



My Drift

Title: Deadly Hawaii

Written by: Jerry D. Petersen

Date: 10 Nov 2017

Article Number: 273-2017-29

Mainland Headline: Way Too Many Tourists are Dying in Hawaii

Statistics for last 10 years (2007 to 2016)

Approximately 8 million tourists come to Hawaii every year. That adds up to about 80 million tourists over the 10-year period.

Approximately 580 tourists were killed in Hawaii during that period. Here are the numbers:

- **780 Total Drownings (tourists and locals)**
 - **392 Drownings for tourists**
 - **388 Drownings for locals**

- **650 Drownings in the ocean**
 - **356 Drownings for tourists**
 - **294 Drownings for locals**

- **130 Drownings in swimming pools, rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, etc.**
 - **36 Drownings for tourists**
 - **94 Drownings for locals**



- **85 tourists died in motor vehicle crashes during the same period.**
- **55 tourists died hiking making it the third leading cause of death for tourists.**
- **An additional 48 tourists were killed doing something else.**

Okay, that is the **BIG PICTURE**. Now let's take a closer look at some of these deadly activities.

SNORKELING

Drowning is by far the leading cause of death for tourists in Hawaii and snorkeling is the most common activity that leads to visitor drownings. State health department records over the past decade show that Hawaii's visitor-drowning rate is 13 times the national average and 10 times the rate of Hawaii residents.

Would you have ever guessed that snorkeling is the most dangerous tourist activity in Hawaii? I would have guessed surfing on the North Shore or body surfing at Sandy Beach. Out of 650 ocean drownings from 2007 to 2016, the state Department of Health has recorded 169 as related to the common ocean activity of snorkeling. A total of 156 of those deaths were of tourists to the islands.



Why are all these tourists drowning while snorkeling?

While some vacationers make bad decisions, like mixing alcohol with water sports, others seem dangerously unaware of the risks. Novice swimmers or people without any kind of ocean skills tend to go snorkeling because it's looked on as a really safe activity. You're not getting into the surf. You've got fins, a mask and snorkel on so there's a false sense of security.

Despite being touted as a leisure activity, snorkeling is the most common cause of injury-related death in the islands. In the last 10 years, more than half of all visitors who drowned in the Aloha State did so while snorkeling.

Hanauma Bay, an iconic nature preserve, receives more than 1 million visitors annually. It is very scenic and it's a popular bucket-list snorkeling spot. However, more tourists drown there than anywhere else in the state. There have been 21 snorkeling-related drownings there during the ten-year period. At Hanauma Bay, the

danger seems to lie in the fact that many people underestimate how strenuous snorkeling can be, especially older swimmers. In fact, snorkeling and swimming are the two most common activities that result in drowning in Hawaii.



Hanauma Bay

A lot of people think, ‘Well, Hanauma Bay is really shallow, so if I get into trouble, I’ll just stand up.’ Well, a lot of the rescues and drownings occur in waist-deep water. For a novice snorkeler, what you don’t realize is when you’re wearing fins, it’s not an easy thing to stand up in very shallow water because this extended foot length makes it very difficult to get your feet under you when you’re floating face down. So, if you get a gulp of sea water in you, and you start to gag and you decide to try to stand up, it could be several more seconds before you get your feet under you in a way that you can stand up, and by then you’ve taken another gulp or two and it’s downhill from there. You drown.

Hanauma Bay is far from being the only location where Hawaii’s visitors run into trouble while snorkeling. All of the major Hawaiian Islands have great beaches for snorkeling. Here is the breakout by island for drownings while snorkeling during the 10-year period 2007 to 2016:

Maui	Oahu	Kauai	Big Island	Total
72	58	20	19	169

Here are the deadliest snorkeling beaches in Hawaii:

- 1. Hanauma Bay, Oahu**
- 2. Waikiki Beach, Oahu**
- 3. Black Rock, Maui**
- 4. Kahanamoku Beach, Oahu**
- 5. Molokini Island, Maui**
- 6. Makena Beach, Maui**
- 7. Hapuna, Big Island**
- 8. Brennecke Beach, Kauai**



Waikiki Beach



Black Rock



Makena Beach



Hapuna



Brennecke's Beach

SWIMMING

The tourist activity that causes the second most drownings is swimming - 140 tourists drown in the last 10 years. If you live in or have visited Hawaii, you might have noticed that there is a lot of water surrounding the islands. Life guards can only protect a small portion of the shoreline where people can go swimming.

