



A LOCAL'S GUIDE FROM HAPPY DAYS VACATION

51 things to do near your Makaha getaway

The coast our guests actually explore, beaches, hikes, luau, and local food, all within a short drive of where we host on the west side, plus a few farther-flung favorites worth the drive.

COVERAGE

Wai'anae to Ko Olina

BEST FOR

First-time & repeat guests

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WELCOME

A note from your hosts

We've been coming to this coast as guests for twenty-five years, and hosting here ourselves for the last two and a half, long enough to know which beach is calm on a Tuesday morning, which hike gets too hot by 10am, and where to eat that isn't in every guidebook.

This isn't a list of the most Instagrammed spots on O'ahu. It's the coast the way we actually see it, the beach we send first-time guests to, the hike we do for sunset, the market we shop at on Saturdays, plus a handful of places further afield that are worth a full day if you've got a rental car. Fifty-one places, organized by what kind of day you're in the mood for.

Print it, save it, or just keep it open on your phone during your stay. However you use it, we hope it helps you find your own version of what keeps bringing us back to this side of the island.



Fred & family

Happy Days Vacation · Wai'anae, Hawai'i

Good to know

Weather & best time

Wai'anae sits in the rain shadow of the mountains, so it runs sunnier and drier than most of O'ahu year-round. Winter (Nov–Mar) brings whales and bigger surf; summer has calmer water for swimming and snorkeling.

Getting around

A rental car is the easiest way to reach most of what's in this guide. Rideshare works but is less consistent on this side of the island. Farrington Highway is the main road running the length of the coast.

What to pack

Reef-safe sunscreen, a reusable water bottle, sturdy shoes for the pillbox hikes, and a light layer for the evening. One bag that works for the beach and a hike saves you packing two.

Ocean & reef safety

Conditions can change fast outside the calmer bays like Pokai and Ko Olina. Check conditions before you swim, use reef-safe sunscreen, and never turn your back on the ocean.

A few words you'll hear

<i>Wai'anae</i>	why-AH-nah-eh	this coast, and the town at its heart
<i>Aloha</i>	ah-LOH-hah	hello, love, and the spirit behind both
<i>Mahalo</i>	mah-HAH-loh	thank you
<i>'Ohana</i>	oh-HAH-nah	family, including the kind you choose
<i>Pau hana</i>	pow HAH-nah	done with work, happy hour, essentially

Fifty-one spots, seven ways to spend a day

01	Beaches & ocean	8 SPOTS
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01-08

Beaches & ocean

The Waianae Coast has some of Oahu's least crowded sand, start here.

8 SPOTS IN THIS SECTION

01 Pokai Bay Beach Park

The most sheltered beach on the coast, calm year-round, easy for kids and beginner swimmers, with a reef at the center of the bay for snorkeling. There's a small boat harbor at one end if you'd rather watch the fishing fleet than swim.

[85-037 Pokai Bay Rd, Waianae](#) · Free · Calmest in the morning

02 Makaha Beach Park

Golden sand and a legendary surf break, this is where big-wave surfing on Oahu got its start. Offshore, the Makaha Caves sit 30 to 50 feet down, drawing certified divers to their arches and tunnels.

[Farrington Hwy, Makaha](#) · Free · Surf is bigger in winter

03 Electric Beach (Kahe Point Beach Park)

Named for the power plant next door, whose warm-water outflow draws turtles and tropical fish close to shore. It's a shore entry over rocks, so reef shoes help, and conditions can shift fast.

[Farrington Hwy at Kahe Point, Kapolei](#) · Free · Check conditions before you go in

04 Nanakuli Beach Park

A wide, forty-acre stretch of sand that's usually sunny and dry, this coast sits in the mountains' rain shadow, so it's a safe bet when the rest of the island is soggy. Little natural shade, so bring your own.

Nanakuli Ave off Farrington Hwy · Free · Sunny most days

05 Ko Olina Lagoons

Four manmade, current-free coves built for swimming and paddling, each with a crescent of sand and calm, clear water. A paved path connects all four, so you can lagoon-hop without moving the car.

Aliinui Dr, Ko Olina · Free public access · Best before mid-morning

06 Yokohama Bay (Keawaula Beach)

The last beach before Kaena Point, wide, undeveloped, and about as far from a resort as this coast gets. Strong swimmers only; there are no lifeguards most of the year, but it's one of the best spots on the island to watch the sun go down.

