



# BRINGING ALOHA BACK

AS THE PRIDE OF AMERICA SETS SAIL IN HAWAII ONCE MORE, TRAVELERS ARE EAGER TO EXPLORE THE LUSH RAINFORESTS, BREATHTAKING BEACHES AND TOWERING VOLCANOES FOUND ON THE ISLANDS.

BY ASHLEY RYAN | PHOTOS COURTESY OF NCL

There's no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on travel, but few industries were impacted quite as much as cruise lines. Virtually a hotel on the water, infection rates soared aboard ships during the first wave of the outbreak, triggering long-standing closures on the high seas.

But Norwegian Cruise Line has since made its return to the ocean, with each of the 17 ships in its fleet back in operation. One of the most in-demand, the Pride of America, offers an inter-island trip around Hawaii, leaving from Honolulu, Oahu, and stopping at various ports of call on Maui, Hawaii (also known as the Big Island) and Kauai. Already sold out through most of October, this trip is at the top of many peoples' bucket lists and, given the uncertainty in recent years, they are flocking to the islands in full force.

Time spent aboard the Pride of America is exactly as dreamy as you'd imagine. Whether relaxing aboard the ship, enjoying its selection of pools, dining and entertainment or heading off on an excursion, there is plenty to see and do to keep you busy all week long.

## ALL ABOARD

Regarded as one of NCL's smaller ships, the Pride of America is also one of the most exclusive, making it the company's most profitable as well. It's easy to see why, when you consider the fact that it's the only cruise that both starts and ends in Hawaii as well as the only one to sail around the islands year-round.

Once patriotic-themed, with red, white and

blue everywhere, the boat was freshened up with more contemporary hues in 2016 (with additional touches incorporated during the pandemic). While interior rooms and solo studios are available, you'll want to spring for an oceanview stateroom—or even one with a balcony—to truly soak up everything this adventure has to offer. From within your room, you're likely to spot scenery and wildlife from waterfalls and dolphins to early-morning rainbows in addition to sprawling views of the islands themselves in the distance.

Although issues with staffing have kept NCL from opening up every single amenity on board the ship, there is still a lot to do during the day. Head to the South Beach Pool for some excitement—and frozen sips, as the Ocean Drive Bar is right next door—or relax at the Oasis Pool, a more serene spot to spend the day. Guests can also unwind in one of five hot tubs located near the pools. For further relaxation, visit the onboard Mandara Spa & Salon, which offers everything from seaweed or bamboo massages to cleansing salt scrubs, hot stones, collagen treatments and more.

If retail therapy is more your speed, you'll find a number of shops on board as well, including Na Hoku jewelry store, SoHo Art Gallery, Island Treasures souvenir shop and more. Plus, Pride of America is home to Perspectives Studio, where creative portraits can be taken of you and your loved ones so you won't forget a moment of the magic.

By night, the ship is a little light on the entertainment right now, but the current schedule does allow

for some live music, trivia sessions, comedy shows and dance parties. Expect this to ramp up later this year as well.

Of course, we'd be remiss not to mention the dining scene on the ship. Although only about half of the restaurants are currently operating, there are a number of solid options to enjoy, as long as you make reservations as soon as you step aboard the boat. When seeking fine dining, Cagney's Steakhouse has plenty of delectable offerings, from premium cuts of beef to lamb chops, lobster tail and house-made crab cakes. Another popular spot is Jefferson's Bistro, an elegant French restaurant serving up traditional treats like *côte de veau rôti*, or roasted veal, and *filet de boeuf Rossini*, or beef tenderloin.

There are a number of complimentary dining experiences as well, the nicest of which is Skyline Restaurant. This traditional dining room has an evolving menu filled with impressive dishes—think shrimp fettuccine alfredo, New York strip steak, breaded flounder and rotisserie chicken—all in a classy setting with top-notch service. The Aloha Cafe buffet, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, is more laid-back but still has many different options, including themed dinners with unique entrees nightly. Or, for burgers and fries, head to Cadillac Diner, a casual, 24-hour eatery with large portions of comfort food, milkshakes and beyond.

## EXCITING EXCURSIONS

Whether you're seeking an adrenaline-filled adventure or a more restful way to wander, NCL's shore







Left to right: Excursions include a variety of activities including the opportunity to swim under a waterfall.; Kalapaki Beach on Kauai

excursions are a fantastic way to see the Hawaiian islands without having to worry about doing any planning: Simply book and go.

You'll have a few different options depending on which island you're docked at, but all of these excursions have one thing in common: You will be picked up and dropped off at the port, making it a simple way to explore during the cruise. After leaving Honolulu, your first stop will be Maui, where you can snorkel at Turtle Arches, head up to the volcanic Haleakala Crater or venture north to explore the rainforest along the Road to Hana. Another way to explore is with the Best of Maui excursion, which whisks guests to the Maui Tropical Plantation to see crops being grown on the island and the beautifully lush Iao Valley before ending at the Maui Ocean Center, where visitors can view an innovative 3D show that's part of the "Humpbacks of Hawaii Exhibit & Sphere."

