

# A Boaters Guide to Oahu

A PDF guide written by Sailor James in conjunction with a video of the same name.

<https://youtu.be/vppMonK4jmQ> - <https://www.svtriteia.com> - [https://linktr.ee/sailor\\_james](https://linktr.ee/sailor_james)



1. Arrival
  - Cement docks
  - Weekend / Off Hours
  
2. Ala Wai
  - Clear In
  - Buoy run
  - Inspection
  - Stay aboard / not stay aboard / time limit
  - No pump out
  - Showers
  
3. Things near Honolulu
  - The Prince Hotel
  - Waikiki Brewery, Harbor Pub, 602 at Pokai Bay, Hanks Haute
  - Laundry
  - Grocery stores
  - POPs / West Marine / Lowes / Home Depot
  - Buying amazon / getting mail
  - Biki / City Bus / Lyft
  
4. Day Trips
  - Rental car from airport
  - Manoa Falls/ Diamond Head / North shore /Makapu'u / West Side
  - Beaches
  - Snorkeling
  
5. Anchorages
  - Time limits
  - Weather / Winds
  - Summer / Winter Swells
  
6. Interisland
  - The Channels
  - Currents
  - Ocean Sailing
  
7. Wintering in Oahu
  - Hauling Out waiting list
  - Limited parts
  - La Mariana Sailing Club
  - Hawaii Yacht Club
  - Other State Harbors

## **Introduction:**

Hello Friends, this is a Boaters Guide to Oahu. In this video I will be going over everything I can think of to let you know what to expect when arriving in Hawaii by sailboat and making landfall on Oahu, what resources are here, the steps you will need to complete to get a guest slip at a state harbor or one of the yacht clubs and things to consider if you plan on staying just a short while or overwintering in the Hawaiian Islands.

If you are new to the channel, I am James and I am sitting onboard my 1965 Alberg 30 sloop, Triteia. We arrived at the Hawaiian Islands in September of 2021 and wintered here spending 8 months in and around Oahu. I will be detailing what is required to get a guest slip at the Ala Wai State Harbor and what to expect from a state that is notoriously known to not be inviting to boaters. While I am only going to talk about clearing in and staying at the Ala Wai, the process is the same for all of the state harbors in the Hawaiian Islands.

I will also go over what is within walking distance from the Ala Wai and what is further afield that might make you want to consider getting a rental car, like day trips to see the island and those sorts of things. If you have been a subscriber for a while, you have likely seen my past episodes of A Boaters Guides that I made for several of the guest harbors in Southern California. I won't be doing these for each of the Hawaiian Islands because I am mostly staying under anchor as I work my way through them but I feel this video will give you a lay of the land and the tips can be applied to other islands as well.

## ARRIVAL

If you arrive in Honolulu after 4:30 pm on a weekday or on a weekend there will be no one in the office at the Ala Wai Harbor. There is no guest dock, no fuel dock, and no pump out dock. There is an inspection dock tucked deep up inside the harbor but if they have an inspection booked for the next morning you will have to move and will already start off on the wrong foot with them.

There are a set of old cement docks that belonged to the former boat yard that used to occupy the large dirt lot adjacent to the docks. This is the best place to pull in and tie up for the night or the weekend until the offices reopen and you can clear in and get sorted out. I have never seen the docks completely full of boats but if that is the case you can also tie up to the wall at the end of the turning basin, just know that this puts you right on a public sidewalk. There are dock cleats there but I don't know the depth, so user beware. You could also tie up temporarily and walk the docks and find an empty slip with no dock lines attached to the cleats and pull into it for the night.

I stayed on the old cement docks for a night when I arrived and it's worth noting that there are public restrooms there that are unlocked during the daylight hours and sometimes there will be homeless people sleeping around that area. I found the area around the Ala Wai to be very safe and didn't hear of any theft in the 8 months I stayed there but always kept loose stuff put away on deck and locked the boat up when I left.