End of Farrington Hwy., past Makaha · Free · Sunset is the move

07 **Tracks Beach Park**

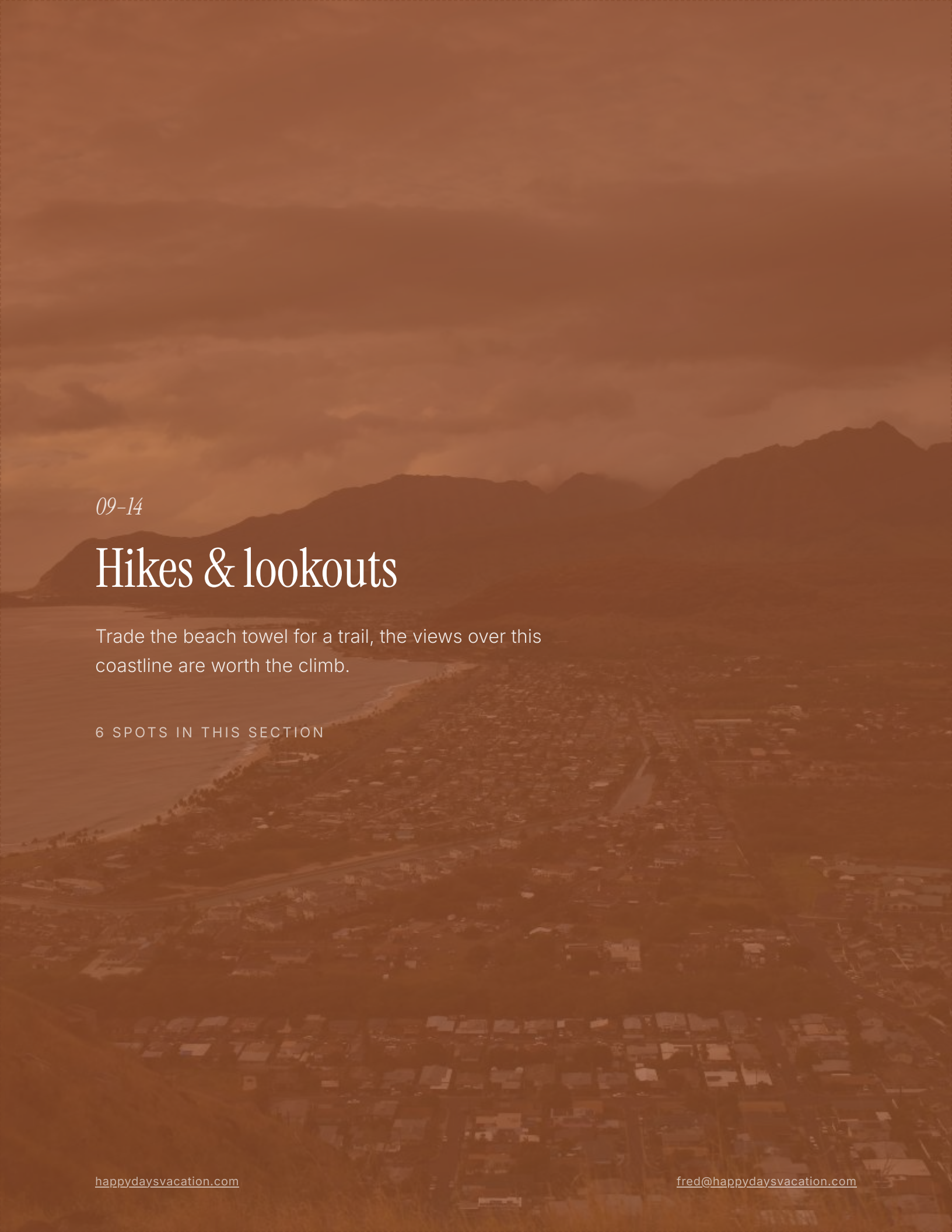
A laid-back beginner surf break, named for the old sugar-plantation railroad tracks that once ran along this stretch of coast. Good sandy bottom, gentle enough for a first time on a board.

[Farrington Hwy, Nanakuli](#) · Free · Best in the morning before wind picks up

08 **White Plains Beach Park**

A wide, family-friendly beach near Kalaeloa with gentler waves than most of the coast, plus more shade trees than you'll find further up Farrington Highway. Popular with local families on weekends.

