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Jon Letman

Sunset comes to west Kauai where children play with their dog at Kekaha beach. In the background, the island of Ni'ihau, home to a Hawaiian-only population, floats on the horizon.

## One, Many, All The Diversity of Hawaii's Human Mosaic

By Jon Letman

After crossing 2,400 miles of ocean from the western coast of the United States, you congratulate yourself on your arrival in paradise. Here in Honolulu International Airport, the air is at least 20 degrees warmer than wherever you left, every woman seems to have a flower in her hair and lanky palm trees sway in the distance, welcoming you to Hawaii.

Still bleary-eyed from the overnight flight, you try to focus and absorb your surroundings. Island people swirl around you – coffee-colored kids in *rubbah slipp* a Hawaiian family welcoming their visiting auntie with a *plumeria lei* (floral garland) and two *yon-sei* sisters, walking hand in hand past an elderly couple who can claim their combined roots as Hawaiian-Chinese-Filipino-Puerto Rican-Croatian-Italian-Korean-Portuguese.

Waiting for your connecting flight to the neighbor island of Kauai, you plop down in a seat between a diminutive Filipino grandmother and an immense Hawaiian man with an XXXX-L t-shirt that proclaims, 'BIG & PROUD.' A dreadlocked Swedish couple in matching *lava lava* carry boogie boards past you, followed by a weathered *paniolo* (Hawaiian cowboy) in dusty red dirt cowboy boots who precedes a small pack of Japanese tourists.

Framed by a high glass wall, a young girl in sunglasses with a shoulder tattoo that reads, 'Local Girl,' exclaims into her cell phone, 'Hey brah, where you stay?' Behind her, a rainbow stretches from the runway to the mountains in the distance, framing the Hawaii you've come to see.



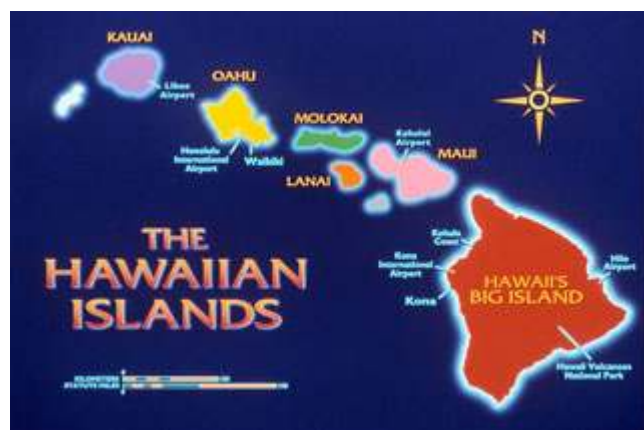
J. Penisten, Big Island Visitor's Bureau

A dancer performs a modern hula at the Big Island's annual Merrie Monarch hula festival.

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It is here, at the airport, that you first meet the complex mosaic of Hawaii's "rain society," where distinctions between race and culture are blurred to the point that when asked, many locals compare themselves to a Hawaiian-style lunch – the *miya plate*; that is, a little of this, some of that, a bit of the other. It is this fusion of people and culture in the middle of the Pacific that makes Hawaii unique and very much its own world all its own.

For those unfamiliar with Hawaii, initial references can be confusing. Hawaii, the archipelago, stretches over 1,500 miles across the central Pacific, consisting of 13 islands, reefs and shoals. When people speak of the State of Hawaii (the 50th state admitted to the Union August 21, 1959), they tend to think of the eight "high islands" (in order of size: Hawaii's Big Island, Maui, Oahu, Kauai, Molokai, Lanai, Niihau and Kahoolawe). Oahu, where approximately 75 percent of the state's population lives, is home to the capitol (Honolulu) and Hawaii's tourist epicenter (Waikiki).



Boarding your connecting flight your introduction to the rainbow society continues. The flight attendant serving you "Passion Punch" looks part-*haole* (Caucasian), part-Oriental. Her nametag reads "Naupualeilani.

Disembarking at the provincial tropical airport in Lihue in Kauai you pass two Filipinas gesticulate wildly as they speak in Ilicano. The agent at the car rental desk, a mix of Hawaiian-Okinawan-Dutch-Cherokee-Spanish ancestry, di

you outside to a spotty teen with dyed blond hair tucked under a wool stocking cap (in Hawaii?!) emblazoned with the words 'Da Kine.' He greets you, "Howzit?" handing you the keys to your car.

You drive to your hotel where three porters – a local Japanese, Filipino and a Mexican-German-Puerto Rican, stand at the *porte-cochere* beside a stout Hawaiian doorman with a *kukui* nut lei who flashes a broad smile and beams, "Alo-ha!"

Born and raised in the islands, these are Hawaii's *kama'aina* (literally, 'child of the land'). Live here long enough, and you may consider yourself a *kama'aina*, too, though whether others do depends much on actions and attitude. Producing a state of Hawaii driver's license entitles one to *kama'aina* discount rates (special promotional prices available in some shops or businesses intended to attract local business), but the definition of *kama'aina* varies, depending on who one asks.

Another identifying term is *hapa*, meaning "half" or "part" (as in half-Hawaiian, half-*haole*, or Chinese or Japanese or...). Due to widespread migration and immigration the people of Hawaii, like the state's unofficial symbol, the rainbow, come in many hues, all merging as one.