***It is important to note:** I do not know the process for clearing in if you are a foreign flagged vessel so that is something you will need to research on your own. If you are a US flagged vessel or have already cleared in then this is what you can expect.*

When it's time to clear in with the Harbor Master's Office make sure you have a large supply of patience on hand. Dealing with Harbor Masters in Hawaii is almost always annoying and frustrating. It is VERY MUCH like going to the DMV in the United States, I am not sure what the equivalent reference would be for other countries but any Americans watching this knows exactly what I mean.

The first thing to remember before dealing with any officials in Hawaii is this: You are not in California. Even though technically Hawaii is a state in the union you can't think about it in the same terms as any other state. If you show up thinking you are entitled to being treated a certain way you will only make life harder on yourself.

Is there racism against white people in Hawaii? Yes. There is also racism in every country on the planet. In my experience the key to most interactions in Hawaii is being respectful. Respect is a currency. Even if you want to bite your tongue off and tell someone to go Fuck themselves, grin and bare it and as the saying goes "Kill them with kindness". I have had several annoying interactions with state officials in Hawaii and was always just overly nice and apologized for whatever made up infraction they were accusing me of and asked them what they would like

for me to do, and it always turned the interaction around a 180. Usually, they will soften up instantly if you show them respect, even if they are full of shit, and turn the tides in your favor. If you come at them with aggression and entitlement, especially as a non-local, they will dig in and can make your life hell. You will be doing yourself a favor by keeping your emotions out of the equation and cursing them once back on your boat.

Ok, so you walk into the Harbor Master's office and ask them if there are any available guest slips. It's worth noting if you call ahead, they will likely tell you there are none to be had. If you show up, they will assign you one of the many, many empty slips, unless your boat is over 45 feet then you might have more of an issue.

You will need the following documents to get a guest slip at the Ala Wai.

1. Documentation number of registration
2. Insurance of 500k with Ala Wai Harbor listed as an underwriter
3. A Vessel Inspection
4. Complete a buoy run

The Insurance thing was simple for me, I have Progressive and was able to up my coverage which cost me like \$70 for the year, on top of whatever my insurance already was that I had previously paid. I was also able to simply add them on to my insurance plan online without having to even call the insurance company. You will likely have to repeat that process if you change state harbors, but I never stayed at another state harbor so I can't speak to this.

On my initial arrival, filling out all the paperwork and getting a slip assigned took an hour and a half. They scheduled my inspection and buoy run for Wednesday (I cleared in on a Monday). You will be charged more per day until that inspection and buoy run are done because you have not received a "temporary mooring permit".

At the time of your vessel inspection, you will arrive at the inspection docks located on either side of the boat ramp directly in front of the Harbor Master's office. While I was there one was in disrepair so make sure you ask which dock, they want you to tie up to. The inspection is the same as any coast guard inspection. They want to see that you have flares, life jackets, a sound making device, that your lights work, so on and so forth. Then they will measure your boat which you will assist with. The boat is measured from the end of your windvane, if you have one to the tip of your anchor or bowsprit. They measured my Alberg 30 at being 33 feet long and charged me accordingly.

After the inspection you must do a buoy run, yes even if you have just sailed in from crossing an ocean of 2000+ miles... I know, it's absurd. They ask you to drive your boat out and when you get to the old fuel dock, which you will have no way of knowing where that is since you are a visitor so I will put a photo on the screen now, you have to call the office and tell them your name, vessel name and that you are passing the old fuel dock on your buoy run. You then drive out the final channel marks 1 and 2 and call them again telling them you are rounding the buoys. I don't think they actually watch you, but I have no idea. If they don't answer the phone,

which is not uncommon, just leave a message and snap a photo with your phone of the buoy and the land as insurance in case they are in a mood that day.

Then you return to the slip they had assigned you and go back into the office for another hour plus of waiting and pay for however many days you would like to stay. You can pay for up to 30 days at a time. Along with the slip fees you will be charged a \$10 temp mooring fee. This price is the same if you pay for 3 days or if you pay for 30 days. If after 3 days you decided you want to stay longer, they will recharge you the \$10 temp mooring fee.

When I arrived in September of 2021, they had the rates listed online, that has since been removed or has been buried so deep in the website I can't locate it.

