

DO MORE WITH THE
SPRING SUPER SAVER
May 1st - June 11th



THE ABBEY RESORT
The Only Full-Service Resort
on the Shores of Lake Geneva, WI



Subscribe • EasyPay • e-paper
Reader Rewards • Customer Service



TRAVEL
[Print Article](#) [Email Article](#) [Share / Bookmark](#)

OAHU, Obama style

ALOHA STATE | New bus tours let visitors walk in prez's footsteps as all eyes shift to the inland neighborhoods of Honolulu

Comments

April 12, 2009

BY ANNE Z. COOKE

HONOLULU, Hawaii – If Barack Obama's grandparents hadn't moved to Oahu before he was born, would he be our 44th president today?

As an honorary Hawaiian (self-appointed) and an Obama supporter, this is my chance to put the two subjects into the same sentence and to connect one to the other. Though Obama acknowledged his family's influence in his autobiography, *Dreams from My Father*, it was Hawaii, I suspect, that shaped his character.

» Click to enlarge image



Barack Obama strolled on Kailua Beach with his daughters, Malia and Sasha, during their Hawaiian vacation last August. Most visitors to Hawaii stick to Waikiki Beach, where the waves are long, smooth and predictable. Follow Obama's lead and head to Kailua to swim with the locals.
(AP)

RELATED STORIES
 • Eat at Obama's favorite isle spots

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE: Fly to Honolulu and take a shuttle to your hotel, or rent a car to tour the island. The Waikiki Trolley provides convenient but slow transportation around Waikiki and through the downtown neighborhoods. A one-day ticket allows you to get on and off, but expect a lot of walking.

ABOUT OBAMA: Check out *obamasneighborhood.com*, the Web site created by journalist Robert Kay, now a Honolulu resident. Kay covered Obama's career for

Was Hawaii's multi-racial society the source of that sunny smile, self-assured stride and the confidence to command? Was it Oahu's easy-going lifestyle, unhurried and tolerant, that nurtured his even-tempered optimism and respect for his peers? The residents of Oahu, proud of their native son, certainly think so.

As a frequent visitor to Hawaii, lucky enough to have friends there, I've been struck by their close-knit families, acceptance of strangers, a love of nature and a comfortable sense of place. No matter that I'm still bowled over by the obvious: the Pali Lookout's green volcanic peaks, the flower-scented trade winds and the reddish gold sunsets. Dreaming about Hawaii, the sandy beaches, translucent ocean and graceful hula dancers come to mind. Intoxicating? Yes, they are. But it's Hawaii's nurturing lifestyle that sets it apart.

Michelle Obama said it best. "You can't really understand Barack," she told an interviewer, "unless you understand Hawaii." And you can't do that, she might have added, unless you come for a visit.

Before the last presidential campaign, travelers rarely bothered to tour Honolulu's inland neighborhoods. No longer. Since the election, a half-dozen guided bus tours have popped up to escort tourists on the Obama circuit, driving past Kapiolani Hospital, where the president was born in 1941, (see a copy of his birth certificate at *obamasneighborhood.com*), cruising past his several boyhood homes,

DO MORE WITH THE
SPRING SUPER SAVER
May 1st - June 11th



THE ABBEY RESORT
The Only Full-Service Resort
on the Shores of Lake Geneva, WI

SUN-TIMES BLOGS ::

- TRAVEL BLOG**
- Photo contest: Win a trip to Nashville and the Grand Ole Opry (5/06/2009 8:49:31 AM)
- ACROSS THE POND BLOG**
- Edinburgh Castle (5/05/2009 9:20:35 AM)
- SCRATCH CRIB BLOG**
- John & Yoko's Montreal Bed-In (4/27/2009 2:40:32 PM)
- SHOPPING BLOG**
- Cannes red carpet fashion -- let me know what you think! (5/13/2009 5:11:14 PM)

TOP STORIES ::

- NEWS**
- My taxes were tardy: Todd
- BUSINESS**
- General Motors notifying 1,100 dealers of closings
- SPORTS**
- Soriano drives in winning run in ninth for Cubs
- ENTERTAINMENT**
- Luna Negra program wants everyone to join in
- LIFESTYLES**
- Luna Negra program wants everyone to join in

- Travel
 - Main page
 - Travel Archive
 - Africa
 - Asia
 - Australia
 - Europe
 - Travel Extras
 - Midwest
 - North America
 - South America
- Blogs
 - Across the Pond
 - Scratch Crib
 - Shopping
 - Travel
- Lifestyles
 - Archive
 - At Home
 - Crossword
 - Fashion/Beauty
 - Eating In
 - Food
 - Health News
 - Lottery
 - Religion
 - Sudoku
 - Travel
 - 50+ Lifestyles
 - Easy
 - Family
 - Pets
 - Shopping
- Columnists
 - Ask Dog Lady
 - Laura Berman
 - Betsy Hart
 - Downtown Diary
 - Ask Ellie
 - Dave Hoekstra
 - Horoscopes
 - Cheryl Lavin
 - Paige Wisner



the Wall Street Journal and other publications.

