

## A History of Tourism Development in Waikiki

In early Hawaii, Waikiki was a much larger area than the 1.5 square miles it encompasses today. Old Waikiki, much of it swampland, included the neighbouring valleys of Manoa and Palolo. Translated, Waikiki means "spouting water," a reference to the rivers and springs that richly flowed into the area. It's said that in the 1400s, Chief Kalamakua designed an irrigation system to take advantage of Waikiki's abundant resources. Fishponds were built and taro patches were planted. In the 1450s, Waikiki was established as the governmental centre of Oahu.

Waikiki was the setting for one of Hawaii's historic battles. In 1794, Kamehameha I arrived from the Big Island with a fleet of canoes. His army stormed Waikiki Beach and then set out for Nuuanu to take on Oahu chief Kalanikupule and his men. Kamehameha's forces proved superior, and the Oahu warriors were forced to retreat up the valley, where they were pursued and driven off the steep Pali cliffs to their deaths.

Oahu and other Hawaiian islands were first discovered by Europeans on January 18, 1778, when British explorer Captain James Cook landed on Kauai, Hawaii's fourth largest island. Honolulu began as a small harbour village established by foreign fishermen in the early 1800s. The area soon flourished into an important centre as it provided a resting spot for merchant ships trading furs with the east and for fishing and whaling ships in the area. The waterfront area played a vital role in the history of Honolulu. King Kamehameha I moved his royal court here in 1809 to keep an eye on the burgeoning trade from the numerous ships that were coming here.

In the mid to late 1800s, Waikiki served as a vacation retreat for the kingdoms royalty. Kamehameha IV, Kamehameha V, Lunalilo, Kalakaua, Liliuokalani and Princess Kaiulani were among the dignitaries who maintained residences in the area,

enjoying moonlight horseback rides, thrilling canoe races and carefree romps in the ocean.

Foreign visitors began to visit Waikiki in the 1830s. A road was constructed in the 1860s, and a tramway and tramcars were introduced in the late 1880s. After annexation, and in anticipation of an increase in visitors, the Moana Hotel was opened in 1901.

In the late 1800s, the United States began to realize the strategic military importance of the Hawaiian islands, establishing military bases at Pearl Harbour and central Oahu. With the installment of the U.S. military, the tourism business began to grow in the Waikiki area. In anticipation of a growing tourism industry, the first luxury-trade hotel, the Moana Surfrider, was opened in 1901 to accommodate wealthy European guests. Simultaneously, the territorial government in 1907, under what it called the "Waikiki Reclamation Commission," planned for greater



commercial and tourism development by widening streets, building bridges, and draining the duck ponds, rice paddies, and taro patches that formed Waikiki's aquaculture.

A new era begins. On March 11, 1901 Waikiki began a climb to global recognition as a tourist destination with the building of its first historic architectural treasure The Moana Hotel. Built by the wealthy Honolulu landowner, Walter Chamberlain Peacock, The Moana Hotel had 75 guest rooms that were the height of fashion for the day, offering spacious accommodations, telephones and private baths, a billiard room, parlour, library, salon and the first electric-powered elevator in the Territory. These were true innovations for the times. It was and is the only resort in Hawaii that reflects the Beaux-arts design of the early 1900s.



In 1920 the Waikiki landscape undergoes a dramatic re-development ushering in a new age of urbanization for Waikiki. The wetlands are declared a health hazard and are drained by the construction of the Ala Wai Canal which was completed in 1928. The lands are reclaimed and subdivided into 5000 square foot lots. This real estate development turns rural Waikiki into a suburb. At the very heart of this suburb was the Moana Hotel, with all its grandeur, offering guests true respite and rejuvenation.

1927 sees the creation of new recreational opportunities for "destination Waikiki" with the building of the historic Waikiki Natatorium War Memorial and the Honolulu Zoo. The Waikiki Natatorium War was a massive 100 yard by 40 yards wide Olympic swimming pool. It was unique because it was actually on the beach and fed by ocean water. Several medal winning Olympians brought fame to this architectural wonder beginning with Hawaiian Olympian Duke Kahanamoku (also made famous during this time by introducing the world to the modern sport of surfing) and joined by other world renowned swimmers such as Fred Kono, Dick Cleveland, Johnny Weismuller and Buster Crabbe. The Honolulu Zoo is built on 40 acres of Queen Kapiolani and is made part of the queen's trust. With the advent of these activities, The Moana Hotel stood as ground central for tourists who visited these exciting new attractions.



