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## Best Hawaiian Islands of 1st Timers

### About Hawaii

Six islands make up the most visited parts of Hawai'i. Of course, Hawai'i includes hundreds of islands, but these six (Oahu, Maui, Lanai, Molokai, Hawai'i (Big Island), and Kauai'i) are the primary inhabited islands. Each Hawaiian island offers visitors a different experience, so it can be very difficult to tell a first timer which is the "best Hawaiian island" for them.

Many visitors to Hawai'i want to see Pearl Harbor and the volcanoes. These are probably the most visited attractions in Hawai'i. Unfortunately, they're on two different islands; Oahu and Hawai'i. Even these two islands present visitors with very different experiences.

Hawai'i has a more rural feel to it, while Oahu is tourist central. Think "Disney World of Hawai'i." We do have some advice on each island, though to help you choose which one you should pick for your first visit to the Hawaiian islands.

### Oahu

Although the primary tourist island, we do not recommend Oahu for your first visit to the Hawaiian islands. In Oahu, you find Waikiki, Pearl Harbor, Diamond Head, the famous North Shore, Disney's Resort (Aulani), Honolulu, and the Kualoa Ranch (home of many, many movie and TV shoots). You can see Oahu featured in so many TV and movie shows from the Brady Bunch and Hawai'i 50 to North Shore and Jurassic Park. That giant, crowded beach lined with high rise hotels? Yep. That's Waikiki, in Oahu. That diamond shaped volcanic cone at the end of the beach? Yes. That's Diamond Head.



With all these great things in Oahu, why do we recommend against it for your first visit? Well, coming from a very touristy and beachy location (Florida), we prefer not to fly half way around the world to be in another touristy and beachy location. Also, with Oahu being geared towards the Hawaiian tourist, you don't get much of the Aloha spirit. You miss out on experiencing what Hawai'i can really be like. The local flavor. Without some effort on your part, it tends to be high rises and beaches. It's a long way to fly and a fair bit of money for a high rise beach vacation, in our humble opinion. At least for your first visit.

## **Kauai'i**

Kauai'i is known as the garden island. It's also the oldest Hawaiian island. Kauai'i is one of the least populated islands, just ahead of Molokai and Lanai. This is a beautiful island and home to the Grand Canyon of the Pacific.



With beautiful landscape and resorts, Kauai'i is a great destination for someone looking to explore the outdoors, get away from it all, and still be a little pampered. While beautiful, we still wouldn't recommend Kauai'i for your first visit to the Hawaiian islands.

## **Molokai**

Molokai, known as the "most Hawaiian island" boasts the most native Hawaiian population of all the Hawaiian islands. It's also one of the most remote and least visited. With only one true resort and one formal "town," Molokai definitely provides a beautiful get-away for visitors. I love Molokai. For me, it ranks right up at the top of the Hawaiian islands, but you'd better be prepared to disconnect, unwind, and relax during your visit to Molokai.

Most people that visit Molokai visit the leper colony. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Molokai served as the exile location for Hawaiians that contracted leprosy (or Hansen's disease). The colony still exists, today on the Kalaupapa peninsula. Visitors can ride donkeys down to the colony and you can also view it from a lookout high above.