[Kalaeloa \(former Barbers Point\), Kapolei](#) · Free · Quieter on weekdays

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in Hawaii, taken from a high vantage point. The town is densely packed with buildings and roads, stretching along the coastline. To the left, the ocean is visible, and to the right, a large mountain range rises. The sky is filled with soft, orange-hued clouds, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall color palette is warm and monochromatic, dominated by shades of orange and brown.

09-14

Hikes & lookouts

Trade the beach towel for a trail, the views over this coastline are worth the climb.

6 SPOTS IN THIS SECTION

09 Ka'ena Point State Park Trail

A flat, wide coastal walk out to a seabird sanctuary at Oahu's westernmost tip, following the old railroad grade along lava-rock coastline. Watch for Hawaiian monk seals hauled out on the rocks, and whales offshore in winter, the point itself is fenced to protect nesting albatross.

Trailhead off Farrington Hwy., past Yokohama Bay · Free · 5–7 miles round trip, go early

10 Maili Pillbox Hike (Pu'u O Hulu)

A steep, half-mile climb to a cluster of WWII-era bunkers, including the famous pink one, with panoramic views down the length of the coast. Short enough to fit into a single evening, but steep enough to want real shoes.

Kaukama Rd, Maili · Free · ~1.5 miles round trip, 45min–1hr, best at sunset

11 Kolekole Pass

A scenic drive up through the Waianae Range to a lookout with views down into central Oahu, the kind of spot most visitors never see because it's not on the way to anywhere touristy.

Lualualei Naval Rd · Free · Clearest visibility midday

12 Whale watching from the ridgeline

December through March, watch for humpbacks breaching offshore right from the pillboxes or the Kaena Point trail, no boat, no charter, just altitude and a little patience.

Mali Pillbox or Ka'ena Point · Free · Dec–Mar, mornings are calmest for viewing

13 Waianae Valley trails

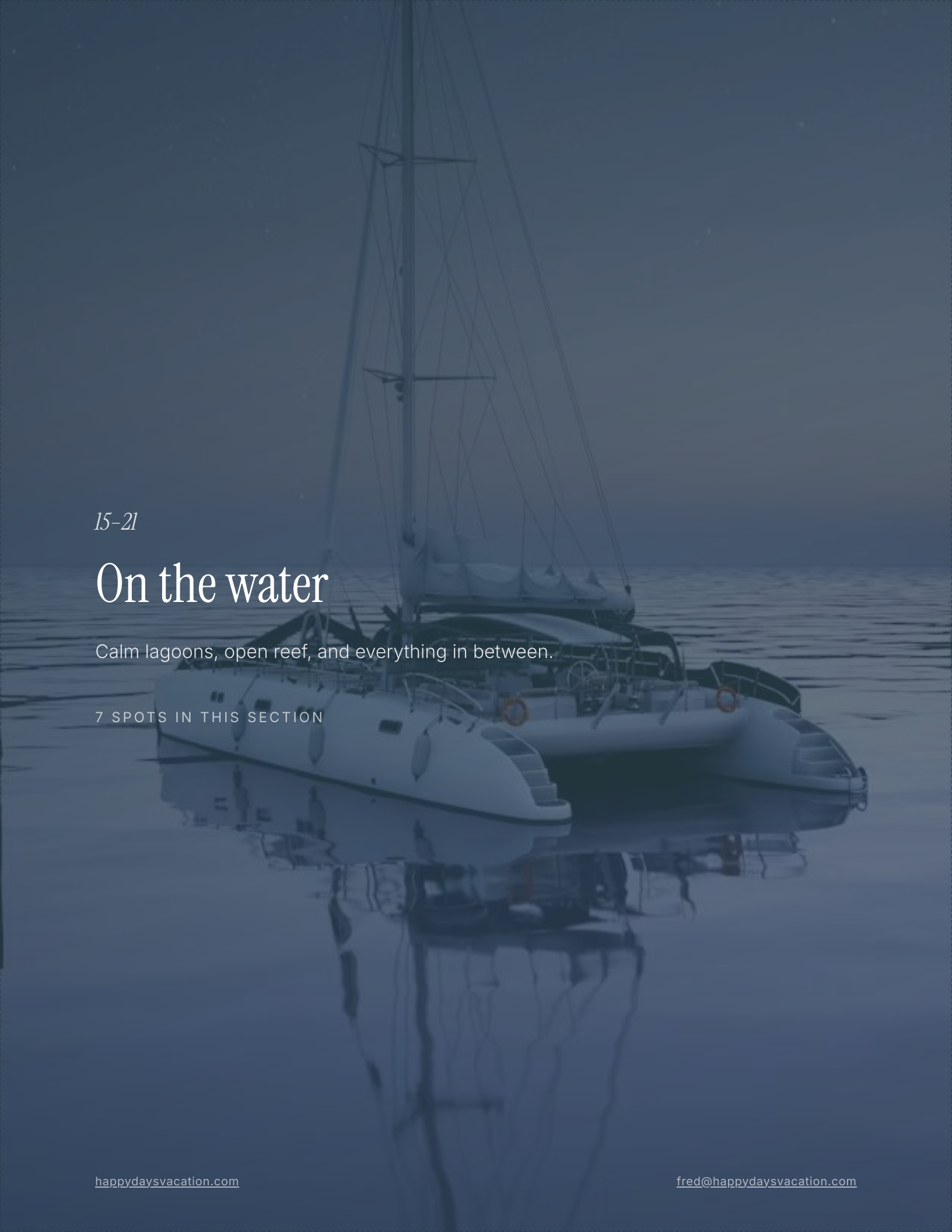
Longer, tougher routes into the mountains behind town for experienced hikers, with some rope-assisted sections near Mount Ka'ala, Oahu's highest point. Not a casual outing, go with someone who knows the route.