The Royal Hawaiian Hotel, a \$4 million investment by the Matson Navigation Co. also opened on February 1, 1927. Built on 15 acres of beautiful beach frontage, the luxurious hotel, with its distinctive Moorish-style architecture painted pink, was promoted world-wide as a premier visitor destination. Elaborate opening ceremonies and festivities included dinner and dancing, a concert, and a pageant. What made Waikiki so attractive in the past contributed to making the "Pink Palace" a



favourite of both visitors and local residents for decades.

The rise of “hapa-haole” marks the beginning of Waikiki moving into full swing. The year was 1934 and Hawaiian music gains worldwide popularity. It begins when Harry Owens and his big band became icons of popular Hawaiian music, followed by the launching of the popular worldwide radio show Hawaii Calls. The show was actually broadcast from the courtyard of the Moana Hotel from 1935 until 1975 and a hallmark of the show was the sound of the waves breaking in the distance.

Many new stars were created in Waikiki, including Hilo Hattie, Andy Cummings, Alfred Apaka and Sterling Mossman. Visiting celebrities such as Bing Crosby, Shirley Temple, Groucho Marx, Clark Gable and Carol Lombard graced Waikiki and many such as Frank Sinatra, Joe DiMaggio and Amelia Earhart stay at the Famous Moana, sealing its reputation as a first class destination.



Babe Ruth in Hawaii c.1930's

In 1941 the bombing of Pearl Harbour and the Second World War interrupts the flow of tourists to Waikiki. It becomes a rest

and recreation area for soldiers and sailors coming and going to the war in the Pacific. Waikiki become the last stop for those heading to war not knowing if they will come back and its the first stop on American soil on their way back. From 1941-1945 The Moana Hotel transforms into a respite for these soldiers, offering hospitality and friendship as they ventured into the unknown to fight for their country.



Tourism thrived during the late 1940's and 1950's with the introduction of regularly scheduled airline services from the west coast and the Moana became the jewel of Honolulu society. Celebrities such as Elvis Presley were regulars on the island and three of his films were shot on location on Oahu, including on Waikiki Beach.



Today, Waikiki is in full bloom. There are world-class hotels with familiar names like Hilton, Sheraton and Hyatt, and there are smaller operations that still provide plenty of aloha. Waikiki also boasts Waikiki Beach and the iconic slopes of Diamond Head Crater. There's 500-acre Kapiolani Park, the Waikiki Aquarium, Honolulu Zoo and the International Marketplace (a shopper's bonanza located in the heart of Waikiki). Waikiki is also home to some of Hawaii's finest restaurants and hottest nightspots.

Best of all, everything is within walking distance. Waikiki is yours to discover, block by block, beach by beach.

## Waikiki Revitalization

After months of construction and \$12.5 million in expenditures, Kuhio Beach, Waikiki's main stretch of sand, has a new sidewalk promenade with landscaping and fountains.

An additional \$3 million will be spent to complete the landscaping and sidewalk as far as the Natatorium, the national and state historic landmark built in 1927 to honour islanders who died in World War I, which will undergo its own \$11.5 million restoration.

Also along the beach, Kapiolani Park has gone through an upgrade, with more than \$10 million spent on improvements to the Honolulu Zoo and a new bandstand used for special events and the Sunday afternoon Royal Hawaiian Band concerts.

Additional plans call for the creation of an Iwi Kapuna Memorial in front of the zoo to re-inter the bones of ancient Hawaiians who were buried in Waikiki and other areas of Oahu. At the other end of Waikiki, Fort DeRussy, the neighbourhood's only open space besides Kapiolani Park, is being upgraded and beautified as part of a \$135 million project.

Throughout Waikiki, the streets and sidewalks are being transformed with new traffic signals and antique-style lampposts hung with baskets of flowers. The new Waikiki Historic Trail's 21 markers point out historic sites and tell the story of old Waikiki, from the time it was the playground of royalty through its development to one of the world's most famous beach resorts.

