ALOHA PERFECTION

Not all beaches are created equal. This is a fact you will quickly realize when you step upon the shores of Hawaii, where sun-splashed strands lined with colorful beach bars and intimate coves on the edge of shady jungles await on each island. Watching the crystal blue waters of the South Pacific lap at the glistening, colored sands of these beaches is nearly a religious experience. Here's a guide to help you find the one that matches your personal idea of perfection.

BEST CLASSIC BEACH: WAIKIKI BEACH, OAHU

Turquoise water, colorful surfboards lined up like soldiers on parade, views of Diamond Head … this is Waikiki Beach, arguably Hawaii's most famous stretch of sand. A visit here all but requires a surfing lesson, as novice surfers can easily handle the lazy winter waves and well-timed summer swells. Afterward, grab a mai tai under the banyan tree at the Moana Surfrider Beach Bar and take in some of the best people-watching Oahu has to offer.

BEST FAMILY-FRIENDLY BEACH: KAMAOLE, MAUI

Known affectionately as Kam I, II and III, Maui's three Kamaole Beach Park beaches are set in a row along Maui's southwest shore. Families flock to Kam III for its picnic-friendly park, snorkeling amid sea turtles and its easy access to facilities. There are also plenty of shops and restaurants nearby. Although the sunsets are spectacular, the snorkeling here is ideal in the morning

BEST DRAMATIC BEACH: WAIPIO VALLEY BEACH, HAWAII

On an island filled with the most spectacular of sights—black-sand beaches, rumbling volcanoes, fiery lava fields and tremendous valleys—Waipio Valley Beach still manages to stand out, thanks to Kaluahine Falls, which cascade from a 1,400-foot-tall cliff before crashing into the ocean. To get there, it's advised to take one of the many guided tours, which will also give you a chance to take in more waterfalls within the deep Waipio Valley.

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