HAWAII INFO: The Hawaii Convention & Visitors Bureau Web site, go.hawaii.com/obama, includes travel and tour advice.

slowing down to point out the corner markets where he stopped on the trip home from school and the local park where he shot hoops.

Some tours are more expensive and include stops at historic sites, such as the Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor and the restored Mission houses in downtown Honolulu. There's also a

walking tour led by Uncle Jack, a self-taught local historian.

Chances are you'll see the school where Obama went to kindergarten. A class photo shows one smiling half-black boy, five white kids, seven mixed-race kids, 12 full or mixed-origin Asian children and a Japanese-American teacher (plus two classroom assistants).

Hanging out with these kids, he would have developed a taste for everything from scrambled eggs and spaghetti, to plate lunches, Spam musubi, malasadas and huli huli chicken. His classmates' parents and grandparents would have been all or part Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Samoan, ethnic Hawaiian, Filipino, Portuguese, and assorted European-stock haoles (white). Was pidgin (slang English) a common denominator for these kids? I wish I knew.

"Do you think people are as color-blind as they seem?" I asked Darlene Morikawa, with the state's tourism office.

"Just about everyone here has inherited what I call potluck," she said. "We're proud of our individual heritage, of course. But we're Hawaiian first and foremost. That's where we get our identity, our sense of who we are. I happened to catch 'Oprah' when her guests, African Americans mostly, were talking about how it mattered if you were more brown, or less brown, or almost white. It really surprised me. I didn't know that on the mainland, people thought about color like that."

To learn more about Obama, tours are a good way to start. But they're only the half the story. The rest evolves as you explore the island – in the spirit of research, of course.

First, venture away from the safety of your hotel pool and make friends with the world's largest ocean. Float on the swells. Kick your feet. Duck your head under and embrace the waves.

Next, rent a car; you'll need it to wander the byways. Don't waste time on commercial attractions, like the submarine rides and the booze cruises. And pass up national franchise fast-food joints in favor of local eateries run and patronized by kama'ainas (local Hawaiians). Go native, and sample that most revered of all Hawaiian fast foods, the plate lunch. A treat when an expert makes it (and a dog otherwise), it's one of the islands' basic food groups. With years of experience under his belt, Obama likes the Rainbow Drive-In in Honolulu. The Web site proclaims, "For 45 years, Rainbow Drive-In has served the most ono grindz [delicious food] to Hawaii and the World."

I like the barbecue chicken plate lunch with macaroni salad and rice for \$6.50. The Ifuku family, owners of Rainbow, at 3308 Kanaina Ave., donates generous sums each year for scholarships and school supplies, something to muse on as you open your wallet. See their menu at rainbowdrivein.com.

My favorite lunch item is saimin, served at one of Oahu's half-dozen Zippy's, also an Obama hangout. If you see this Chinese-Hawaiian soup elsewhere, make sure it contains saimin noodles in chicken broth, bits of char sui pork, won tons, eggs, green onions and a bit of bok choy.

If you're staying in a Waikiki Beach hotel, walk southeast along the sand toward Diamond Head, to Kapiolani Park and the beach across the street. Local families picnic on the sand, swim in the waves and sun on this stretch of shoreline, a great place to strike up a conversation, and even feel like local.

The Park, a great swath of grass named for Queen Kapiolani, is Hawaii's oldest public park, established in 1875. The grounds include the Waikiki Shell, a zoo, tennis courts, soccer fields and space to fly a kite or have a picnic. The Shell is the chief city venue for free summer-evening concerts on the grass, and a good place for people-watching. Ask your concierge for a schedule, bring a beach towel, food-to-go (and your favorite libation) and join the party. Obama picnicked here with his grandparents and most recently, with his own children – and the Secret Service.

