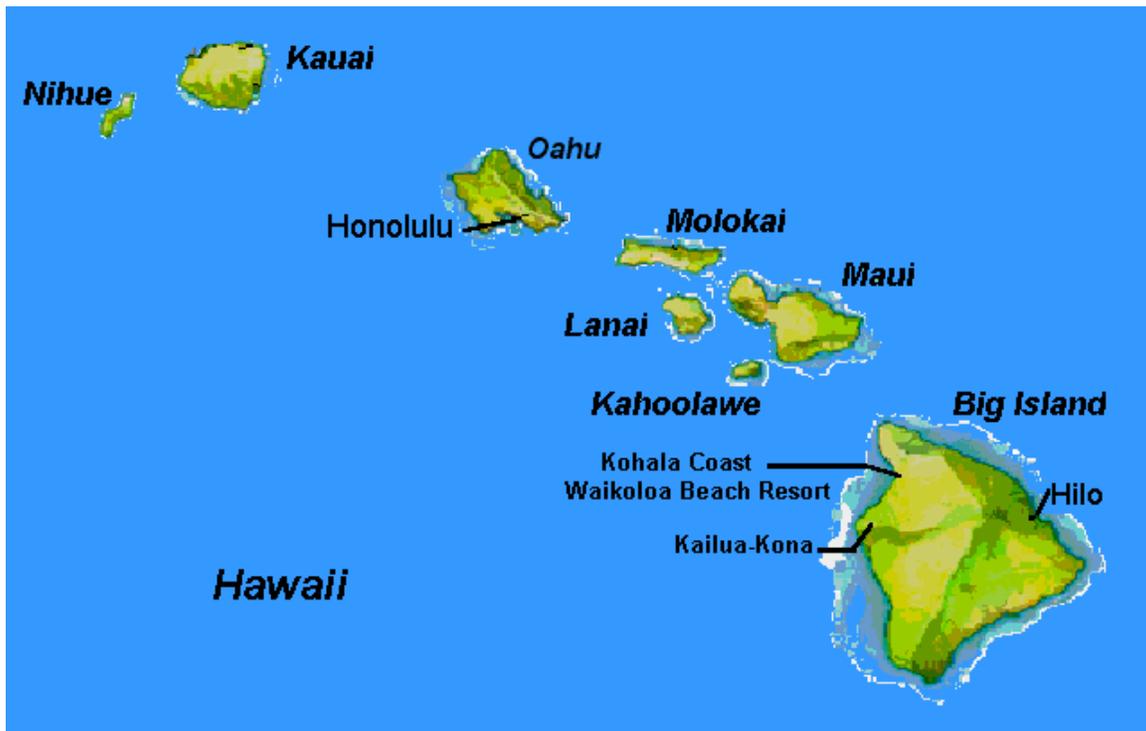
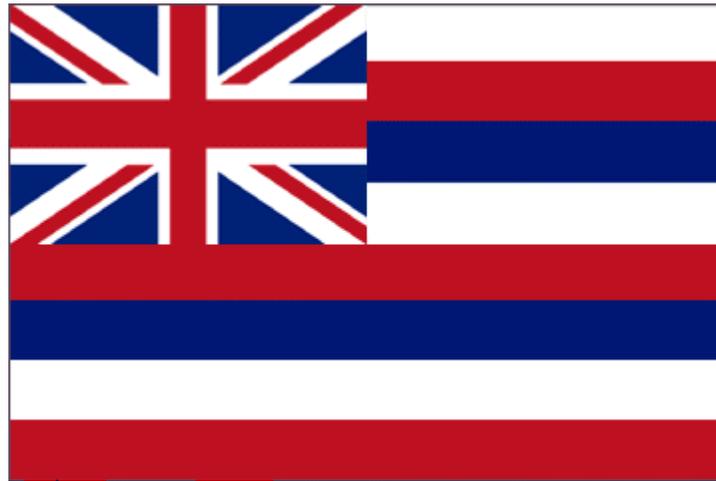


The Best of Hawai'i



Jan & Martin Oakes
22 Feb - 3 Mar 2008

20 Feb ~ Wednesday, Freeport.

It is so much easier to pack without the cat around.