Though picturesque, and maybe you cannot believe your luck – swimming at a secluded beach where you are the only one in the water – is not a good idea for a several reasons. The ocean may look calm, but currents, unlike high surf, are difficult to spot. So be cautious when entering the ocean and read and obey all warning signs. They could save your life. Here are five ocean swimming safety tips:



Tip #1: Choose a beach with a lifeguard

It is best to swim at guarded beaches. But keep in mind that lifeguards are humans too and they can't watch everyone all the time so stay within sight.

Tip #2: Pay attention to beach warning signs

Whenever possible, signs are posted on beaches that warn beachgoers about current dangers, such as strong currents, stinging jellyfish, sharp corals, slippery rocks and other hazards.

Tip #3: Don't swim at remote beaches

If you want to swim at a remote beach and notice that no one else is in the water, stay out. There is probably a good reason why.

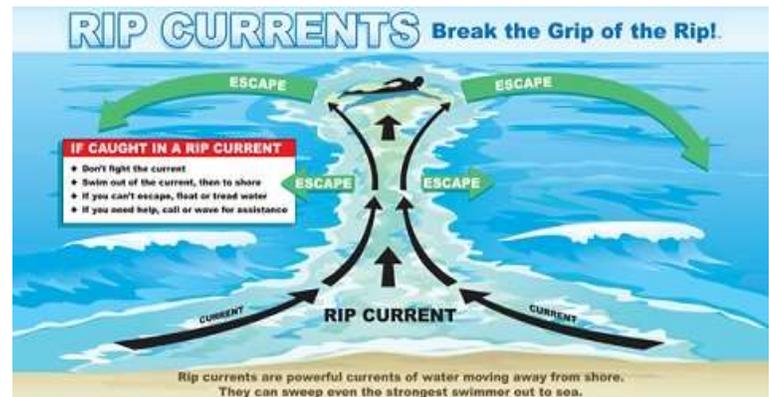
Tip #4: Never turn your back on the ocean

Sudden large waves can sneak up on you and sweep you off the beach or rocks and pull you out to deep water without warning.

Tip #5: If in doubt, don't go out!

Whenever you're not sure if a beach is safe to swim at, don't enter the ocean.

Probably the best reason for swimming where there are lifeguards is the rip current that is sometimes present. Many people have died in Hawaii after being sucked out away from the beach in a rip current that exhausted them as they tried to swim against it – or tread water until help arrived.



SURFING (ON A BOARD) AND BODY SURFING



Surfing – North Shore of Oahu



Body Surfing – Sandy Beach on Oahu

54 tourists drown while surfing or body surfing in Hawaii during the 10-year period. The North Shore of Oahu is known for its giant waves and world class surfing. If you are not an experienced surfer, you better stay away from these dangerous waves. Every year there are a few tourists that insist on seeing these waves up close and they die.

In addition to all the dead tourists, many more have sustained serious spinal cord injuries. Sandy Beach on Oahu is known as the “beach of broken necks and bones” for a reason. The shore break is very powerful here and many accidents have happened. There are red warning flags on the beach at every day of the year, warning beachgoers of the hazards. It is a beach for experienced bodyboarders and surfers only, and even they haven’t escaped serious injuries in the past.

Hawaii Trauma Registry

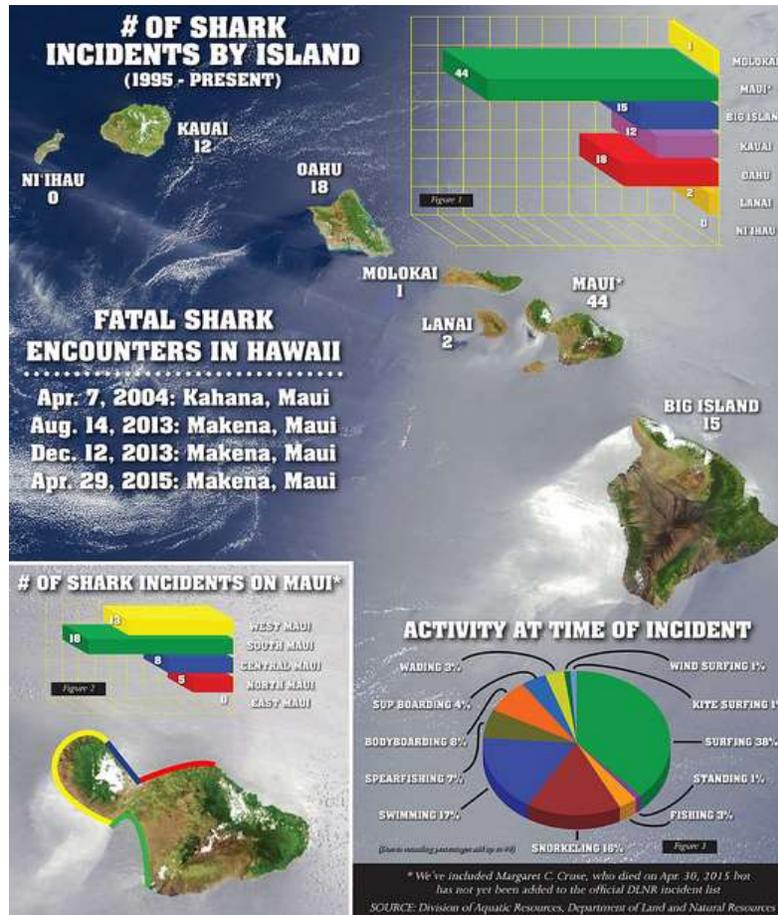
Location (beach) of spinal cord injuries from ocean activities in Hawaii, 2012-2016



