

TRAVEL WEEKLY

THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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20 things you might not know about Hawaii (10/18/2005)

By Robert Bone

Although Hawaii has been a U.S. state for more than 45 years, there are several aspects of the islands that surprise many visitors. Here are 20 facts you might not know:

1. There are no "city limits" to Honolulu, unless you count the shoreline. The city and county of Honolulu include the entire island of Oahu, and for administrative purposes, the tiny islands west of Kauai and Niihau are part of Honolulu city and county.
2. The Hawaiian language is spoken regularly in daily life only in one place -- on Niihau, the small island just west of Kauai. Privately owned Niihau has no electricity or central water supply, and visitors generally are not welcome. If you think you are hearing Hawaiian on the streets of Honolulu, it is more likely Samoan, due to an immigrant population from that Polynesian island.
3. Old-timers who grew up working on the sugar and pineapple plantations, as well as many younger residents of the state, take pride in speaking variations of Hawaiian pidgin. The language is basically English, but with some unusual grammatical construction and verbal inflection. Words and expressions are thrown into the mix from Hawaiian, Japanese and Chinese.
4. Since Hawaii is the 50th state, island residents prefer not to hear travelers use expressions such as "back in the States." Instead, they refer to the rest of the country as "the mainland."
5. Most people know that the Hawaiian Islands were created by volcanic action. But how many know that another potential island, Loihi, is growing but still submerged, some distance southwest of the Big Island. Your descendants may someday stay at a Starwood Loihi, Outrigger Loihi or Four Seasons Loihi.

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6. Speaking of volcanos, there are two types of lava -- aa and pahoehoe. Aa is very rough, almost cinder-like. Pahoehoe is smooth or "ropey looking."

7. Waikiki, Honolulu's most famous neighborhood, is not "downtown," although many travelers refer to it as such. There is a Downtown Honolulu, however, three miles from



Waikiki, and it is the seat of commerce and government. Visitors who seek a sense of history and Hawaiian culture should leave the beach and head downtown.

8. Honolulu's streets are among the quietest of any busy metropolis in America. It is considered impolite to honk your horn except in an emergency. (One new arrival who made this mistake reported that four big guys piled out of the car ahead of him and asked politely what his problem was.)

9. With occasional exceptions, politeness is considered a general characteristic of the population. This stems from both the Asian and Polynesian traditions, and most islanders are said to have the "Aloha Spirit," a feeling of good will toward each other and *malihinis* (newcomers).

10. You won't find any billboards in Hawaii. This is the result of a state law that dates to the 1920s, on the theory that a beautiful landscape should not be obscured by outdoor advertising.

11. A favorite food in Hawaii is mahi mahi. In fact, the fish is so popular that the seas around the islands don't provide enough to fill the demand. Most mahi mahi is shipped frozen into Hawaii after having been caught in Taiwan or Ecuador.

12. Hawaii has no dangerous animals in its mountains and forests, with the exception of wild pigs, descendants of those brought by early explorers to the islands. If you surprise a sow with babies, she might decide to charge you.

13. There are no snakes on Hawaii. But there is a colony of rock

wallabies living in an almost inaccessible area of the mountains behind Honolulu. These are descendants of a pair that escaped from a private zoo in the 1920s.

14. Hawaii has no squirrels, with the exception of a few in cages at the Honolulu Zoo. Sometimes called the “Hawaiian squirrel” is the Indian mongoose, imported into Hawaii in the late 19th century in a futile attempt to destroy rats that threatened the sugar harvest. Unfortunately, the rats are nocturnal and the mongoose diurnal. They only meet occasionally at the change of shifts. The mongoose has survived mainly by preying on Hawaii’s ground-nesting birds.

15. The state fish of Hawaii is the *humuhumunukunukuapuaa* -- more famous for its long name than for anything else.

16. Hawaii also has a state bird, the *nene* (pronounced nay-nay). Some believe it descended from a flock of Canadian geese, blown to Hawaii on some long-ago wind.

17. Queen Liliuokalani, Hawaii’s last monarch, was a prolific songwriter. She composed “Aloha Oe,” the quintessential Hawaiian song.

18. The steel guitar was invented in Honolulu. A student at the Kamehameha School for Boys noted an unusual sound when he slid a comb along the strings of a conventional guitar, and a new instrument was born.

19. Hawaii is considered to be the northern apex of the Polynesian Triangle, which generally encompasses other islands of similar Polynesian background. The easternmost point is Easter Island. The southernmost is New Zealand (Aotearoa). The Polynesian islands of Tahiti, Tonga, Samoa, etc., are also enclosed within the triangle.

20. Hawaii’s most famous musical instrument is the ukulele. It is actually Portuguese, having been imported by that group of immigrants in the 19th century.

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