## Sunset Torch Lighting and Hula Show

One of Waikiki's new and signature attractions is the tradition of torch-lighting ceremonies that occurs most evenings throughout Waikiki. Less ceremony than ritual, what you'll see is a half-clothed, brown-skinned man running down the street, or on your hotel grounds, with a stick of fire in his hand. His job is to light the torches. You can witness that scene at about 6:30 each evening when the torches are lit at the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Centre. At the Ilikai Hotel, a conch shell blower adds an ancient echo to the scene. At Kuhio Beach Park, the nightly hula pageant begins with a torch-lighting ceremony and the call of a conch shell. The free show runs from 6:30 to 7:30 each evening. The city has just completed renovating the Kuhio Beach hula mound for this highly popular show. The renovations provided improved pedestrian access to the mound, with construction of two concrete paths, one along the base of the stage and one to the rear of the viewing area. Provision also made possible a wear-resistant surface on the hula mound stage itself. Artificial turf replaced the natural turf that was impossible to maintain because of the constant use. A concrete pad was also installed



at the rear of the stage area.

Enjoy a beautiful Hawaiian sunset, romantic torch lighting and conch shell ceremony, and authentic Hawaiian music and hula performances right on Waikiki Beach. The hour-long show starts just before sunset and features the young men of the "Men of Hoêa" in a torch lighting ceremony, followed by the award-winning hula halau schools dedicated to hula and Hawaiian culture from throughout Oahu.

Authentic Hawaiian music and hula shows by Hawaii's finest hula halau (dance troupes) and Hawaiian performers. Opens with torch lighting ceremony and blowing of conch shell. Nightly except Mondays, weather-permitting. 6:30-7:30 PM (6:00-7:00 PM in Nov, Dec, Jan) at the Kuhio Beach Hula Mound, near Duke Kahanamoku statue, beachside at Uluniu & Kalakaua Ave. in Waikiki. Outdoors, casual. Seating on the grass; beach chairs, mats, etc. okay. Cameras are welcome.

## **Royal Hawaiian Center**

Royal Hawaiian Center, formerly Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center, is the premier shopping, dining and entertainment destination in Waikiki. The 4-level Center spans a 3-block stretch of the famed Kalakaua Avenue and is currently being revitalized and expanded to more than 310,000 square feet of world-class shops, restaurants and entertainment.

Owned by Kamehameha Schools and developed and managed by The Festival Companies, the Center will soon feature 110 shops, 10 anchor restaurants, a world-class state-of-the-art live performance showroom and the largest open garden space in the heart of Waikiki. It remains open during its revitalization.

## **Culture and Entertainment at the Royal Hawaiian Center**

Royal Hawaiian Center returns to the traditions of Helumoa in Waikiki through Hawaiian story telling, dance and music in The Royal Grove. As one of the largest lush green spaces in Waikiki, The Royal Grove is a centerpiece for entertainment and cultural gatherings with local hula ha-lau and other exciting performance groups. For a hands-on experience, guests also enjoy free cultural classes including 'ukulele, hula, lei making and Hawaiian quilting are offered at the Center.

## **Waikiki Beach Walk**

Waikiki Beach Walk is the largest development project ever to be undertaken in Waikiki's history. The 7.9 acre area, bordered by Kalakaua Avenue, Lewers Street, Kalia Road, Beach Walk and Saratoga Road, has been completely rebuilt and has emerged as a vibrant showcase and gathering place in the new Waikiki. With a total construction cost of \$535 million, it features an outdoor entertainment plaza, 41 new retailers, six great restaurants, and five hotels. Incorporating a design theme that celebrates Hawaii's voyaging and ocean heritage and takes advantage of the island's cooling trade winds and year-round excellent weather, Waikiki Beach Walk is the consummate expression of Hawaii today -- a place where people come to be enlivened with warm hospitality, a rich confluence of cultures, and nature's precious gifts from land and sea.

Waikiki Beach Walk has become an icon for Waikiki's revitalization and a symbol for the area's successful renaissance," said Barbara Campbell, vice president of retail development for Outrigger Enterprises Group. " we are reminded of what was once narrow streets and aging buildings and is now a bustling shopping and dining destination for thousands of visitors and residents."

Source: [www.waikiki.com](http://www.waikiki.com)