I was charged \$18.34 a day for my "33" foot boat + \$10 a day (per person) since I was staying aboard.

A long-time resident of the Ala Wai explained to me shortly after my arrival. "If someone asks you in Hawaii if you are staying aboard, the answer is always NO." So, if you are staying with a friend or relative or in a hotel, you won't be charged the \$10 a day.

If you are paying for the stay aboard rate you can get a shower key fob from the Harbor Master's office for a cash deposit of \$100. You must return that key (and get your money back in the form of a check) if you decide you want to switch from "Staying aboard" to "Not Staying aboard" The showers are rough with some of them being only slightly better than others. The one nearest the Hilton Lagoon I call the "Prison Showers" while the one closer to the Hawaii Yacht Club is less gnarly. I won't go into details about how I received a shower FOB after I stopped "staying aboard" but just know that once you meet the locals you might find resources for things.

You get 120 days a Calendar Year at EACH state harbor marina. This means if you arrive at the Ala Wai in September you can stay until the end of December. Then the clock resets and you can stay January through the end of April. So, you can stay 8 months, if you choose at one State Harbor then you have to find another spot.

Another option for a temporary slip is the Hawaii Yacht Club, but we will talk about that more later.

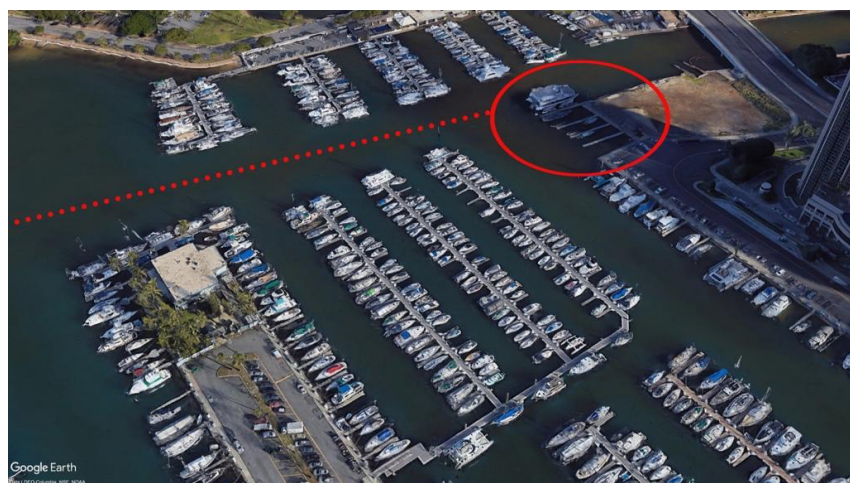
One very disturbing thing to know is that the Ala Wai has 600 slips with many people staying aboard regularly and some people staying aboard fulltime, and the harbor does NOT have a pump out station or a pump out boat. So, you can imagine where all of that ends up, So hire someone to clean your bottom while you are there and save yourself the misery.

The Ala Wai used to have a bad reputation for sketchy people and druggies, that is no longer the case. I never saw sketchy people on the docks even though none of the gates have locks. There are homeless people around on the streets, but they just keep to themselves. I regularly

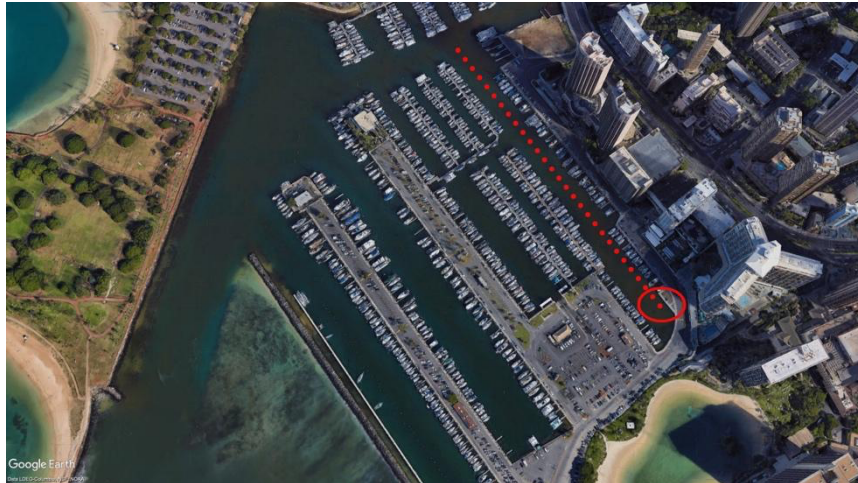
left Tritaia unlocked and open when I would go off for close by errands or to grab coffee and never had any issues. I did leave for two weeks over the holidays and locked everything up down below that I had been storing on deck, like my scuba tanks and such, and had Kimberly Wood stop by and check on the boat a few times and never had any issues with theft.