Trailhead off Waianae Valley Rd · Free · 5–7 hours round trip

14 The Ko Olina lagoon path

An easy, paved, scenic walk connecting all four lagoons, flat enough for a stroller, pretty enough for a sunset walk before dinner at one of the resort restaurants.

Aliinui Dr, Ko Olina · Free · Morning or evening, avoid midday sun



15-21

On the water

Calm lagoons, open reef, and everything in between.

7 SPOTS IN THIS SECTION

15 Snorkel & sail from Ko Olina Marina

Half-day catamaran trips out of the marina, with a good chance of spotting dolphins, turtles, and, in season, whales. Most include gear and a light lunch; book a few days ahead in summer.

[Ko Olina Marina, Kapolei](#) · ~\$100–150/person · Half-day, morning departures fill first

16 Dolphin Excursions Hawaii

A local operator running dolphin and whale-watching tours for over 20 years, departing right from Waianae Boat Harbor with a lifeguard-certified crew, closer to home than the Ko Olina charters and often more personal.

[85-491 Farrington Hwy, Waianae](#) · [dolphinexcursions.com](#) · ~3-hour morning tours

17 Fishing charter from Waianae Boat Harbor

Half, full, and 3/4-day deep-sea and coastal sport fishing trips depart right from the harbor, this is where Fred went out himself. Likely outfit: Live Bait Sport Fishing, running trips from here since 1985, confirm before printing.

[Waianae Boat Harbor](#) · [live-bait.com](#) · Half, full & 3/4-day trips



18 **Stand-up paddleboarding at the lagoons**

Calm, current-free water in Ko Olina makes this about as easy as SUP gets, a good place for a first attempt before trying it in open water.

[Ko Olina Lagoons](#) · Rentals ~\$20-40/hour · Calmest early morning

19 **West Side Surf Lessons at Makaha or Tracks**

West Side Surf Lessons runs group and private lessons right at Makaha and Tracks, both breaks are forgiving for first-timers, boards, a wetsuit top, and a couple of hours is usually enough to stand up.

[westsidesurflessons.com](#) · ~\$75-100 for a group lesson · Gentler surf in summer

20 **Diving the Makaha Caves**

Underwater caverns, arches, and swim-through tunnels 30 to 50 feet down, just offshore from Makaha Beach, a local dive shop can set you up if you're certified.

[Offshore, Makaha Beach](#) · Book through a local dive shop · Certified divers only

21 **Glass-bottom boat sunset tour**

Reef viewing paired with Ko Olina's famous west-facing sunset, from the comfort of a boat deck rather than a snorkel mask, an easy option if you'd rather stay dry.

[Departs Ko Olina Marina](#) · ~\$70-100/person · Evening departure timed to sunset

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a tropical scene. It features several palm trees with long, feathery fronds. Interspersed among the palm fronds are several leis made of colorful, folded paper or fabric in shades of orange, yellow, red, and pink. The entire image has a warm, orange-brown color overlay.