Most visitors to Hawaii stick to Waikiki Beach, where the waves are long, smooth and predictable. But to swim with the locals, head to Kailua Beach County Park, on the southeast side of Oahu. Here's where the Obamas and friends rented two adjoining houses last Christmas. But there's plenty of public beach and parking. Do observe the hand-printed "kapu" (forbidden) signs, however, and don't park across private driveways. That famous Hawaiian good nature has limits.

Area of Interest: *
Please select

Class location: *
 Online Campus

Your level of education: *
Please select

Zip Code: *

[FIND A DEGREE NOW](#)



Another safe beach is at Kuliima Point, on the North Shore, directly east of Turtle Bay Resort. The beaches here – and everywhere in Hawaii – are public, and there's always public access. For lunch, drive a couple miles farther to the Shrimp Wagon, at Kahuku Point, on the makai (ocean) side of the road, for a plate of fresh steamed shrimp and salad.

Stop at Sandy Beach, now with a new parking lot, to see where Obama still bodysurfs when he comes home. Don't get into the water, however. One of the island's most treacherous beaches, Sandy regularly chews up novices.

For the best luau and hula performances, pass up the crowded and impersonal buffet dinners staged by big hotels and look instead for a community event, often hosted by churches and charity groups. Visitors are always welcome.

Even the Bishop Museum, famous for the South Pacific's most prestigious collection of Polynesian art and artifacts, gets into the aloha spirit, inviting local school kids to demonstrate some of the basic hula moves. The steps are practiced and the smiles are learned, at least at first. They smile at you, you smile at them, and pretty soon, everyone's smiling; in fact, kinda like Obama.

Anne Z. Cooke is a California-based free-lance writer.

THE OBAMA FAMILY SAMPLER

- Manoa Falls, at the end of a short dirt trail, in the Manoa Valley.
- Pu'u Ualaka'a State Park, on Tantalus Peak, for superb valley views.
- Hanauma Bay Beach Park, Oahu's premier snorkeling destination.
- Halona Point and the Blowhole, on the rocky cliffs just past Makapu'u Point.
- Sandy Beach Park, where expert bodysurfers catch the waves.
- Makapu'u Point, a short walk to the lighthouse and cliff top views.
- The Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor.
- The Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, where Obama's grandfather, Stanley Dunham, is buried.

OBAMA TOURS

Guides of Hawaii Tours: Daily half-day bus tours visit sites where Obama lived or spent time from his birth to the present. See the itinerary at obamatourhawaii.com. Tickets cost \$40 a person, including hotel pickup, (808) 944-2758.

Polynesian Adventures' President Obama Tour: Air-conditioned narrated bus tours visit birth, home and other pertinent sites in and around Honolulu, with special attention to the culture and values that have shaped President Obama's life. Includes hotel pickup. Tickets cost \$36.76 for adults, \$20.74 for children 3-11, and free for kids 2 and under; polyad.com, (808) 833-3000.

Barack Obama's Neighborhood: Personalized walking tours are led by Uncle Jack, a local resident and self-taught historian. Tour No. 9 is scheduled on the last Sunday of the month for \$10 a person. The same tour, scheduled for any day, costs \$100 for a group of any size. Call (808) 948-3299 or go to unclejackinhawaii.com. (Warning: This very large Web site detailing all of Uncle Jack's passions takes several minutes to download).

A self-guided tour: The Hawaiian Convention and Visitors' Bureau Web site, gohawaii.com/obama, lists all Obama-related sites and favorite attractions.

suntimes.com: [Send feedback](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Advertise With Us](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [Make Us Your Home Page](#)

Chicago Sun-Times: [Subscribe](#) | [Customer Service](#) | [Reader Rewards](#) | [Easy Pay](#) | [e-paper](#) | [Online Photo Store](#)

Affiliates: YourSeason.com | RogerEbert.com | [SearchChicago - Autos](#) | [SearchChicago - Degrees](#) | [SearchChicago - Homes](#) | [Chicago Area Jobs](#) | [Centerstage](#) | [North Shore Magazine](#)

Express Links: [Obituaries](#) | [Death Notices](#) | [Sudoku](#) | [Crossword](#) | [TV Listings](#) | [Blogs](#) | [Video](#) | [Yellow Pages](#) | [Horoscopes](#) | [Letters](#) | [Commentary](#) | [Lottery](#) | [Eating In](#) | [Restaurant Reviews](#)

Partner: nbcchicago.com | BlockShopper.com