Speaking of Criminals, When I left someone who had just arrived told me the Ala Wai Harbor Master told them the waiting list for a permanent slip at the Ala Wai had 96 people on it. I counted 100 empty slips the last week I was there. It is not a secret that there is a LOT of corruption at the state level, while I was there several local politicians were on the news being arrested by the feds. They are trying to privatize the state harbors, which would mean the end of affordable slips in Hawaii. So, my guess is they don't fill the empty slips so they can make it look like there is no demand and justify selling off the harbors to the highest bidders. This is such a bummer and will be a great loss for anyone who isn't rich but wants to be able to have a boat in Hawaii. This might also explain why every single person in Harbor Master's offices, all around the state, seem to really hate boats and boaters... It's crazy to me, but it's a real thing.

<https://alawaiharbor.com> (Some of the info on this site is wrong)



*Cement Docks good for after-hours tie up*



*Another option for tying up if cement docks are full*



*Harbor Master's office and inspection docks*



*Buoy Run + "Old Fuel Dock"*



## **Things Near the Ala Wai**

Ok so you have your boat tied up in her guest slip and now you are ready to get ashore. The Ala Wai has by far the best access to everything you might want or need. It is situated next to the Hilton Village resort that has tons of shops, restaurants, Starbucks and the like. The local convenience stores in Hawaii are called ABC stores and you can find them a stone's throw from just about anywhere and they offer the basics for twice the price of most places.

If you want good coffee and fast internet head over to the Prince Hotel lobby, they have tons of seating and a Honolulu Coffee shop with great coffee, pastries and various breakfast stuff and super-fast free WIFI on the Prince Guest network. Everyone there is super nice, and I spent countless hours there working and drinking coffee. I always referred to it as my office. The hotel staff was always chill, even though I look like a prospector from the Yukon gold rush and the baristas at Honolulu coffee were always super sweet.

### **Food**

Waikiki Brewery is a half mile walk from the harbor and they have great veggie burgers, real burgers, amazing fries and good fish and chips. And likely good beer.

The Harbor Pub is directly across the street from the Ala Wai Harbor, below the Chart House, and their pizza is out of this world good. It might take an hour to get the pizza so don't show up starving and bring some patience but trust me it's worth the wait and its super close to the boats.

Further afield you can find Hank's Haute Dogs in Kaka'ako, which is a cool area of town with tons of rad street art, shops, and restaurants.

### **Laundry**

There are two laundromats within a half mile from the harbor, both are absurdly overpriced. The first one I went to was Ena Road Laundry where I took all of my dirty clothes from the passage and paid like \$70 to have it all done. Which is absurd but after 32 days at sea I was willing to give myself that small treat.

After that I would go to iDo Laundry which is just across the street from Ena Road Laundry. Also very expensive but open late and some of the machines take credit cards, when it's working.

### **Provisions**

There is a large mall about a mile away called the Ala Moana Center that has a Foodland, and a target for getting provisions. There is also a large Walmart a few blocks past Target.

### **Boat Parts**

There are two marine supplies stores on Oahu, the first and best is [POPS](#) but they are geared more towards the professional fishing boats but have a ton of stuff. The second is West Marine.

Both POPS and West marine are close to a Lowes and a Home Depot so that area is kind of a one stop shop for all your hardware needs.... If they have what you need. That's the thing with islands is it is very common to see the shelves bare.

