipping. Brooklyn went for an original masterpiece, while I

used one of Christian’s stencils.

Polynesian culture is woven into most of the resort’s offerings, including the Naupaka Spa, where I blissfully succumbed to the long, gentle strokes of a traditional lomilomi massage — a kinder alternative to my go-to deep pressure sports massage.

The Four Seasons Oahu is located on the island’s west shore, overlooking a stunning, postcard-perfect lagoon. Given that it’s sheltered from the open ocean, the water is completely calm and ideal for children swimming, snorkelling and paddleboarding. So, apart from partaking in the resort’s cultural activities, we spent most of our time on the beachfront, soaking in every moment of our perfect stay.

After, we headed to Waikiki for the second half of our trip; cashing in two years of Marriott Bonvoy points at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. The “Pink Palace of the Pacific,” as it’s affectionally known, has always been on my bucket list, and staying in the hotel’s charming historic wing exceeded my expectations.

The elegant property is a tranquil haven nestled amid a lush, tropical garden setting, protected from the tourist-laden buzz of Waikiki. Most guestrooms in the historic wing overlook the gardens, as the Royal Hawaiian was built in 1927 for wealthy travellers who arrived by ship and had little interest in ocean views after five-plus days at sea.

We learned about this and many other fascinating facts during the hotel’s historical property tour. The Royal Hawaiian’s complimentary



The ocean view from a Four Seasons Resort guest room. **CURT WOODHALL**

cultural programming rivals the Four Seasons, and we signed up for most of them. Keiki (kids) Storytime with Aunty was my daughter’s favourite, and I loved the daily morning yoga sessions on the Coconut Grove lawn.

As in Ko Olina, we lazed on the beach or poolside for much of our stay. While the Royal Hawaiian’s pool is on the smaller side, it’s shaded and mere steps from the beach, giving us the freedom to float in the ocean on a whim. We did rent beach loungers through the hotel once, but at \$100 per day, and no food and beverage service, we felt it wasn’t worth the extra cost. Royal Hawaiian guests can also use the pool at the Sheraton Waikiki Beach Resort next door, which is much larger — and busier — so we only tried it once.

Oahu, and Waikiki in particular, has a fantastic dining scene — from casual grab-and-go beach fare to exquisite chef-driven tasting menus. Unfortunately, travelling during a pandemic does complicate matters somewhat. Reservations — and a valid vaccine passport, with

supporting ID — are required everywhere, even poolside (except for the Four Seasons, where ID is presented at check-in in exchange for a wristband). Having a picture of our driver’s licence and vaccine cards (front and back) on our phone alleviated the inconvenience of bringing wallets to the beach and pool.

We also used OpenTable to reserve all of our dinners before arriving in Waikiki — a tip from travel blogger friends (the Travelling Canucks) who were on Oahu the week before. This saved a lot of hassle, given how busy the restaurants are. Hawaii is also notoriously expensive, so we reserved a lot of “Happy Hour” dinners. Apart from Four Seasons’ Mina’s Fish House and Noe restaurants, our favourites were Noi Thai Cuisine, as recommended by U.S. President Barack Obama, Island Vintage Wine Bar, Tommy Bahama Restaurant & Bar and Basalt Restaurant at Dukes Lane Market.

Other than Hawaii’s reduced restaurant capacities and vaccine passport and mask requirements — similar to Canadian



Brooklyn and Mhairri take a painting class. **MHAIRRI WOODHALL**

regulations — our trip felt very relaxed and was a welcome winter reprieve. The only caveat was the multitude of COVID tests we needed to take. COVID travel rules continuously change, causing us a last-minute scramble when Hawaii adopted U.S. mainland testing procedures days before our flight. Booking our tests in Waikiki through Capture Diagnostics in the Waikiki Shopping Center was easy; however, I heard this became more difficult soon after we left due to test kit shortages. Brooklyn was also randomly selected for an additional arrival test after landing in Canada, adding an extra hour onto an already long travel day. More time was lost co-ordinating her required eight-day virtual testing appointment.

Were the additional costs and effort worth two weeks in Hawaii? One hundred per cent yes. We’re already planning our next trip to Aloha paradise, and I’m eagerly counting down the days.

To follow Mhairri’s family travel adventures, visit arrivalstravel.com.