



PHOTO BY JOE BELANGER

# Blue Hawaii

Deep dives, fun floats and uniquely exciting water adventures in the islands  
By Leslie Forsberg

**W**here the 'āina (land) meets the kai (sea) in the Hawaiian Islands, opportunities for playing in, on and under the water are nearly endless, from boogie boarding and jet-skiing to kitesurfing and rafting.

But you don't have to be brave or brawny to soak up the beauty and majesty of the waves and wildlife. We've put together a showcase of shaka-worthy adventures for nearly anyone to take to the waters Hawai'i style.

## Rafting Around Cliffs — Kaua'i

► Bouncing along on a Zodiac-style boat, we zoomed around the steeply folded cliffs of Kaua'i's Nāpali Coast past dramatic valleys, waterfalls (some of which go dry without rain), sea caves and the Honopu Arch.

I expected the party music and the excitement; what I didn't expect was the reverence of our Kauai Sea Tours guides as they offered insights into important cultural spaces we moved through on our water journey. At Nu'alolo Kai, an early Hawaiian settlement with burial grounds surrounded by 1,500-foot cliffs and accessible only by water, our guide explained the history and culture of those who lived here.

## Paddling Along Reefs — Maui

► Lāna'i, Molokini Crater and the West Maui Mountains draw your eyes to the horizon, but there are equally majestic sights just beneath your kayak once you grow accustomed to spotting Hawaiian green sea turtles (honu) as they trundle through the reefs below your hull.

Turtle Town, as the area south of Kihei has been dubbed, has dozens of reefs where sea turtles graze on algae and bob to the surface for air. It's great for kayaking and also a good spot for beginners to learn stand-up paddleboarding.

If you already have experience with paddleboarding, head to Olowalu, a gorgeous coastal region where you can snorkel some of Maui's healthiest reefs.

Planting your paddle in the water and then pulling it to your hip, your board glides over shoals of colorful fish that dart in front of you. You can easily maneuver to get a closer look, and the rhythmic dipping of paddle into water, fresh trade winds and sheer beauty of the coastline make for an unforgettable experience. ➔



TUBING IN THE FORMER LIHUE PLANTATION

## Mountain Tubing — Kaua‘i

▶ Tubing in the historic irrigation system of a former sugar plantation on the slope of Mount Wai‘ale‘ale is a popular activity for families.

With red clay banks as bumpers, we floated through a lush emerald forest alive with bird-song, moving at the peaceful pace of the water through the man-made canals past trailing vines, abundant wildflowers and miniature waterfalls.

“Yee-haws” echoed as we entered the first of five tunnels and were swirled by the current, pinballing gently off the sides.

“It’s a combination of a lazy river and a teacup ride,” said Sam, our guide with Kauai Backcountry Adventures, which provides helmets, headlamps and exclusive access.

### NIGHT SNORKELING WITH MANTA RAYS



## Sailing on a Catamaran — Lāna‘i

▶ Lāna‘i has always had an air of mystery about it. Just 9 miles off the coast of Maui, its rugged landscape is largely undeveloped. One of the top reasons to visit is to snorkel in the pristine waters of Mānele-Hulopo‘e Marine Life Conservation District; the preserve’s extensive tide pools are a plus.

Trilogy Excursions offers the exhilaration of sailing to Lāna‘i aboard a catamaran and guided snorkeling in the conservation area (it’s the only tour boat company allowed to escort guests onto the island and to Hulopo‘e Bay). Locals narrate island tours that demystify the island’s past and present.

## Canoeing through History — Hawai‘i Island

▶ Launching from Kamakahonu Beach in a traditional outrigger, the six of us leaned into our paddles as we sliced smoothly through the waves of the bay whose shores were once the home of King Kamehameha I.

Our Kona Boys guide took us back in time to his reign as she described the rituals and practices of this sacred place. We were spellbound, until a pod of spinner dolphins coursed over to us, stealing the show as they leaped and played alongside our canoe.

## Night Snorkeling with Manta Rays — Hawai‘i Island

▶ The sun had already set when I slipped off the deck of the snorkel boat and into the inky waters of Keauhou Bay. Swimming out to a lighted float, I grabbed the edge and peered down, waiting for the show to begin.

It didn’t take long. A couple of immense, winged manta rays glided effortlessly in slow motion. Spiraling up from the bottom as they fed on plankton, they headed toward the lights — and us — before veering sideways and doing graceful flips, like languid aerialists.