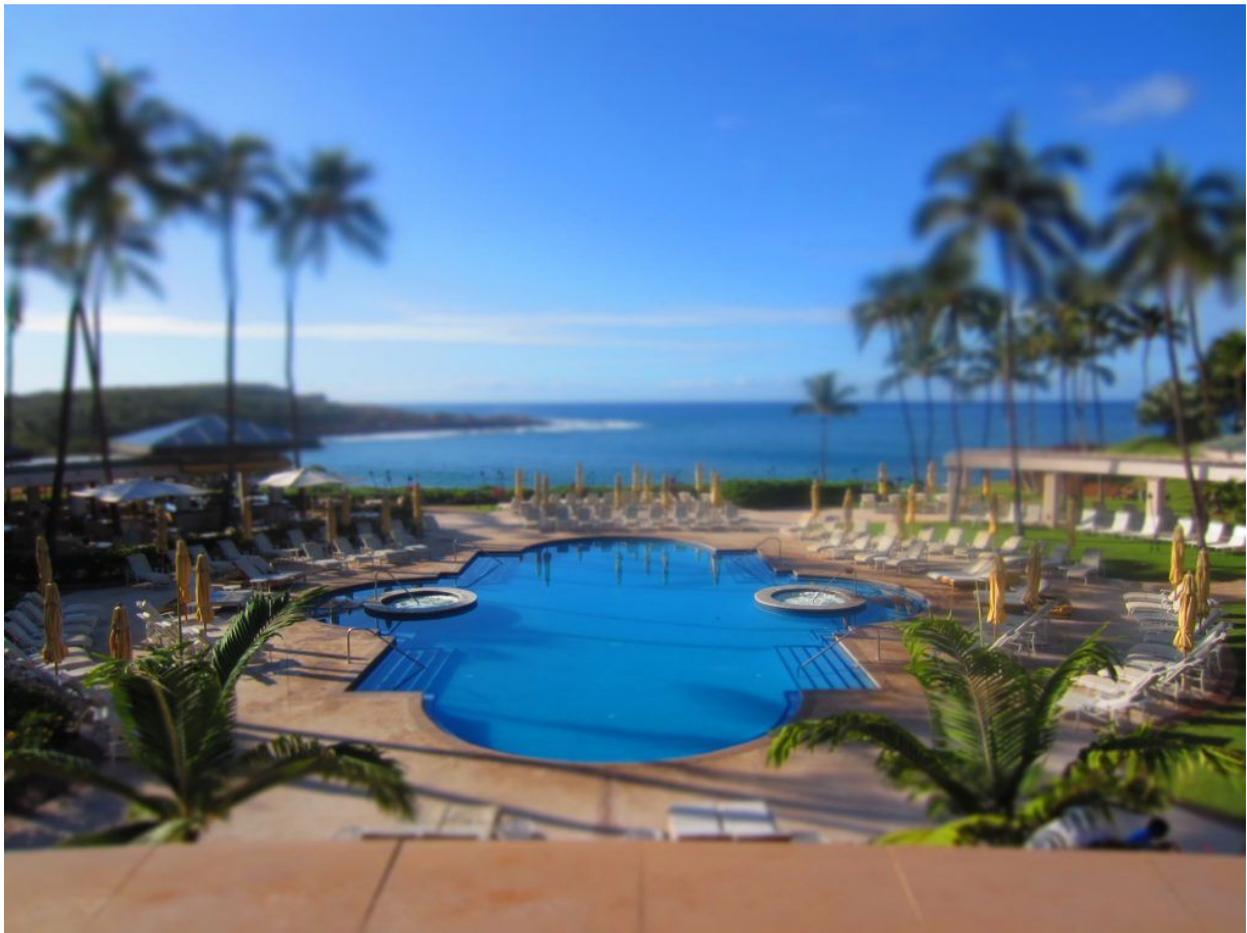
Just beyond the Kalaupapa peninsula, you can see the highest sea cliffs in the world.

It's a beautiful island and definitely an opportunity to get away from it all. Still, not the best Hawaiian island for first timers.

## Lanai

Lanai used to be the pineapple capital of Hawai'i. Now, Larry Ellison (CEO of Oracle) owns 97% of the island, including the two primary Four Seasons resorts.

Lanai is the least populous of all the primary Hawaiian islands. You won't find a stop light anywhere on the island. You will find horseback trail rides, snorkeling, golfing, sporting clay events, the Garden of the Gods, and luxurious resorts and beaches on Lanai.



Lanai is very popular with honeymooners that can afford one of the very spendy Four Seasons resorts on the island. There's some shopping to be done in Lanai City, but other than the few adventures I mentioned, above, there's not a lot to do in Lanai, except relax. It's actually a pretty fun island, but you need to be prepared to spend some dough when visiting this Hawaiian island.

## Best Hawaiian Island for First Timers: Maui

Maui tops our list for first timers visiting the Hawaiian islands. With plenty to do and not an overwhelming tourist vibe, Maui provides the best of both local flavor and tourist activities to the first time visitor to Hawaii. Most visitors stay in either Ka'anapali Beach area or South Maui. We've stayed in both and there's value in both areas. It would be hard to pick a favorite.

The main town near Ka'anapali is Lahaina. This is a bit touristy, but not bad. This is where you can go see one of the best luaus in all of Hawai'i, the Old Lahaina Luau. You can also take the road to Hana. A windy, picturesque road filled with local fruit stands and waterfalls. At the end of the road, just past Hana, you can explore the Seven Sacred Pools; natural, terraced pools that dump into the Pacific Ocean.



Just be sure you don't try to do the Hana loop and drive the "backside" of the road to Hana. It's not fun...and not usually covered on rental insurance. You can visit the I'ao Needle, the Maui Ocean Aquarium, go on a hike to one of several blowholes, visit one of my favorite breweries -- Maui Brewing Co. -- or go up to see the sunrise at Haleakela National Park -- a huge volcanic crater -- just be sure to bring really warm clothes, as it gets cold at elevation, even in the summer.



There's so much to do and experience in Maui. It's like the best of all Hawaiian worlds without making you feel like you flew from one tourist destination to another.

We usually spend about 9-10 days in Maui and that seems just about right. If you get really frisky, you can take a ferry from Maui to Lanai and/or Molokai, so you can get 3 islands in during one trip. However, there's plenty just on Maui for one vacation. This is why we rank Maui as the top Hawaiian Island for 1st time visitors to Hawaii. *Aloha!*