

TRAVEL

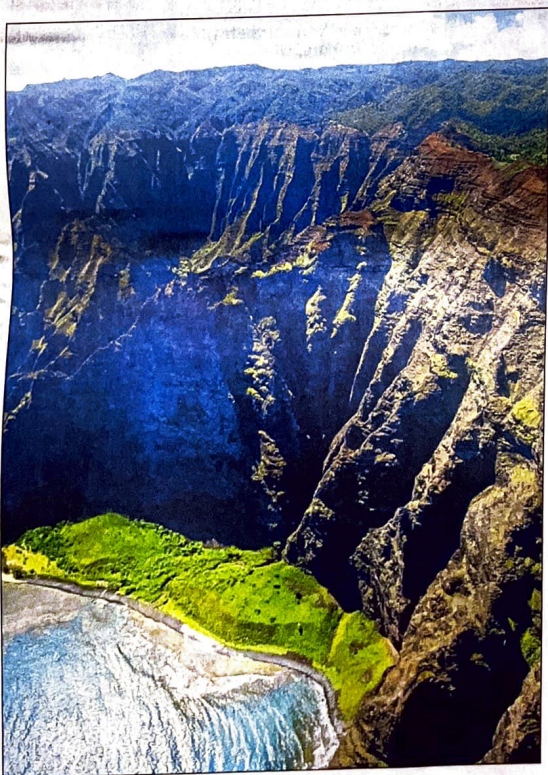


STEVE SLOSAREK / SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL SENTINEL

The Norwegian Cruise Line ship the Pride of America cruises near Kona, Hawaii (the Big Island) on its seven-night cruise of the isles.

Many ways to see Hawaii

Tours by sea, land and air offer breathtaking views



Jack Harter Helicopters' tours provide stunning views of the island of Kauai, including the Na Pali Coast.

By STEVE SLOSAREK
Special to the Journal Sentinel

During this 75th anniversary year of the attack on Pearl Harbor, vacationers to Hawaii are best to heed the advice of Winston Churchill, who a year before proclaimed that Great Britain must approach World War II with a "by sea, land and air" mentality.

Those visiting Hawaii during this diamond anniversary year will find that Churchill's words ring true to produce a memorable trip to the Hawaiian Islands.

By sea

Norwegian Cruise Line's seven-night cruise of the isles gives visitors of America's 50th state the biggest bang for their buck. NCL's Pride of America is the only ship that departs Honolulu year-round on a weekly basis.

Pushing off from the island of Oahu, the nearly 2,200-capacity vessel lands in Maui for two days, Hawaii (the Big Island) for two days, Kauai for two days and then travels back to Honolulu.

The crew and officers on the Pride of America are American or citizens from U.S. territories, and cruisers experience Hawaiian culture onboard through activities and programs conducted by native ambassadors.

Hawaiian motifs of surfers,

palm trees and fish decorate the main sixth-floor deck of the ship, and inside-staircase murals are odes to everything American, including the Grand Canyon and other natural monuments, Hollywood, and cityscapes of Chicago and New York.

The 1950s-themed Cadillac Diner — complete with a jukebox and apropos menu items — provides a natural gathering spot, but the ship offers other nice touches: a weekly off-site luau, a separate children's dining area in the cafeteria, skyscraper partitions (instead of poles) in the Skyline Restaurant, a large fitness center and a Brazilian-style steakhouse.

NCL offers a wonderful commentary during the passing scenery of Kauai's Na Pali Coast, perhaps the most beautiful stretch of coastline in all of Hawaii.

Back in Honolulu, the cruise line's excursion to Pearl Harbor includes a boat ride along the South Channel from the Battleship Missouri Memorial (Mighty Mo) to the USS Arizona Memorial. The latter's tribute to the sunken ship includes the incredibly moving and somewhat eerie revelation of "black tears" — the oil seepage from the fuel tanks of the Arizona's sunken hull that bubbles

Please see **HAWAII, 8E**

From page 10

HAWAII

Many ways to see islands

up from below and swirls along the water in a circular pattern.

The Pride of America is not only an ideal way to be introduced to Hawaii, but also remains a great option for return visits. My wife, son and I only scratched the surface of possible excursions offered on each of the four islands the ship visits, and the cost of the cruise beats the expensive airfare between islands.

By land

Tour companies on all four main islands make visiting the stunning scenery a breeze. We opted for Roberts Hawaii, the state's largest employee-owned and operated tour company. Founded in 1941, Roberts Hawaii also is celebrating its 75th anniversary.