Fair Wind Cruises has offered entry to this extraordinary spectacle since 2009, with naturalists onboard explaining the rays’ behavior, names and ages, based on their markings. It’s a show you won’t soon forget.

Call or visit your nearest AAA store (find locations on Page 2) for help planning your Hawai‘i water adventure.

## Scuba Diving in a Lagoon — O‘ahu

▶ Learning to scuba dive can be daunting, but at Aulani Resort’s Rainbow Reef, you can get a taste as you practice using scuba gear and learn the basics under the supervision of trained instructors.

Our dive instructor, Kelly, taught us to remove and replace our regulators underwater, use the buoyancy compensator and communicate with hand signals before we swam off to see the more than 1,000 fish that live in the man-made saltwater lagoon.

While I practiced simple maneuvers and played catch with a torpedo-shaped water toy, a second-time participant retrieved objects from the bottom, swam through a suspended hula hoop and even did a handstand. I gave him a thumbs up since it was impossible to grin.

(Rainbow Reef — O‘ahu’s only private snorkeling lagoon — is scheduled to reopen on December 18 after renovations.)

## Deep Diving in a Submarine — O‘ahu

▶ A hundred feet below the water’s surface in Waikiki, a sunken fishing boat, a navy vessel and even an airplane hull form artificial reefs, positioned here by Atlantis Submarines in an effort to increase biodiversity.

Schools of fish and the occasional reef shark thread their way through the structures, which you can view from inside air-conditioned submarines that hold up to 48 or 64 passengers.

## Surfing Waikīkī — O‘ahu

▶ One of Hawai‘i’s most iconic images is surfers hanging ten atop turquoise curls at Waikiki. I surfed here at 16 (and to my surprise, got up on my first try), but decades have passed since then.

Game to give it another go after a few onshore exercises led by Lorin, an instructor with Moniz Family Surf — a legendary surfing family — I paddled out through the warm, silky water toward the surf break. Lorin watched for the right wave before giving me a gentle shove. I was almost up before plunging in.

Lined up a second time, I caught the wave, rose to my feet in the surfer pose ... and surfed! Wind in my hair, the sound of the wave rushing alongside, adrenaline pumping through me, I could have sworn I was still 16 as I glided toward Waikiki’s glittering buildings and ivory sands. **1**

**LESLIE FORSBERG** visits Hawai‘i regularly to research and write about the islands’ culture, foods, festivals, beaches, parks, ecosystems and experiences.

### DEEP DIVING IN A SUBMARINE



LEFT: WATERFRAME / ALAMY; TOP: TOR JOHNSON / HAWAII TOURISM AUTHORITY

TOP: BENNYMARTY / ISTOCKPHOTO; RIGHT: JACOB WONG / ATLANTIS SUBMARINES



FORT DERUSSY BEACH PARK

## TIPS FROM THE PROS

We asked expert adventurers and tour guides to share their tips for enjoying and protecting Hawai‘i’s spectacular waters:

**1** For great snorkeling on O‘ahu, try Shark’s Cove on the North Shore when the water’s calm in the summer, and Kaimana Beach near the Waikiki Aquarium, which is quieter than Waikiki and out of the surf zone.

**2** On Hawai‘i Island head to Kealahou Bay State Historical Park, Hawai‘i’s only underwater state park.

**3** For Maui snorkeling, there’s a sandy beach with coral and gentle water in Olowalu at mile marker 14 on Route 30 to Lahaina. Baby Beach in Lahaina has lots of sand for toddlers to play in and a reef that extends far out and breaks the waves.

**4** O‘ahu’s Ala Moana Beach Park and the nearby Fort DeRussy Beach Park in Waikiki have nets set up for beach volleyball. There are people playing most of the time, especially if it’s a sunny, weekend day.

**5** Avoid touching or walking on coral, which is fragile and can die from contact. Buy only coral-safe sunscreen (easily found in Hawai‘i) and invest in a rash guard, which will protect both you and the environment.

**6** Don’t touch, disturb, chase or feed wildlife. Stay at least 10 feet from sea turtles, 50 feet from endangered Hawaiian monk seals, 150 feet from dolphins and 300 feet from humpback whales. Resist the temptation to hover over turtles in the water, which can prevent them from surfacing to breathe.