On the Big Island, there are two ports of call: Hilo and Kona. Easily the most popular experience at Hilo is the Volcanoes National Park tour, though other adventures allow for viewing lava fields, waterfalls or memorable sights such as the Liliuokalani Gardens, the Panaewa Zoo and Gardens, Big Island Candies and the King Kamehameha statue. Utterly unique is the Volcano Wine Tasting trip, where the vineyards are placed atop volcanic terrain; you'll sip varietals such as pinot noir, cayuga and Maréchal Foch.

The other port, Kona, requires a tender boat to go ashore so leave some extra time for that before enjoying excursions on a submarine, glass-bottom boat, fishing vessel or high-speed Zodiac watercraft. Here, there are also a number of snorkeling and historic experiences as well as a wide range of culinary excursions to introduce you to local coffee, chocolate and more.

When you reach Kauai, the Garden Isle, you'll find the excursions center around being outdoors, from kayaking, zip lining and riding in a utility task vehicle, or UTV, to hiking and searching for waterfalls. On the Best of Kauai excursion, you'll visit Opaekaa Falls before heading up Wailua River on a locally owned boat, enjoying music and stories along the way. Once you arrive, you'll make the short journey to Fern Grotto, a stunning natural respite filled with tropical plants, flowers and caves, now known as a famed wedding location. This experience also includes a trip to Waimea Canyon, also called the Grand Canyon of the Pacific, for stunning views of the green ravines.

Or, set out on Kauai—The Director's Cut, which showcases the island's best movie locations. Kauai is also the only destination where travelers can venture out at night for a luau excursion, where you'll get your fill of Hawaiian foods, culture, music and dance. Plus, don't miss views of the rugged Napali Coast from the boat before you make your way back to Honolulu.

Don't skip over the activities offered on Oahu once you return; after disembarking, guests can experience a more somber side of the island's history at the Pearl Harbor National Memorial and neighboring USS Missouri battleship, or visit the North Shore to catch the perfect wave. The Grand Circle Island Tour is another option, as it takes you all around the full island with a stop at the Dole Plantation.

#### ON YOUR OWN

The shore excursions arranged by Norwegian Cruise Line are a great way to ensure you see everything you're hoping to with ease. But they aren't your only option. Cruisers are free to come

and go as long as they're back by a set time, so don't be afraid to try planning some exploits of your own as well.

While you can venture down to the southern part of Maui to snorkel with turtles on a guided tour, you're also likely to find these majestic creatures at Hookipa Beach Park in Paia—not far from where the ship docks in Kahului. Viewable both on the sand and in the water, these gentle giants are usually out midday to sunset, but remember, they're protected so be sure to keep a safe distance.

Staying overnight at the dock in Maui enables you to head off the ship for dinner. If you can find proper transportation (Uber may not always be reliable on the island due to limited drivers), venture over to Montage Kapalua Bay on the northwestern shore. Everything at this luxurious property—cuisine, cocktails and especially the sunsets—are unrivaled. Enjoy modern Hawaiian fare at the resort's Cane & Canoe or stop by The Hideaway for a casual, intimate setting with delicious local dishes.

On the Big Island, wander the downtown Hilo area to find a number of shops and art galleries; this is the perfect spot to buy gifts for loved ones back home or snacks for the rest of your journey. The Hilo Farmers Market offers everything from lychees, apple bananas (small, sweet bananas grown on the islands) and bouquets of fresh tropical flowers to jewelry, clothing and other crafts. On the other side of the island, you'll find Kona is very walkable. Trendy shops galore offer fun gifts and souvenirs of your trip, but you'll also find a few historic places right near the spot where your tender boat arrives. Hulihee Palace, formerly a vacation home for Hawaiian royalty, has been turned into a museum that can be toured. Down the



Top: a performance of "Hawaiian Wedding Song" at Kauai's Fern Grotto; bottom: a sea turtle from a Maui snorkeling trip

street, a replica of King Kamehameha I's final residence from the 1800s sits in the water, just above a cozy beachside snorkeling spot. Head over to The Fish Hopper to have some fish tacos, ahi tuna poke, oysters, or kalua pork sandwich for lunch, then follow it up with dessert at Scandinavian Shave Ice before heading back to the boat.

Nawiliwili—which has a port within walking distance of the town—on Kauai has a few special things to offer as well. Kalapaki Beach is a short distance away, with gentle waves and gorgeous views of the pristine cove. Also nearby is Duke's restaurant, serving up Pacific-inspired cuisine with a view and a spectacular atmosphere. If you have time to go further south on the island, consider dinner at the Beach House Restaurant. Located near Poipu Beach, this is a great spot to look for sea turtles in the water while you wait to be seated. A sprawling lawn sits just adjacent to the crashing waves for beautiful views that expertly complement the locally caught seafood and other fresh dishes.

And, since the cruise begins and ends in Honolulu, you can extend your trip—either before or after the journey—to hike the Diamond Head summit trail, wander the Hoomaluhia Botanical Garden, sip a mai tai at a nearby bar, discover local culture at the Polynesian Cultural Center or book a stay at one of several beachfront properties like the historic Moana Surfrider, A Westin Resort & Spa, which first opened in 1901, and swim in the waters of Waikiki. **NBM**

RIGHT AND OPPOSITE PAGE: ASHLEY RYAN

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