SHARKS

The most feared creature in the ocean (by far) is the shark. Most of those 8 million tourists who visit Hawaii every year engage in ocean activities like swimming or snorkeling or just wading. Well, don't tell the tourists this but the ocean is the home to many sea life creatures and fish including sharks. Sharks like to feed on sea turtles

and sometimes they mistake a human for a big fat turtle. It is amazing that there are not more shark attacks and more deaths with all those people out in the ocean swimming and floating around. Take a look at the following chart:



Okay, what did you learn from reading that Shark Incident Chart? I learned that they have a lot of sharks near Maui. I also learned that most shark attacks are not fatal. There has been a total of 92 shark attacks in Hawaii since 1995 and only 4 of them were fatal – all in the ocean waters around Maui.



The Tiger Shark is responsible for almost all shark attacks in Hawaii

OTHER OCEAN ACTIVITIES THAT HAVE RESULTED IN TOURIST DEATHS



Scuba Diving



Cave Diving



Windsurfing



Cliff Jumping/Diving



Parasailing



Shore Fishing



Canoe Paddling



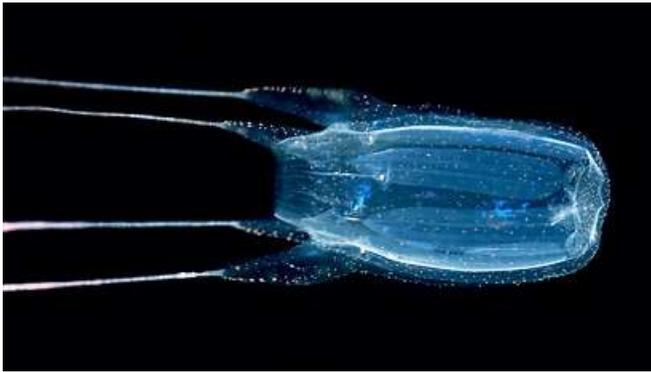
Jet Skiing

MORE HAWAII OCEAN DANGERS



Hālonā Blowhole is on the island of Oahu near Hanauma Bay. In Hawaiian hālonā means "lookout".

Blowholes are holes in the cliff face near the ocean that spray water when waves come in and go under the lava cliffs and up and out the hole in front of tourists. They are great fun, but also can be quite dangerous. The force of the water coming through the hole can pick you up and drop you head first down the hole – where you drown. This has happened numerous times in the past. Some blowholes are closed for this reason.



Box Jellyfish

Beachgoers can expect influxes of jellyfish on Oahu's south facing beaches about eight to ten days following the full moon. Hawaii's jellyfish can deliver a painful and serious sting. Their tentacles, like their relative the

Portuguese man-o-war, are lined with stinging cells used to capture prey. Each cell fires a toxin-dosed barb that can penetrate the skin, which causes the stinging sensation. On one fateful day not so long ago in Waikiki, there were as many as 800 people who sought medical attention for box jelly stings.

Box jellyfish are among the deadliest animals in the oceans responsible for more deaths every year than sharks. Even mild stings cause severe pain and can leave horrible scars.

Portuguese Man-O-Wars belong to a different family than box jellyfish and therefore must be treated separately. For severe pain, try applying heat or cold, whichever feels better to the patient. Few Portuguese man-o-war stings in Hawaii cause life-



Portuguese Man-O-War

threatening reactions, but there is always a possibility. Some people are extremely sensitive to the venom; a few have allergic reactions. Consider even the slightest breathing difficulty, or altered level of consciousness a medical emergency, and call for help.

