

North Shore Nirvana

I felt like I'd been dropped onto a movie set. After passing numerous highrises and navigating crowded freeways, the car carrying us away from the Honolulu airport turned onto a two-lane road with modest cottages on one side and the ocean on the other.

"This is the real Hawaii," our driver said. "The missionaries wiped out much of our culture, but the North Shore was isolated and pretty much left alone."

As we cruised past lush vegetation, she pointed out exotic trees – mango, monkey pod, and koa – and large ginger plants. Muumuu-wearing mamas tended piles of papaya,

breadfruit, and pineapples at roadside stalls. A sign stuck in one front yard advertised "luau leaves for sale."

For weeks I'd been telling friends that my husband, Richard, and I were going to the North Shore of Oahu, and now I was beginning to understand the misty-eyed response this evoked from those familiar with the area.

"We're laid back and relaxed here," our driver Charlie said. "The folks, you see – they're all locals like me. At Hanauma Bay (near Waikiki) people have tromped all over the coral and ruined it, but our Shark's Cove is still pristine."

I already had a must-do-on-the-North-Shore list of suggestions from the above-mentioned misty-eyed friends, and to that I added "snorkel at Shark's Cove." ▶

A great snorkeling location, Shark's Cove is named for its shape, not its inhabitants. The green sea turtle was photographed on Lanikai Beach, North Shore, Oahu.



Oceanfront pool at
Turtle Bay Resort



Polynesian Cultural Center

After a brief stop to admire the view at Laie Point, we arrived at our destination – Turtle Bay Resort. I'd read about this place in guidebooks and magazines, but nothing had prepared me for its impressive setting and grounds.

Two 18-hole golf courses and tropical landscaping lined the way in from the highway. At the end of the drive, the six-story hotel rose up on a point of land surrounded by water on three sides.

As striking as this was, the best was yet to come. Our so-called oceanfront beach cottage looked better in reality than it had on the website (www.TurtleBayResort.com). The whole suite had a high ceiling and polished walnut floor, but more important – a picture-postcard view of the ocean visible from the bed, the sitting area, and from the lanai.

Ahhh. The lanai. I could have spent the whole week there - watching surfers, the sunset, the waves. I could even see green sea turtles from the lanai (and if we'd been there between December and April, I'm told we'd have spotted humpback whales). Suddenly, my list of things to do on the North Shore didn't seem so important.

We did, however, get up somewhat early the next morning and go horseback riding along the beach and through a grove of ironwood and macadamia trees.

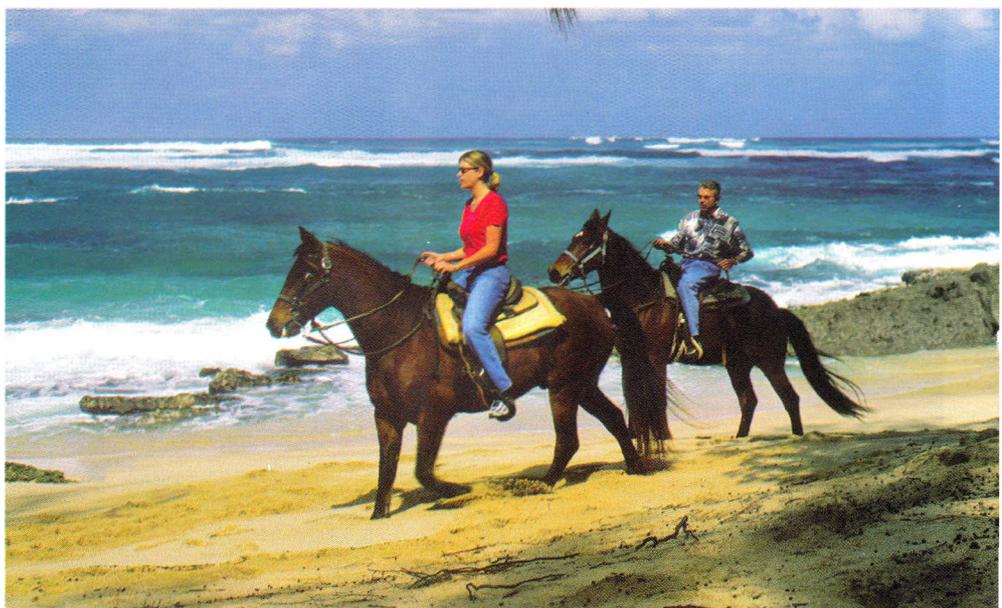
The views of the soft sand beach and aqua water were fantastic.

Turtle Bay Resort is located on 880 acres, so there's plenty of room for stables, 12 miles of hiking trails, golf courses, tennis courts, swimming pools, a surf school, shops, and a complete spa. Included along the resort's five miles of beach frontage are three bays: Kuilima Cove, right next to the hotel, is a popular spot for snorkeling, swimming, and spotting turtles; Turtle Bay is best for surfing; and Kawela Bay – the most remote – is so beautiful that it's often used for photo shoots.

After watching others ride waves for a couple of days, I couldn't resist trying it myself. The resort's Hans Hedemann

Surf School supplied longboards and an instructor. The results were mixed – Richard, the old surfer dude, did pretty well, and I learned that paddling out is much harder than it looks. In fact, the best part of the lesson was sitting on the board waiting for a wave. This gave us a chance to talk with professional surfer Hans about the North Shore and its celebrated surf. Waves here reach 30 feet from October to April and attract surfers from all over the world.

