

## Diving in Hawaii

*Harlequin shrimp can be seen on dusk and night dives*



Diving in Hawaii is generally favourable all year round, especially on the leeward side of the islands. Divers can look forward to incredible lava caves, arches and other underwater formations, along with a variety of wrecks and pristine hard-coral gardens. The many small, isolated bays make for great snorkeling adventures and excellent shore diving when the weather is calm. Divers and snorkelers who venture out on one of the many day excursions often enjoy dolphins playing in the boat's wake. December through April is the humpback whale season, which often features outstanding surface displays by these incredible creatures.

The underwater topography in Hawaii is made up of lava tubes, archways and finger reefs. Many diving and snorkeling sites are located directly offshore but, due to a variety of factors, are only safely accessible by boat. Boat dives allow you to see the best the islands have to offer while providing a safer, more relaxing and fun experience. Boats vary in size and capacity: some take up to six, others 12 and in some cases 24 or more passengers. Generally, dive operators

will provide enough divemasters to split divers into groups of six or less. Some operators cater to specific nationalities of divers (evident by brochures and advertising in many languages), though most are multilingual.

Live-aboard enthusiasts will find two vessels which operate along the Kona and Kohala Coasts of the Big Island. The Kona Aggressor II is based in Kailua-Kona, accommodates up to 14 passengers and generally runs one-week charters. The Sunseeker operates out of Honokahau Harbor and caters to a maximum of six divers. Charter length and schedules vary based on divers' requests. See the Listings section for details.

Shore diving opportunities vary from island to island and day to day. Though shore diving in Hawaii is practiced regularly by locals, it is wise to learn the local conditions before attempting any of these dives. One way to ensure you select the safest shore dives, with respect to current weather conditions is to hire a local dive guide. Those on a tight budget may want to dive the popular shore diving areas on the weekend in order to watch local divers enter the water (often a tricky task on Hawaii's rocky coastlines) and perhaps ask a few questions. Be sure to stop by a local dive shop for professional advice and guidance. Some dive operators organize local shore dives guided by a professional divemaster. This combines safety with specific information about each site's unique highlights at a price that generally suits even budget-oriented divers. An experienced guide can also point out critters often overlooked by most divers.

Hawaii also has a number of active local dive clubs, underwater photo competitions and scheduled underwater clean-up efforts.

## Snuba Diving

*Snuba is a fun and easy way to explore Hawaii's underwater world*



Designed as an introduction to diving, snuba is a hybrid of diving and snorkeling. Snuba divers breathe compressed air like a scuba diver, but the air is supplied via a regulator and a 20ft- to 40ft- (6m- to 12m-) long hose connected to an air tank which floats in a raft on the surface of the water. A small harness keeps the regulator in place.

Without the heavy and technical equipment normally associated with diving, snuba is far less intimidating than a 'real' dive. Snuba makes underwater exploration easier than either snorkeling or free-diving since you don't have to hold your breath or constantly return to the surface for air. Even children as young as eight years old can do this with only a little training, and a lot of success. There are, however, a few disadvantages: snuba depths are limited by the length of the hose, and snuba diving can't be safely performed in areas with lava formations, currents, wrecks or anywhere else where the hoses could get tangled.

## WHAT TO BRING

### General Supplies

A casual attitude toward dress prevails. Shorts, sandals and a T-shirt are standard throughout the islands. An Aloha shirt (a colorful Hawaiian-print shirt) with lightweight slacks for men and a cotton dress for women are sufficiently dressy even for formal occasions. If you plan to travel to higher elevations, be sure to bring a sweater and raincoat. Good walking shoes are also recommended for visits to rocky or mountainous areas such as Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

As in most western countries, you'll find everything you need on Hawaii's five main islands, though at a 25% higher cost than on the US mainland. Outer islands such as Molokai and Lanai have a limited stock of retail goods, so consider bringing your own film, batteries or other items you are particular about. Though pharmacies on the main islands are readily available and well stocked, it is a good idea to bring a supply of any prescription medicine you require to last for the duration of your trip.

*Snorkeler observing moorish idols*



### Dive-Related Equipment

Hawaii's five main islands are well stocked with quality rental and retail equipment. Most dive operators only rent 3mm shorty wetsuits. If you are visiting in winter, when water temperatures can drop below 74°F (23°C), and you tend to get cold easily or plan to dive a lot, bring your own 5mm wetsuit. Not all dive shops sell 5mm suits, so if you plan to purchase a warmer wetsuit when you arrive, call ahead to ensure there is one available.

### Underwater Photography

The growing popularity of digital photography has extended to the underwater world. More and more underwater photographers, amateur and professional, are trading in their film cameras for digital technology and many diver operations are offering digital rental cameras. If you are looking to rent a camera, avoid disappointment and reserve one ahead. Photographers shooting on film will find it increasingly difficult to find developing services. At the time of this writing E-6 processing was still available on the more populated islands of Oahu and Maui. On Oahu, E-6 processing is available at retail stores such as Fox Photo, Light Ink and Fromes. On Maui, labs offering fast E-6 processing services, include Maui Custom Color Lab, Fox Photo and others. However, if this is an essential serv-

## Volcano Diving

The unique underwater terrain formed by volcanic activity adds interest to nearly all of Hawaii's dive sites. Lava ridges and fingers often lay the base for coral reefs, while lava caves, caverns, tunnels and archways are awesome to explore. Lava tends to be porous and covered with small nooks and crannies (called *pukas* in Hawaiian) that underwater critters convert into homes. Areas of relatively young lava activity – huge flows of coal-black lava where coral has not yet established itself – are dramatic seascapes in their own right.

Lava continues to flow into the sea every day from the still-active Kilauea Volcano on the Big Island. Many divers inquire about diving where the red-hot lava meets the ocean. Although technically possible, it is not recommended. Diving in the vicinity of volcanic activity is dangerous, the water temperature extremely hot and burns are almost inevitable. Underwater explosions and lava avalanches are quite common when the glowing lava and the cool salt water mix, and constitute additional dangers that divers are better off avoiding.

*Lava flowing into the ocean at Hawaii's Volcano National Park, Big Island*



### Hawaii's Top 10 Snorkeling Spots

- Magic Island (Oahu)
- Inside Reef (Oahu)
- Three Tables (Oahu)
- Kaiwi Point (Big Island)
- Kahalu (Big Island)
- Kealakekua Bay (Big Island)
- Place of Refuge (Big Island)
- Black Rock (Maui)
- Inside Crater (Maui)
- Keel Lagoon (Kauai)