Wednesday is our cocktail evening. Larry tells me that there will be a total lunar eclipse starting at 8:00pm. Now I usually know about these things, but this I had not heard, and suspected he was pulling my leg, or the alcohol was talking. But as everyone left, the silhouette of the earth began to edge onto the moon. I eventually got out the binoculars. I have never seen such a spectacular eclipse. The moon was dark orange. Must be an omen for Hawaii; but of what?

21 Feb ~ Thursday, Chicago O'Hare Hilton.

Today for Jan it is hair and nails. "See you this afternoon."

I was planning to catch the 5:00pm bus, but we are both ready to leave after lunch. I can't sit still. "Let's go."

As I feared the Van Galder Bus parking lot is full. An arrow points to alternate parking which looks suspiciously like the adjacent hotel. We take the second to last open spot and drag our cases through melting snow. After purchasing tickets, the lady counter clerk assures me that if we entered through the lift-up gate, we were legal.

A lady does not have enough money to purchase a ticket to Chicago. Jan takes pity on her and gives her a dollar.

"No, this bus is going down town. The next is to O'Hare."

"The Hilton? You can get off at terminal one and walk across the street, or from terminal two cross using the tunnel." The latter sounds better.

We settle down. The landscape is covered in snow. Trees stand bare of leaves. It looks as if an artist has drawn vertical black lines on a white canvas. It is a dull day and seems to get dark much sooner than we expect.

We retrieve our cases. They are filthy, covered in dust from the hold of the bus.

In the terminal, we take an elevator two floors down to the tunnel. I don't remember there being an elevator. The last time we did this I am sure we had to drag our suitcases onto an escalator. This is so much more convenient.

The Hilton front desk is well staffed and since there are no lines, check-in is expeditious. We don't bother with the automated check-in machines.

As we open the door to room 4055 a blast of hot air greets us. Someone has turned the temperature up to 90°F. After turning off the heating and shedding most of my clothes, I feel comfortable.

"Want a drink Jan?"

"Just a coke."

Armed with the heaviest metal ice bucket I have ever lifted, I go on safari. My choice, turn left or right out of the door. I go left and strike ice but no coke machine. Let's start over. I go right and find a machine in such a dimly lit alcove that I have to return for my reading glasses. The price would have significantly reduced the national debt!

I enjoy my martini from the miniature I filled at home.

We usually eat in the coffee shop located off the tunnel, but opt instead for the Andiamo Restaurant. Much nicer, but as expected, Chicago prices.

Jan orders Caesar salad with chicken, and I paella, a seafood combination. I stare at the plate. Since when has paella been made with tomatoes, red pepper and sausage?

"But sir, this is Portuguese Paella, you were thinking of Spanish Paella."

Actually, when I dug under the mountain of rice, there was seafood.

The cappuccino and tiramisu were better.

22 Feb ~ Friday, Flight to Honolulu.

We did not sleep. The telephone rang at 6:30am. When I picked it up, there was silence. No voice, human or computer. I guess humans are becoming obsolete.

It is cold and damp, but the forecast snow has gone south of Chicago.

In the elevator was an abandoned baggage cart which we quickly acquired. Much easier than trundling suitcases. Our coats are packed. It is cold in the tunnel. We walk briskly and reach United Terminal one more quickly than expected.

Our pre-printed boarding passes allow us to expedite check-in. A clerk instructs me to enter the validation code into a touch screen computer, which spits out baggage claim checks. Goodbye bags. That was quick!

The lines at security are short. A guard looks at our sweatshirts adorned with maps of Hawaii and comments. "You are going to enjoy this vacation."

There is the usual turmoil surrounding X-ray, but at least I don't have to take off my belt.

Two isolated seats invite us to a window. Food on board the plane is snack boxes, which have to be purchased, so I buy wrapped sandwiches and cookies to carry on board.

United offers a new feature, economy plus. These seats boast 5in extra leg room which we upgraded to. "These seats are nice."

The movie is an "I don't want to watch title." We have the usual share of crying babies. Glad it is not an overnight flight!