22-27

Culture, luau & history

This coast carries some of the island's deepest Hawaiian history, a few ways to spend an evening in it.

6 SPOTS IN THIS SECTION

22 **Germaine's Luau**

A casual, family-friendly luau on a secluded beach near Barbers Point, lei greeting, an imu ceremony, an all-you-can-eat Hawaiian feast, and a Polynesian revue that runs through Samoa, Tahiti, and Fiji as well as Hawaii. It's also where the live-action "Lilo & Stitch" was filmed.

91-119 Olai St, Kapolei · Packages vary, book direct for current pricing · Most evenings except Mon & Wed

23 **Chief's Luau**

Set inside Wet'n'Wild Hawaii, this one leans into spectacle, a full Hawaiian buffet, an energetic Polynesian show, and a ten-minute, eight-man Samoan fire-knife finale to close the night.

400 Farrington Hwy, Kapolei · From ~\$144/adult · 5:30pm start, evenings

24 **Kaula Luau**

An oceanfront dinner show at Ko Olina built around one family's story across Hawaiian, Tahitian, and Samoan tradition, eat-when-you-want format instead of a buffet line, with wandering performers between courses.

Ko Olina Resort, near Lagoon 4 · From ~\$95-119/adult · Evening, book ahead

25 **The Israel Kamakawiwo'ole statue**

A tribute at the Waianae Neighborhood Community Center to the Waianae-born musician behind "Over the Rainbow", a quiet, unmarketed stop that means a lot to people from here.

[Waianae Neighborhood Community Center](#) · Free · Anytime, daylight

26 **Makua Cave**

A roadside cave tied to Hawaiian legend, easy to miss if you're not looking for the pullout, worth a five-minute stop on the drive out toward Kaena Point.

[Farrington Hwy, Makua](#) · Free, roadside pullout · Daylight viewing

27 **Buffalo's Big Board Surfing Classic**

An annual longboard contest at Makaha Beach honoring the coast's deep surf history, founded by legendary waterman Buffalo Keaulana, check current listings for this year's date, typically held in late winter.

[Makaha Beach Park](#) · Free to watch · Annual, check current dates

28-37

Local flavor

Skip the resort menus for a night, this is where the coast actually eats.

10 SPOTS IN THIS SECTION

28 Waianae Farmers Market

A Saturday-morning gathering in the Waianae Mall parking lot, local produce, prepared food trucks doing Filipino plates and kalbi, handmade jewelry, and a genuinely local crowd rather than a tourist one.

Waianae Mall, 86-120 Farrington Hwy · Free entry · Saturdays, morning

29 Hannara Restaurant

Korean, American, and Hawaiian plates in one no-frills room, known for oxtail soup and coconut pancakes the size of dinner plates, a Wai'anae institution people drive out of their way for.

86-078 Farrington Hwy Ste 101, Waianae · \$\$ · Lunch & dinner

30 A&G Bar and Grill

Hawaiian-style plate lunch, poke, and garlic shrimp in a laid-back bar-and-grill setting. Recently rebranded from its old "Steaks and Things" name and location, confirming this is the spot with Fred before printing.

87-2070 Farrington Hwy, Waianae · (808) 200-0976 · \$\$

31 **L&L Hawaiian BBQ**

The reliable, familiar plate-lunch chain, with a location right on this stretch of coast, confirm which Wai'anae-side address Fred means before printing.

[Farrington Hwy, Waianae area](#) · \$ · Lunch & dinner

32 **Barbecue Kai**

A local drive-in serving plate lunches and chicken katsu straight through the window, cash only, so keep small bills on hand.

[85-973 Farrington Hwy, Waianae](#) · [\(808\) 696-7122](#) · \$ · Cash only

33 **The Beach House by 604**

Waterfront tables, ocean views, and what regulars call Hawaii's best Bloody Mary, with an all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet some weekends. Not to be confused with the unrelated "604 Clubhouse" in Wahiawa.

[85-010 Army St, Waianae](#) · [\(808\) 725-2589](#) · \$\$

34 **Lanterns Restaurant and Tavern**

Named for nearby Green Lanterns Beach, with sunset views over the water and live music or karaoke some nights.