In many ways, it's still Endless Summer on the North Shore – funky, laid back, and low rise. Some of those early teen surfers are still there (now drawing Social Security) and new devotees – perhaps enticed by scenes from *Baywatch* – arrive every day. ▶

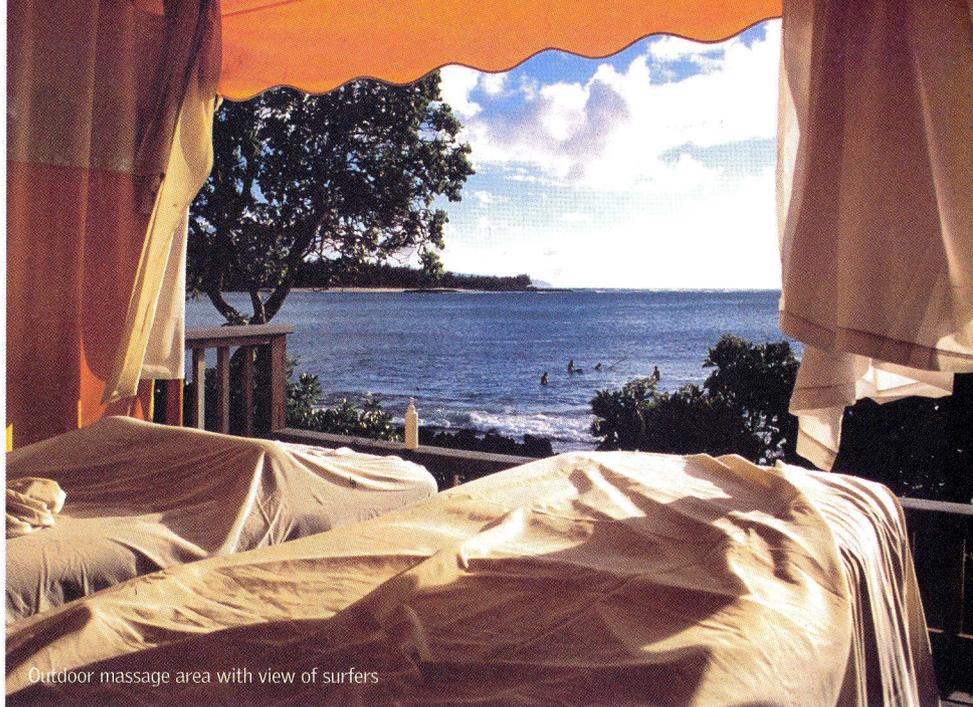


We had breakfast with some of them at Ted's Bakery across from Sunset Beach. The signature dish at this mom-and-pop eatery is Chocolate Haupia Pie, but it was a bit early for chocolate cream and coconut pudding, so we opted for bacon breakfast sandwiches. They sell about 80 of these a day – many to hungry surfers who appreciate the \$2.60 price tag and tasty ingredients. Other popular breakfast items include loco moco (ground beef patty, fried egg, and rice covered in gravy), Portuguese sausage and eggs, and owl bowl (three eggs and rice).

Charlie – who, it turns out, is really the concierge at Turtle Bay Resort and was only filling in for a limo-driver friend the day she picked us up at the airport – recommended Ted's. She also suggested the Hukilau Café in Laie. Run by Kalani Soren, this place also specializes in breakfast – especially Hawaiian sweet bread French toast. Columbia Pictures borrowed the establishment's name for *50 First Dates*, but didn't even try to reproduce the camaraderie that makes this place so popular. Both Ted's and Hukilau are featured in *Island Grinds*, a guide to Hawaii's best hole-in-the wall restaurants – with Hukilau meriting a "da bes" star. (Hukilau makes a



Surfing at Turtle Bay Resort



Outdoor massage area with view of surfers

good stop en route to the Polynesian Cultural Center.)

Located about 11 miles from Turtle Bay Resort, Haleiwa (pop. 2,200) is the biggest town on the North Shore. Also known as "Surf City USA," the main street is lined with surfboard rental places, cute shops, and historic buildings dating back to the days of Hawaiian royalty.

Haleiwa Joe's doesn't take reservations, so we went late (after snorkeling at Shark's Cove). Lucky for us, we were seated on the patio overlooking a lawn lit with tiki torches. Beyond, small boats swayed at docks in the marina.

The daily specials were baked on served with a Thai curry sauce, shutomi (swordfish) steamed in ti leaves, and grilled naragi (striped marlin) topped with tangy mango and mint salsa. It was a tough decision, but I threw caution to the wind and opted for the crunchy coconut shrimp served with plum and honey-mustard dipping sauces. My mouth waters even now just thinking about it.

You'd think with all this eating, Richard and I would have been down in the resort's fitness center every day, but not so. While the Pilates Power Mix and the yoga classes tempted me, I consistently

caved in to the siren song of the lanai.

We did, of course, manage several trips to the spa. The most memorable was for the couple's massage offered in an outdoor pavilion overlooking the sea. While I am not, by nature, a modest person, I have to admit it felt a little odd to be laid out in my birthday suit with only a tent flap providing privacy. This situation was intensified by the fact that on an adjacent lawn, Disney was holding a wrap party for a new animated DVD. They had flown in the "voices" – including David Ogden Stiers – and media from all over the world for a gala event involving hundreds of guests. It was a little hard to relax while contemplating the effect of a strong gust of wind.

However, Disney did do us one favor. Later that night, while we were enjoying candlelight and champagne on our lanai, fireworks erupted. They shot above the palm trees, exploded against the dark sky, and then swayed in the gentle breeze of the trade winds. It's a moment I'll never forget. I get misty-eyed just thinking about it.

— Elizabeth Hansen, photography by Adams/Hansen Photography

Elizabeth Hansen is the travel editor of Ranch & Coast Magazine. When not researching tough assignments like this one, she is at home in La Jolla with her husband, photographer Richard Adams.