There are no Amazon Lockers on Oahu so if you buy something online and need it shipped you can have mail sent to the Ala Wai Harbor Master's office, but check with them first, there is a sign in the office saying this is allowed but I would still speak with them first.

### **Transportation**

You have a few options for getting around. Lyft and Uber are Uber expensive, so I didn't use them much while I was there. The city bus is \$2.75 a ride, I took this to the airport several times for flights or to meet friends that were visiting, and it takes about 45 minutes from the harbor by bus. It takes about 20 minutes to take the bus to West Marine.

I found [Biki](#) rental bikes to be the best option for getting around. You can get a monthly pass called the "Voyagers Pass" Kama'aina (this means resident) for \$25 a month. I signed up for this and they didn't ask for a local address but if they did just use the address from the Prince Hotel or the Harbor Master's office. There are tons of the bike racks all around Waikiki and you can just ride across town and lock it up at one of the racks then do your errands and go unlock another bike to return. All this is done using an app. Very simple and I more than got my money's worth.



*Biki Rack in Waikiki*

## Day Trips

If you decide you want to rent a car to see more of the island, I suggest renting a car from the Airport. It is much cheaper than getting one in Waikiki. Oahu is small so you can drive from Waikiki to the North Shore in about 55 minutes unless it's rush hour. I won't list all the stuff there is to do on island but here are some of the things I enjoyed.

- Manoa Falls trail (easy and close by)
- Hiking up Diamond Head Crater
- Visiting Makapu'u Lighthouse trail
- Seeing the North Shore
- Heading to the Westside and hiking out to Kaneana Point

If you do rent a car, make sure you pay for parking around the harbor, they have now made ALL street parking pay parking and have not installed the signs and will tow your car even though there are no signs. This happened to Sarah and myself the last time she visited and it cost us \$250 to get the car out of impound plus the cost of the uber ride. She is contesting it in court.

## Beaches

As far as swimming and beaches go there are countless beaches to choose from. Waikiki is easy and close but usually very crowded. I really liked Kaimana Beach that is close to Diamond Head, it's more of a local's vibe.

## Snorkeling

Kaimana Beach also has great snorkeling out around the reefs to the left if you are facing the sea. Also, Electric Beach on the westside is out of this world for snorkeling but a pretty long surface swim if you come from the shore. I anchored about 300 yards from the dive site so that's an option if you are hitting the westside anchorages.

## Anchorage

I am not going to do a massive overview of the anchorages because I have made episodes of each and every anchorage, I visited on Oahu so you can check out the playlist "Hawaiian Adventures" to see those and decide which anchorages you would like to visit.

Hawaiian Adventures Playlist:

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLm0chdAnUTpxwzL3khOItSR3zMAmT3sD>

One thing to know is that legally speaking you are only allowed to be in one anchorage for 72 hours. Sometimes it's enforced and sometimes it isn't. Just know that technically that's the law.

Also, Summer vs. Winter will determine which anchorages are possible or comfortable to visit. In the summer there is a south swell which makes some of the south facing anchorages very uncomfortable or even dangerous, while in the winter there is a North Swell making it impossible to anchor the North Shore anchorages or harbors.

## Inter-Island Sailing

If you have reached the Hawaiian Islands by boat, you already have ocean sailing experience, so that will benefit you if you decide to sail between the islands. If you decide to make passage between the islands just know that once you are in the channels, even though they are only about 30 miles wide, you are Ocean sailing. The channels accelerate the winds and the currents. If the Tradewinds are forecasted to be 10 knots, they will almost certainly be 20 knots in the channel. And the currents run at about 2+ knots in the channels, with the strongest sections of both wind and current being the areas closest to the shores, where the middle of the channel is less accelerated. Unlike mainland / California sailing the Tradewinds don't always die down at night. They may slacken as the land cools but it's not a sure bet. I have left at 2am and still seen 20 knots in the channel even with a forecast of 10 knots. If the trades are blowing strong (20+ knots) it's best to wait for a better weather window because the wind and the seas in the channel will let you know that they are serious.