[87-064 Farrington Hwy, Maili](#) · [\(808\) 762-0264](#) · [lanternshawaii.com](#) · \$\$

35 **Countryside Cafe**

A breakfast-only spot, kalua pork benedict, a Westside omelet, and pancakes sized for sharing. Likely what Fred calls "Country Kitchen", confirm before printing.

[87-070 Farrington Hwy Ste 104, Waianae](#) · [\(808\) 888-5448](#) · Daily 7am–1pm · \$

36 **Mountain Magic Shave Ice**

Voted the island's best shave ice a few years back, the title's a little dated now, but the shave ice still holds up.

[84-1170 Farrington Hwy Bldg A2-AE, Waianae](#) · [\(808\) 699-1013](#) · \$

37 **Surf & Sprout**

Lighter fare, acai bowls, smoothies, wraps, and a coffee and matcha bar for the mornings you want something that isn't a plate lunch.

[84-1170 Farrington Hwy Ste BC, Makaha](#) · [\(808\) 762-9858](#) · Mon–Thu 9–3, Fri–Sun 9–4 · \$

Wellness

Ask us about mobile massage, our go-to therapist will come right to where you're staying. We're confirming the best way to share her contact, ask us directly and we'll connect you.



38-44

Family fun & day trips

For the days you want a break from the sand.

7 SPOTS IN THIS SECTION

38 **Wet'n'Wild Hawaii**

A full water park in Kapolei with a wave pool, a lazy river, a kids' play area, and a handful of proper thrill slides, about fifteen minutes from Waianae and an easy full-day plan for kids of any age.

[400 Farrington Hwy, Kapolei](#) · ~\$60–70/adult · Opens 10:30am, closes 3–7pm depending on day

39 **Hawaiian Railway Society**

A narrated, two-hour round-trip ride on restored vintage rail cars along the old sugar-plantation line, from Ewa out to Kahe Point and back, usually with an ice cream stop in Ko Olina along the way.

[91-1001 Renton Rd, Ewa Beach](#) · ~\$18–20/adult, ~\$15/child · Wed 1pm, Sat 12 & 3pm, Sun 1 & 3pm

40 **Ko Olina Golf Club**

An 18-hole championship course ranked among Hawaii's top resort courses, with sixteen water features and views of the Pacific from nearly every hole, open to the public, not just resort guests.

[92-1220 Aliinui Dr, Kapolei](#) · Green fees vary, call ahead · Open daily from 6am

41 **Ka Makana Ali'i**

Kapolei's open-air shopping center, good for a grocery run, a rainy-day errand, or just a change of scenery with real restaurant variety, a short drive from the coast.

[91-5431 Kapolei Pkwy, Kapolei](#) · Free · Most stores open 10am–9pm

42 **Aulani, A Disney Resort & Spa**

Public-facing dining, shops, and the resort's lobby areas are open even if you're not staying there, with Disney touches throughout, an easy stop to pair with a lagoon day at Ko Olina.

[Ko Olina Resort, Kapolei](#) · Free to visit public areas · Daytime

43 **Waianae Coast Sunset on the Beach**

A community movie night on the sand, bring a blanket, grab something from the food trucks, and watch a film as the sun goes down. Check local community listings for the next scheduled date.

Location varies by event · Free · Evening, check current listings

44 **Coral Crater Adventure Park**

A 35-acre former quarry turned adventure park in Kapolei, six ziplines, a 60-foot aerial tower with a freefall and climbing walls, and guided ATV trails. Good for a group that wants something with more adrenaline than a beach day.

[91-1780 Midway St, Kapolei](#) · Packages from ~\$100+, book ahead · Open daily 8am–6pm

45-51

Worth the drive



These aren't a quick trip from Wai'anae, most are 45 Head or Pearl Harbor minutes to two hours each way, but if you've got a free day and a rental car, they're worth it.

7 SPOTS IN THIS SECTION

45 **Diamond Head State Monument**

Oahu's most iconic crater hike, a paved, switchbacking trail to a summit lookout over Waikiki and the south shore. Reservations are required for non-residents, book online in advance.

gostateparks.hawaii.gov · ~0.8mi one-way, 560ft gain · ~45–60 min from Waianae

46 **Waimea Valley (Waimea Falls)**

A botanical garden and cultural site on the North Shore, an easy, mostly flat walk back to a swimmable waterfall. Swimming is seasonal and conditions-dependent.

waimeavalley.org · Entry fee applies · ~50–70 min from Waianae

47 **Polynesian Cultural Center**

A full-day commitment in Laie, a luau, a canoe pageant, and recreated villages from across the Pacific.

polynesia.com · ~1.5–2 hrs from Waianae

48 **Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve**

Widely considered the best easy snorkeling on Oahu, inside a protected volcanic bay. Requires advance timed-entry reservations and is closed Monday and Tuesday for reef recovery, verify the current official booking site before you go.

