

ALOHA from Hawaii!

by James Glasbergen

Ah, Hawaii, land of majestic waterfalls, towering green cliffs, awesome volcanoes, pristine beaches, and grass skirts. Not only is it one of the most beautiful places around, it is also one of the most accessible!

Most first-timers to Hawaii spend their time in Oahu, Hawaii's most populated and most visited island. The touristy place to stay on the island is Waikiki, only a 25-minute drive from Honolulu. The most accessible beach I have ever visited is Waikiki Beach. A paved walking path runs parallel to the beach, and sections of the sand are hard enough for wheelchair or scooter users to maneuver easily. Beach wheelchair rentals are also available.

On Oahu's north shore, experience the culture of seven South Pacific Islands at the Polynesian Cultural Center. Highlights

include demonstrations in the seven villages, a canoe pageant, an authentic luau, and an evening show where Polynesian performers share their history and traditions through song, fire, and dance. Accessibility is great.

Another popular attraction is Pearl Harbor, site of the infamous Japanese attack in 1941. Visitors can take a ferry out to the USS Arizona Memorial, which is built directly over the sunken ship. Electric wheelchairs are not allowed on the ferry, so a person in an electric wheelchair must be transferred into one of the site's manual wheelchairs for the trip out to the memorial. Once inside, visitors can peer out at the USS Arizona, which lies beneath only six feet of water.

The second most visited Hawaiian island is Maui. Iao Valley State Park has accessible paths and walkways where you can get a great view of the Iao Needle, a natural rock pinnacle. The Road to Hana is an unforgettable drive along Maui's northeast coast. A word of caution though – it can be a very bumpy ride along winding, single-lane gravel roads! Don't miss the little town of Lahaina on Maui's west coast, either. Once the capital of the Hawaiian Islands, Lahaina is now a small tourist town known for its many shops and huge banyan tree.





The focal point of Maui, however, is Haleakala, the 10,023-foot volcano that dominates the southeast part of the island. Hundreds of tourists travel to the summit every day to enjoy the spectacular sunrise and magnificent view of western Maui. The Haleakala Visitor Center, near the summit, is wheelchair accessible and provides a breathtaking view of Haleakala's massive crater.

The Island of Kauai is arguably the most beautiful of the Hawaiian Islands. At Waimea Canyon, you can drive to an accessible lookout area and see the beautiful colors of the 10-mile long canyon, dubbed the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific" by Mark Twain. The other must-see on Kauai is the Na Pali Coast. Unfortunately, this 17-mile stretch of spectacular sea cliffs can only be seen by boat or helicopter. There are one or two boat companies that will take a manual wheelchair aboard (not electric), but the wheelchair must be carried aboard and it can be a rough boat ride. The better option is to take a helicopter ride. Although not wheelchair accessible, one or two helicopter companies are willing to help transfer someone out of their wheelchair and into a helicopter seat. There is no better way to see the beauty of Kauai!

Most tourists go to "the Big Island" of Hawaii to see one thing – the erupting Kilauea volcano. Visitors can drive through Volcanoes National Park and stop at several accessible locations to view enormous craters that were once filled with boiling lava. Along the way you can see the steam vents, where hot steam seeps through the ground from deep below the earth. However, as in Kauai, the best way to see the true beauty of Kilauea is by helicopter.

Hawaii's many accessible tourist attractions are not the only reason Hawaii is considered a great destination for people with disabilities. Many hotels offer ADA-compliant rooms, including roll-in showers. There are also medical companies on each of the four largest islands that rent a variety of equipment, such as wheelchairs and hoist lifts. Even personal care can be arranged with appropriate planning. Accessible transportation is also available. While Oahu and Maui offer the most options, accessible taxis, van rentals, airport transfers and sightseeing tours are available on most islands.

Given the great access and number of available services, Hawaii is definitely a can't-miss destination for people with disabilities!

James Glasbergen is an Accessible Travel Specialist at Frederick Travel in Ontario, Canada. In addition to arranging trips for disabled travelers, James operates a website devoted to wheelchair accessible travel. Visit www.fredericktravel.com or www.worldonwheelz.com to learn more about Hawaii and other accessible travel destinations.