Here are the best two cruising guides I have found for the Hawaiian Islands:

### **Cruising Guide to the Hawaiian Islands**

Paperback – January 1, 2019

by [Carolyn Mehaffy](#) (Author) - <https://amzn.to/3apKr2t>

also...

<http://www.noodlesnotes.com>



*Triteia during a lively sail across the Kalohi Channel*

## **Wintering on Oahu**

If you have decided to keep your boat over winter on Oahu and sail for Alaska or the Pacific Northwest or the South Pacific, the following season here are some things to know.

1. Keep in mind the time limit at state harbors and that you must pay monthly (more on this below)
2. Boats under 40ft will have an easier time finding a slip at private marinas.
3. If you require a haul out for repairs or a bottom job, know that there is a very long waiting list (I had to wait 4 months to get hauled out) so call and book a spot early or even before you arrive if you think you will need to haul out.
4. You can get a mailbox at a UPS store so you can get packages.

At the Ala Wai State Harbor I was told that I MUST pay each month in person and that there was no way around this, They also did not allow me to pay for 30 days on December 22<sup>nd</sup> because “Oh no you can only pay till the 31<sup>st</sup> because it’s a new year” which meant I had to fly back from LA on New Year’s Eve, pay for January, then a few days later fly back to LA for some work I was hired to do.

Just before I left Oahu, I met a couple who had just sailed in from San Diego who were going to have to leave their boat there for the summer due to needed repairs before continuing to Japan and they were told they could pay online. This pretty much sums up what it’s like to deal with the Harbor Masters in Hawaii.

## **Haul Out**

I had to haul out to repair my rudder and I was happy with my experience at the Keehi marine Center Boatyard. While they were almost twice as expensive as the Ventura Harbor Boatyard, this is not surprising considering pretty much everything in Hawaii is more expensive. The nice thing about the Keehi Marine Center is they allow you to stay onboard and do your own work. One thing to know is they lock you in at night between 7pm and 7am, there is a number so that if you get locked out or in you can call and a guard will let you out or in. They do NOT have showers, which is a bummer. <http://www.keehimarine.com>

## **Other Marinas**

Some private marinas to consider are La Mariana Sailing Club or Ko’Olina Marina (expensive but nice). La Mariana has a ton of slips open for boats under 40 feet. Not sure about what Ko’Olina has but most places will not have “Live aboard slips” but I know tons of “sneakaboards” and have never heard of anyone being kicked out. It’s very Don’t Ask / Don’t Tell.

You can find a list of state harbors on the DLNR website. I will say I would avoid Keehi State Harbor if possible because it is super sketchy with drug addicts and a shady Harbor Master that placed an illegal lien on a friend’s boat, so beware of that place.

**You can find links to all the other harbors on all the lines via - <https://alawaiharbor.com>**

This publication was compiled to try and help boaters who are planning to visit Hawaii have an idea of what to expect when visiting the Hawaiian Islands by boat. All the information in this document is true to the best of my knowledge based on my own real-world experience sailing in and around the Hawaiian Islands in 2021/2022. Prices, situations, conditions, etc. will change over time so keep this in mind if you are referencing this document in the future. I have presented this document as a free PDF to the public along with the hour-long video.

If you have found this information helpful and would like to donate monetarily you can do so at the following links:

One time donation: [PayPal.Me/jamesthesailorman](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.paypal.com%2Fjamesthesailorman)

Become a Patron: <https://www.patreon.com/sailorjames>

I hope this helps make your lives easier, I would have loved to have had it all laid out for me before I arrived.

Fair Winds,  
James Frederick

USCG Masters Captain License  
PADI Advanced Diver Certification  
SV Tritonia - 1965 Alberg 30 (#55)  
Circumnavigating - Currently: Kailua, Hawaii

<http://www.youtube.com/sailorjames>

<http://www.svtriteia.com>

[https://linktr.ee/sailor\\_james](https://linktr.ee/sailor_james)

*Awards:*

**Ocean Cruising Club - Qualifiers Mug 2021**

*Feature Article:*

**Finding A Way Forward**

by David Blake Fischer

Cruising World Magazine - June/July 2022

*Sponsors:*

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