My Hawaii Christmas List

48 bucket-list spots. When to go, and one local tip for each. (It's getting out of hand.)

O‘ahu (12)

- [ ] **1. Swim with honu at Laniākea**
  Afternoons
  Green sea turtles often rest on this North Shore beach. Watch from at least 10 feet back.

- [ ] **4. Shave ice in Hale‘iwa**
  Afternoon
  Add a snow cap of sweet condensed milk on top. The lines move faster than they look.

- [ ] **6. Snorkel Hanauma Bay**
  Mornings
  Reservations are required and the bay is closed Mondays and Tuesdays.

- [ ] **11. Waikīkī sunset**
  Sunset
  Walk out toward the Kapahulu end of the beach for a less crowded view.

- [ ] **14. Hike Diamond Head**
  Early morning
  Non-residents need a timed entry reservation booked online.

- [ ] **15. Malasadas. A dozen.**
  Anytime
  Portuguese doughnuts are best eaten hot, right out of the box.

- [ ] **17. Learn to surf**
  Mornings
  Waikīkī's long, gentle waves are made for first-timers.

- [ ] **21. Paddle an outrigger**
  Mornings
  In Waikīkī, the canoe catches a wave and surfs you back to shore.

- [ ] **26. Lanikai sunrise**
  Sunrise
  Parking is very limited, so walk in from Kailua Beach Park.

- [ ] **31. Pearl Harbor**
  Morning
  Reserve the free USS Arizona Memorial program on recreation.gov (small booking fee).

- [ ] **35. Pineapple everything**
  Anytime
  Pineapple soft serve on a hot day is mandatory.

- [ ] **39. North Shore big waves**
  November to February
  Watch from the sand. Winter surf here is for experts only.

Maui (6)

- [ ] **3. Haleakalā sunrise**
  Sunrise
  Sunrise entry needs an advance reservation from recreation.gov. It's near freezing at 10,000 feet, so bring layers.

- [ ] **7. Drive the Road to Hāna**
  Start early
  Pull fully off the road for photos, let locals pass, and skip any waterfall on private land.

- [ ] **9. Watch whales off Maui**
  December to April
  Humpbacks are so close in winter that you can often spot spouts from shore.

- [ ] **22. Snorkel Molokini**
  Early boats
  The water is calmest before the trade winds pick up.

- [ ] **27. ‘Īao Valley**
  Morning
  Non-residents need an advance reservation.

- [ ] **34. Jump off Black Rock**
  Sunset
  At Kā‘anapali, a sunset torch-lighting cliff dive happens off this point.

Big Island (9)

- [ ] **2. See Kīlauea glow at night**
  After dark
  The glow only shows when the volcano is active, so check the USGS volcano status before you drive up.

- [ ] **8. Night swim with mantas**
  Evenings, year-round
  You float at the surface while lights draw plankton, and the mantas come to you.

- [ ] **12. Black sand at Punalu‘u**
  Anytime
  Turtles nap on the sand here. Taking sand or rocks from Hawaii beaches is illegal.

- [ ] **16. Stars on Maunakea**
  After sunset
  Most people stargaze from mid-mountain. The summit needs a 4WD and time to acclimate.

- [ ] **19. Rainbow Falls in Hilo**
  Sunny mornings
  Morning sun hitting the mist is when the rainbow shows up.

- [ ] **24. Green sand beach**
  Morning
  Papakōlea is a long hike each way from South Point, so bring water and sun protection.

Big Island (cont.)

- [ ] **28. Pololū lookout**
  Morning
  The view from the top alone is worth the drive to the end of the road.

- [ ] **40. Kona coffee farm**
  Daytime
  Many farms offer free tours and tastings.

- [ ] **41. Spot a nēnē**
  Anytime · Big Island, Maui, Kauaʻi
  Hawaii's state bird. Drive slowly near parks and never feed them.

Kauaʻi (6)

- [ ] **5. Nāpali Coast by boat**
  Calmer seas in summer
  Tours leave from the west side. Big winter swell can cancel trips, so book early in your stay.

- [ ] **13. Waimea Canyon lookout**
  Morning
  Go before the afternoon clouds roll in. Non-residents pay an entry and parking fee.

- [ ] **23. Hanalei Bay**
  Sunset
  Walk the pier at golden hour. Winter brings big surf here.

- [ ] **29. Kayak the Wailua River**
  Morning
  Rent from a permitted outfitter and pair it with the hike to the falls.

- [ ] **38. Helicopter over Nāpali**
  Morning flights
  Morning slots usually get the clearest views of the cliffs.

- [ ] **45. Monk seal at Poʻipū**
  Anytime
  Hawaiian monk seals are endangered. Stay at least 50 feet away.

Lānaʻi & Molokaʻi (2)

- [ ] **32. Hulopoʻe Bay, Lānaʻi**
  Morning · Lānaʻi
  Spinner dolphins often visit this bay in the morning. Give them space.

- [ ] **33. Molokaʻi sea cliffs**
  Clear days · Molokaʻi
  The Kalaupapa lookout looks over some of the tallest sea cliffs in the world.

Every island (13)

- [ ] **10. Kalua pork plate lunch**
  Lunch
  Two scoops rice and mac salad. Order from a local spot, not the hotel.

Every island (cont.)

- [ ] **18. Go to a lūʻau**
  Evening
  Book ahead for December, since shows sell out over the holidays.

- [ ] **20. Fresh ahi poke**
  Anytime
  Grocery store poke counters are where locals buy it.

- [ ] **25. Spam musubi**
  Road trip snack
  Convenience stores sell them fresh. It's the classic Hawaii road trip snack.

- [ ] **30. Loco moco breakfast**
  Breakfast
  Rice, burger patty, fried egg and gravy. It was born in Hilo.

- [ ] **36. Fresh plumeria lei**
  Arrival day
  Grocery stores and airport stands sell fresh lei.

- [ ] **37. Sunset mai tai**
  Sunset
  Grab a beachfront seat 20 minutes before the sun goes down.

- [ ] **42. Swim with yellow tang**
  Mornings
  Kahaluʻu Beach Park in Kona has easy entry and lots of fish.

- [ ] **43. Learn the ʻukulele**
  Anytime
  Plenty of shops and resorts run beginner lessons.

- [ ] **44. Waterfall swim**
  Dry days
  Skip swimming after heavy rain because of flash floods and bacteria in the water.

- [ ] **46. Zipline a valley**
  Daytime
  Book a morning tour, before afternoon rain clouds roll in.

- [ ] **47. Acai bowl on the beach**
  Breakfast
  Pick one up on the way to the beach.

- [ ] **48. Hammock nap. Repeat.**
  Every day
  Plan one slow day per island. Hawaii rewards fewer stops done well.