



## **CONSCIOUS TRAVELLING WHILE EXPLORING AN ISLAND PARADISE**

O'AHU – The island and its surrounding waters are teeming with wildlife, from the colorful fish that inhabit the reefs to the dolphins that cavort just offshore to the turtles that sometimes belly up to the warm sand. But Hawai'i is also the endangered species capital of the world, where endangered animals such as the Hawaiian monk seal, North Pacific humpback whales and green sea turtles come to seek refuge near or on the island. Preserving the wildlife and making sure that its populations can flourish requires a conscious conservation effort.

If you're lucky enough to see a Hawaiian monk seal on the beach or in the water in Hawai'i, make sure to keep some distance for your safety and their protection. The Hawaiian monk seal is an endangered species—when viewing one, make sure your actions don't disturb it. If you see one on the beach, give the animal space; if there are roped off areas around it, please don't enter them. Don't chase a monk seal into or in the water.

The same guidelines apply for the turtles that love to play around O'ahu's waters. The best place for viewing the Hawaiian green sea turtle is at Laniakea Beach on the North Shore, where some turtles come to laze in the sand so regularly that the neighborhood knows them by name. Volunteers from the non-profit Malama na Honu are on hand to answer questions about the turtles and share how you can help protect them.

One of the most thrilling experiences in the world is gliding alongside dolphins. Book a responsible tour such as the sustainable tourism-certified Wild Side Specialty Tours ([sailhawaii.com](http://sailhawaii.com)), which takes visitors along the west coast for a chance to swim with dolphins and see whales. During peak whale season, from January through March, you can get involved with the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary's

Ocean Count (<http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/involved/ocwelcome.html>), when visitors and residents are invited to help count the whales from the shoreline of O‘ahu so that we can learn more about their population and behaviors.

Dive into the Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve and peer into the underwater world of reef and fish. But the beautiful bay is more than a world-famous snorkel spot. Conservation is also emphasized here—it’s important for visitors to preserve the fragile marine ecosystem of the bay by not touching the sea animals or coral. When entering the water, whether at Hanauma Bay or elsewhere around O‘ahu, it’s best to use a reef-safe sunscreen and apply it at least 15 minutes before heading into the ocean so that the sunscreen has a chance to soak in.

There may be a lot of “don’ts” when it comes to the wildlife around O‘ahu but there’s also a lot you can do. The new travel agency Travel2Change ([travel2change.org/](http://travel2change.org/)) focuses on volunteer tourism, with activities such as a beach cleanup and yoga session, as well as tours that combine reforesting native Hawaiian plants along with hikes through O‘ahu’s valleys and ridges or even kayak expeditions of Kāne‘ohe Bay.

On the Windward side, Papahana Kuaola ([papahanakuaola.com](http://papahanakuaola.com)) is a non-profit that creates educational programs focused on environmental restoration and economic sustainability, all integrated with Hawaiian knowledge. It hosts monthly community workdays in the He‘eia ahupua‘a, ancient native Hawaiian land divisions that ran from the mountains to the sea. On the third Saturdays of the month, help restore the upper reaches of He‘eia stream with native plants, and on the fourth Saturdays, work in the kalo lo‘i, or terraced taro patches, by weeding, planting and harvesting kalo, and repairing lo‘i banks and walls.

Also in He‘eia, Kāko‘o ‘Ōiwi ([kakoowiwi.org](http://kakoowiwi.org)) is a non-profit whose mission is to perpetuate the cultural and spiritual practices of native Hawaiians. One of its long-term goals is to restore almost 405 acres of wetlands to agricultural and ecological productivity. Join its monthly community workdays and help build ‘auwai (irrigation ditches) for new kalo lo‘i or help maintain existing lo‘i.

O‘ahu’s shoreline was once dotted with fishponds, a native Hawaiian form of aquaculture. Today, there are very few left, and Paepae o He‘eia ([paepaeohecia.org](http://paepaeohecia.org)) is dedicated to caring for the He‘eia fishpond. The non-profit hosts large volunteer days on the second and fourth Saturdays of the month, during which tasks include moving rock and coral, removing invasive mangrove and limu (seaweed), and reconstruction of the fishpond wall.

Check 808 Cleanups’ (<https://www.808cleanups.org/cleanup-events/>) calendar to join a beach cleanup or other event to help restore Hawai‘i’s natural beauty, from *mauka* to *Makai* (mountain to ocean).

With an abundance of organizations dedicated to preserving O‘ahu’s most precious resources, there is sure to be something for everyone looking to make a difference while exploring the beautiful island of O‘ahu.

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