~1.5 hrs from Waianae · Advance reservation required

49 **Kualoa Ranch**

A movie-set ranch on the windward side, Jurassic Park, LOST, and others filmed here, with ziplines, ATV and horseback tours, and catamaran ocean tours.

kualoa.com · ~1–1.5 hrs from Waianae

50 **Pearl Harbor / USS Arizona Memorial**

Free timed tickets for the Arizona Memorial release through recreation.gov and often sell out same-day, book ahead. The closest of this group to Waianae.

pearlharbor.org · ~40–50 min from Waianae

51 Aloha Stadium Swap Meet & Marketplace

A flea-market-style marketplace of local vendors, a good rainy-day or souvenir stop on the way back from the North Shore or town.

alohastadium.hawaii.gov · Wed & Sat 8am–3pm, Sun 6:30am–3pm · \$2 admission (12+), \$1 kama'aina/military, free under 12

BONUS

Four ways to spend a day

A beach day

Easy, low-key, good for the first day of a stay

- 01 Morning at **Pokai Bay Beach Park**, the calmest water on the coast, easy for kids.
- 33 Lunch at **The Beach House by 604** on the way past.
- 05 Afternoon at the **Ko Olina Lagoons**, then stay for sunset over the water.

A hike-and-sunset day

Best on a cooler morning, with sturdy shoes

- 09 Start early at **Ka'ena Point State Park Trail**, before the heat sets in.
Rest and cool off midday, Pokai Bay or your own lanai both work.
- 10 End at the **Mali Pillbox Hike** for sunset over the pink pillbox.

A cultural evening

Book the luau ahead, they sell out, especially in summer

- 28 Late afternoon at the **Waianae Farmers Market** for local produce and crafts.
- 22- Evening at a luau, **Germaine's**, **Chief's**, or **Kaula** all deliver a full night of food and
- 24 performance.

A day worth the drive

Pick one big far-flung stop and make a full day of it

- 45 Start at **Diamond Head** early, before the crowds and heat.
- 48 Or spend the day snorkeling at **Hanauma Bay**, book your timed entry first.
- 50 On the way back, stop at **Pearl Harbor**, the closest of the bunch to home.

Shopping & practical

Waianae Mall

Your go-to for basics, Longs Drugs/CVS, City Mill, Starbucks, and more. Also hosts the Saturday farmers market (see 28).

[86-120 Farrington Hwy, Waianae](#)

7-Eleven across from Longs

Skip past the hot dogs, the sushi and prepared food here is genuinely good, like popping into a convenience store in Japan.

Tamura Super Market

A longtime Waianae grocery store, distinct from the Tamura's liquor stores elsewhere on the island. Ask us for directions if your map doesn't find it, exact address to be confirmed.

Japanese-style deli near the mall

A small deli-style counter near the Waianae Mall shopping center that Fred likes, ask us on arrival and we'll point you to it directly.

BEFORE YOU HEAD OUT

Worth checking first

Trail conditions

Hawai'i's Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DLNR Nā Ala Hele) posts trail alerts and closures, worth a check before any hike in this guide, especially after heavy rain.

Weather & surf

The National Weather Service's Honolulu forecast office covers current surf, wind, and marine conditions for the Leeward Coast.

Luau reservations

Germaine's, Chief's, and Kaula each take bookings directly through their own websites. Reserve a few weeks out if you're visiting in summer or over a holiday.

Day-trip reservations

Diamond Head, Hanauma Bay, and the Pearl Harbor Arizona Memorial all require advance, often timed-entry tickets, book these before you drive out.

Ask us directly

This guide reflects what's open and running as of the time we wrote it, hours and availability can shift. When in doubt, just message us at fred@happydaysvacation.com and we'll point you the right way.

BEFORE YOU GO

However you explore it

We hope this guide helps you find your own version of what keeps bringing us back to this coast. If anything in here has changed, or you just want a local's opinion on where to go next, we're an email away.

Happy Days
VACATIONS

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