

TRAVEL

HONOLULU

BY PHIL TRIPP



For many Australians, a short, nine-hour trip to Hawai'i is their first encounter with American culture, shopping and intensity. It's a great introduction and I thought I'd share some secrets of Honolulu which is the gateway to this paradise, though I always encourage going to the outer islands which are only 15-30 minutes away, a step back in time and full of rich music and culture.

Honolulu, is a bubbling city of 1.2 million of the 1.5 million Hawaiian residents on six islands and can be best compared to the Gold Coast. The beaches are lined with hotels, the boulevards lined with designer boutiques and brand stores. Fine dining is ubiquitous and island-style music is everywhere. It's a background soundtrack that decompresses you in an aloha magic way.

I was lucky enough to recently scope it out during the 2nd annual **Hawai'i Food and Wine Festival** (hawaiifoodandwinefestival.com) that gives a fascinating view of local food culture and producers and also incorporates local musicians – in style.

Though I'll be sending you to some holes in the wall later, let's assume you want to get off the plane, have a short

nap and hit the town with a great meal and some true Hawaiian music. But not too old style.

Ala Moana Boulevard is the main drag where the world's largest mall of the same name is located and just a mile back towards town is the **Aloha Tower Marketplace** where several brewpubs, nightclubs, restaurants and even a Hooters! rock on. You'll be looking for **Chai's Island Bistro** (chaislandbistro.com) at the front of the complex where cool island breezes bathe the outdoor tables and the interior stage is home to some of Hawai'i's greatest players in an intimate setting with spectacular food. It's an early show and the best acts to catch are The Cazimero Brothers, Hapa or Jerry Santos, often accompanied by hula dancers.

That's a great way to start off your Honolulu holiday and there are numerous hotel bars and nightclubs that feature local music. Tops on my list would be **Kani Ka Pila Grille** in the **Outrigger Reef Resort** that is a poolside bar with succulent pupus (snacks) and great players like **Cyril Pahinui** (son of slack key God Gabby), **Manoa Madness** and many jam sessions.

Kona Brewhouse features slack star

Ledward Ka'Apapa in its Hawai'i Kai brewpub on Sundays (konabrewing.com/pubs/koko-marina-pub) and its home operation in Kona on the Big Island is also a major concert venue there.

One of the more bizarre nightspots and one I always go to is **La Mariana Sailing Club** (lamarianasailingclub.com). It's a little dive hidden at 50 Sand Island Road halfway between the airport and Waikiki and is encrusted with collected Tiki artifacts from all the older bars like Don The Beachcomber, Trader Vic's and other classic Tiki Twilight Zone hide-aways. Open since the late '50s it's a kitsch vortex of bars past.

There's a music underground in HNL too. Monthly punk nights at **Waikiki Sandbox** (2260 Kuhio Ave) is only one of the special events that rock this little bar. Check out Pimpbot if they are in the house. Cheap drinks and a wild atmosphere will curl your toes.

More mainstream is the newer **Republik** (1349 Kapiolani Drive, jogetherepublik.com) which is run by the former owners of Pipeline, the legendary indie club. Recent bands in this 1000 capacity venue with three bars were 3rd Eye Blind, Death Cab for Cutie and Bloc



Party.

If rock and blues are your set, **Anna O'Brien's** (2440 S. Beretania facebook.com/anna.obriens) is the locals' dive bar for this. Its previous incarnation was as Anna Banannas which closed and reopened in the new skin.

Whatever your musical tastes, there are two main publications to research for the kind you want. **Honolulu Weekly** (honoluluweekly.com) is the street press, free on Wednesdays with a gig guide and event tips. The daily newspaper **Star Advertiser** has a pullout section on Fridays called **TGIF** (tgif.staradvertiser.com) which also highlights food and bar scene faves as well as what's playing at the major venues.

For touring concert acts, **Blaisdell Arena**, **Waikiki Shell** and **Hawaii Theatre** are the three main venues that feature international acts and the Shell is an outdoor amphitheatre of superb acoustics and sightlines.

A hot tip for an upcoming event is the **3rd Annual Pacific Rim Jazz Festival** (pacificrimjazzfestival.com) that has an initial lineup of The Rippingtons, Deniece Williams, Rick Braun, Brian Simpson and Kaori Kobayashi among other smooth jazz stars. It also has a

VIP level with tasting stations from up to ten local top restaurateurs, wine tastings and Gold Ticket Seats. It's being held at the Honolulu Convention Centre November 3 from 2 pm and is another facet of the growing cuisine and concert scene in Honolulu.

Now about those holes in the wall. Look I love a great restaurant and some of the best are **Chef Mavro**, **Alan Wong's Roy's**, **3660 on the Rise**, **Morimoto** and **Nobu**. But get me into Honolulu and I love discovering places that pack you full of local grinds and Styrofoam plate lunches. So here are some funky faves.

For over fifty years, the **Rainbow Drive In** (rainbowdrivein.com 3308 Kanaina Ave) has served the cheapest and best plate lunches (translated: two scoops of rice, various meats, gravies and probably an egg on top with macaroni salad). It's a tradition and an institution.


Gulick Delicatessen (1936 King St.) is not Jewish. It's a Japanese okazuya which features fried delights, Nipponese delicacies, steam table standards, rice balls, noodles and other tasty morsels for no more than \$10 for a huge plate. An incredible experience.

Helena's Hawaiian Food is another storefront basic (1240 North School

Street www.helenashawaiianfood.com) serving Tuesday to Friday only from 10am to 3 pm. It's been the real deal for local food such as leaf wrapped lau lau, short ribs, kalua pork and long rice.

Sushi fiends flock to **Sansei** (2552 Kalkaua Ave, sanseihawaii.com with locations on other islands) which has half price food and drinks from 5-6pm and from 10pm on to 1am. Contemporary sushi stylings and incredible value.

Though a few airlines serve HNL, Hawaiian is the best simply for the fact that you are permitted two suitcases at 32 kilos each for shopping which the other airlines can't match. If you need a car, Alamo's office in Australia (momentotravel.com.au) offers an all-inclusive rate that can't be beat.

Hotels can easily be found at wotif.com with a variety of rates and deals but if asked my five top picks, they would be **Aqua Palms & Spa** right down the street from **Ala Moana Mall**; **The Modern**, just a block away; **Waikiki Parc** right across from the legendarily lush **Halekulani** (and you can use their facilities); **Outrigger Waikiki Reef** with stunning views of Diamond Head; and for those willing to take the trek for some North Shore surf, the **Turtle Bay Resort**. 



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