Roberts took us to the Big Island's Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, where the Kilauea volcano has been spewing lava and rock continuously since 1983. The excursion included a walk on a lava field and through the Thurston Lava Tube, a 500-year old, 20-foot-

tall lava cave. We also visited the 80-foot-tall Rainbow Falls and adjoining banyan tree forest.

In Kauai, Roberts delivered us to Waimea Canyon State Park, perhaps Hawaii's most underrated attraction. Nicknamed "the Grand Canyon of the Pacific," the gorge is nearly 3,600 feet deep and about 14 miles long. An overlook delivers staggering views of the colorful valley that features a green canopy of trees and red volcanic soils rimming the Waimea River below. Additional blue, gray and purple hues make the canyon a must-see stop.

In Maui, Roberts drove us up to the 10,000-foot volcanic summit of Haleakala National Park. The Haleakala Crater — seven miles across, two miles wide and 2,600 feet deep — features large cinder cones and other volcanic features in its interior. We took a sunset tour, but fog shrouded the view; sunrise tours are advisable.

Additionally in Maui, hiking tour operator Hike Maui took us to a rain forest for a moderately adventurous hike. Two waterfalls within the rain forest included the opportunity to swim underneath the waterfalls and jump from a bluff.

Oahu offers the omnipresent Diamond Head State Monument, a volcanic crater a short distance from Waikiki Beach. We hiked up the crater for a 1.6-mile round trip that included tunnels and a 99-step stairway. The trail climbs 560 feet from the crater floor to an



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The Royal Hawaiian and the Moana Surfrider hotels, seen from nearby Diamond Head State Monument, ring Waikiki Beach in Honolulu.

elevation of 761 feet, which offers spectacular 360-degree views of the island.

We had tacked on two extra days in Honolulu: one before the cruise and one after. We

stayed on Waikiki Beach, but in different hotels — both of them grand. The Moana Surfrider and The Royal Hawaiian are both Historic Hotels of America as deter-

mined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The Moana Surfrider (a Westin Resort & Spa), considered "the First Lady of Waikiki," opened its grandiose doors in 1901. The revitalized hotel features a spacious banyan tree courtyard, an upper-level museum that chronicles the hotel's history, and numerous festivals and music series on the grounds. During our visit, the Mangoes at the Moana featured a mango farmers market with free samples and upbeat music by the Langley Ukulele Ensemble from British Columbia.

The pink-hued Royal Hawaiian stands out like a beacon, and the large resort is known as the "pink palace of the Pacific." It owns perhaps the most coveted spot on the beach and has expanded to include Mallani Tower. Guests in the tower are treated to complimentary flatbreads, pizzas, wines and beers in the evening and a continental breakfast in the morning. Whether at the Royal Hawaiian proper or in the tower, guests may partic-

pate in weekly Saturday evening luaus complete with fireworks from the beach.

By air

Helicopter tours abound in Hawaii, but at the top of the list is Jack Harter Helicopters' Na Pali Coast tour in Kauai. Although the coast is magnificent to see from a cruise ship, the aerial views are unparalleled.

Jack Harter began offering helicopter tours in Kauai in 1962 and is most famous for its optional "doors-off" tours in which the back seats have no doors, allowing for unimpeded photography and videography. The helicopter offers smooth-turning swooshes into the Waimea Canyon, over Na Pali's spectacular sea cliffs and lush valleys, and near the towering, dreamlike waterfalls made famous in "Jurassic Park" and "Fantasy Island."

It's a great overview of just one slice of Hawaiian beauty, of which there is plenty to explore by sea, land and air this anniversary year.

BIG YEAR FOR HAWAII

2016 is likely to be a big year for Hawaii. Besides the approximately 8 million visitors who travel to the islands annually, this year marks two special occasions:

■ **The release of the Disney animated movie "Moana" on Nov. 23.** The film is about a young teen from 2,000 years ago who sails across the South Pacific to fulfill her ancestors' quest. A Hawaiian native will voice the title character, who along the way hooks up with demigod Maui, voiced by Dwayne Johnson.

■ **The 75th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack.** The National Park Service and U.S. Navy already staged a "rehearsal" Dec. 7 for this year's event.

In the past, commemorations took place at the USS Arizona Visitor Center. But in 2015, the event was moved to the more-spacious Kilo Pier on Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. That move enabled more than 3,000 distinguished guests to attend the 2015 event along with the general public. During this year's 75th anniversary gathering, more than 6,000 are expected to attend in the temporary new location, which also offers clear views of the USS Arizona Memorial and Battleship Missouri Memorial. The public may attend but will need to park at nearby Aloha Stadium and be shuttled to the free event.

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