By contrast, the *malihini*, or newcomer, is anyone who has arrived recently, tourists and residents alike. Keep in mind, however, everyone, including the *Kanaka Maoli* (native Hawaiians) themselves, came from somewhere else and 'recently' is a relative term. When speaking of the *ancient* Hawaiians, one is referring to the first humans to arrive from Hiva (the Marquesas Islands) and later

### Talkin' da kine

Plantation culture, comprised of Hawaiians, Asians, Europeans and Americans, produced Hawaii's unique form of Hawaiian Creole English. Usually referred to as pidgin, H.C.E. is a mix of Hawaiian, English and other linguistic elements (mostly Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese and Filipino languages) with its own vocabulary, grammar and a unique sing-song intonation. Pidgin today is spoken by people from all walks of life and can be heard throughout Hawaii. A few commonly used words include

**Rubba slippas** – beach sandals, flip-flops

Uruguay (1) Tahiti, beginning roughly 1,600 years ago.  
 Vietnam (3)  
 Wales (1)  
 Yemen (1) The Polynesians who settled Hawaii had already formed a distinct culture largely free of outside influences before British explorer Captain James Cook's landing in 1778. His arrival brought a trickle, then a flood of explorers, traders, later missionaries, cattlemen and eventually plantation owners and laborers, ushering in the metamorphosis of Hawaiian society.  
 Zambia (1)  
 Zimbabwe (1)

**Yon-sei** – of fourth generation Japanese ancestry

**Lava lava** – common name for sarong in the Pacific islands

**Brah** – informal, friendly form of address (for men)

**Where you stay?**– Where are you now?

**Da kine** – a general, widely-used term serving as a substitute for any word implicit or mutually understood between two or more speakers. Ex.: "Where da kine stay?" "He stay Maui."

**Howzit?** – common local greeting

Starting with the Chinese in 1852, followed by Japanese (1868), Portuguese (187), Germans (1881), Puerto Ricans and Okinawans (1900), Koreans (1902), Filipinos (1905) and Spanish (1907), people from around the globe have flocked to Hawaii, bringing with them (among other things) their cultures and languages. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Hawaii's rainbow society blossomed, while at the same time the *Kanaka Maoli* struggled to preserve their own culture and traditions amid burgeoning numbers of *malihini*.

Further immigration by Samoans, Tongans, Thais, Vietnamese and others lured to Hawaii by opportunity, trade, travel or military continues to shape the demography of Hawaii today.

In Kauai, this melding of peoples is encapsulated in a carved stone which reads, "One Island, Many Peoples, All Kawaiians."



Courtesy Justine Michioka

**Miss Hawaii USA 2004  
 Justine Pi'ilani Reiko Michioka**

Kauaiian Justine Michioka will represent Hawaii in the Miss USA Pageant this spring. Michioka, whose mother is English-American and father is Japanese, says she loves living in a small-town community.

"Everyone knows everyone else here," she says. "It was nice to grow up in an environment like that because it taught me to trust people. Rarely did we ever lock our front door. That's kind of scary; but that's how close knit our neighborhoods are."

This includes what revered travel writer Pico calls "Global Souls" – the German woman who moved from the Dominican Republic, the Brazilian and his Texan wife, stone masons from Bangalore, Natasha from Moscow, Yuko from Fukuoka, Gem from Chiang Mai, the Vietnam restaurateur, the deck hand from Durban, a fighter from Edinburgh, a Fijian quarryman, Australian Hindu monks, a psychiatrist from Prades, free spirits from Fairbanks and a be bum named Babble from somewhere deep in Summer of Love.

On this remote chain of volcanic rock in the middle of the Pacific, there is something so welcoming, so accommodating, that everyone and everything seem to thrive beneath the dream blue skies and trade wind-blown palm. Constant sunshine often gives way to a sudden shower, casting a rainbow across the islands, over the dry barren *kiawe*-covered hills of Maui in the west, to the spurting black volcano Kilauea to the east.

And while Hawaii is marketed as and often considered to be a tropical "paradise," one must remember that even "paradise" has gridlock traffic and air pollution, an affordable housing shortage and a serious "ice" (crystal methamphetamine) problem.

It would be untrue to say that this multi-ethnic society is completely free of racial tensions, yet it is remarkable how well the people of Hawaii's rainbow society generally get along.

Despite the painful history of colonization and subjugation of native Hawaiians, and facing unprecedented challenges (the need for conservation and environmental balance, economic diversification and growing pressures from population), it is the widespread acceptance, integration and celebration of one another's culture that bestowed the people of Hawaii with a radiant beauty that shines from within, making Hawaii a global model for a brighter human future.

### If You Go

Oahu Visitors Bureau  
[www.Visit-oahu.com](http://www.Visit-oahu.com)  
877-525-6248

Maui Visitors Bureau  
[www.visitmaui.com/](http://www.visitmaui.com/)

Hawaii's Big Island Visitors Bureau  
808-886-1655  
[www.bigisland.org](http://www.bigisland.org)

Kauai Visitors Bureau  
808-245-3971  
[www.kauaivisitorsbureau.com](http://www.kauaivisitorsbureau.com)

Molokai Visitors Association  
<http://www.molokai-hawaii.com>

Lanai  
<http://www.visitlanai.net>



Current Events, Hawaii's Big Isl

### Hula dancers at Hilo's Merrie Monarch Fest



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