Coral Reef Cuts

The coral reef in Hawaii is razor sharp and will cut your feet, hands, or any body part that comes in contact with it. Almost everybody who spends time in the ocean has at one time or another inadvertently stepped on the coral reef.



Reef cuts don't tend to heal quickly. The reason is because coral contains a living animal filled with proteinaceous matter that is toxic to the human body. The body fights against it, but it takes considerable time to win the battle. Couple that with the fact that the water of Waikiki is filled with staphylococci bacteria – as well as other nasty things. If you get cut, you can almost count on an infection. You'll want to have it treated properly immediately.

Sea Urchins

These long spine sea urchins, known collectively in Hawaiian as wana (pronounced “vah-na”), are found on reef flats and shallow reef slopes, where they are often wedged into crevices in the coral framework.



Hawaiian Sea Urchins

Many people have stepped on and had sea urchin spines imbedded (broken off) inside their feet. They hurt like you couldn't imagine. Eventually they dissolve – but it can take months. These long spiny beasts are the scourge of surfers all over Hawaii.

I think we all know how dangerous **hurricanes and tsunamis** are so I'm not going to say more than the fact they both hit the Hawaiian Islands on a semi-regular basis.

I originally meant this article to be about only the ocean dangers but since I already mentioned motor vehicle crashes and hiking deaths, I will expand on these a little bit.

Motor Vehicle Crashes

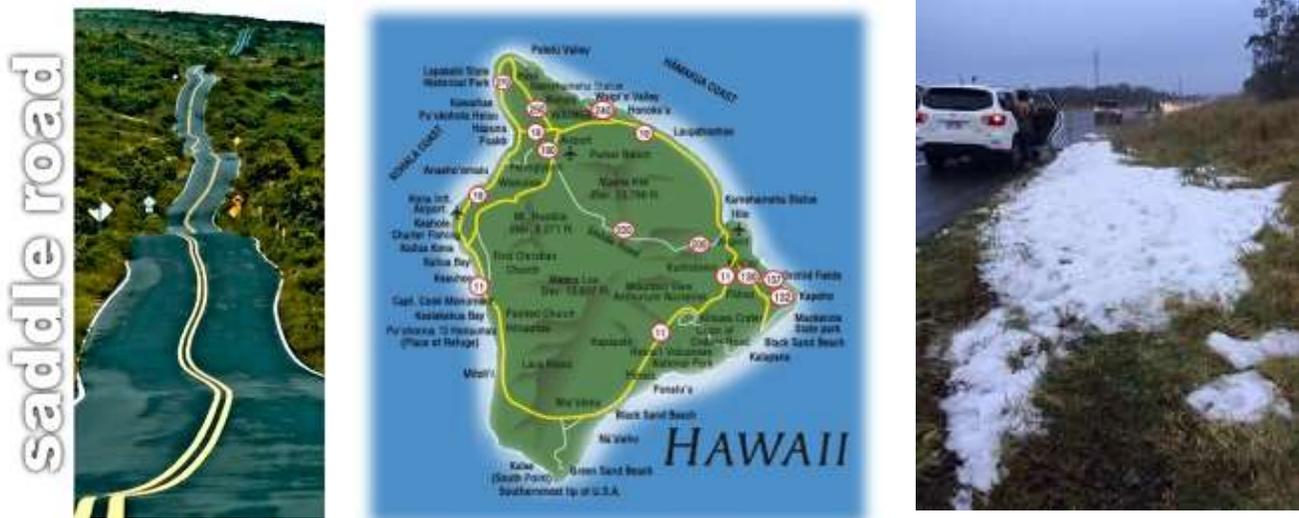
Take a Drive on the two Most Dangerous Roads in Hawaii... If You Dare!

Rental car companies tell you when you rent your car that you are not allowed to take it on these roads. Well, where do you think the first place these tourists are going to go for a scenic drive? You guessed it. Some of them don't make it back to the hotel.

SADDLE ROAD

Hawaii Route 200, also known as Saddle Road, traverses the Hawaii Island for 52.7 miles from downtown Hilo to its junction with Highway 190 near Waimea. Saddle Road reaches a maximum elevation of more than 6,600 feet and provides access to the volcano observatories that branch off the road. The highway received its nickname for being the “saddle” in between the Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea volcanoes.

The road is notoriously dangerous, and was featured by Conde Nast Traveler as being one of the “10 Scariest Highways for White-Knuckle Road Trips in the United States.” Most people who have taken this road agree with this designation, and here's why:



See map above – Saddle Road (Route 200) goes across the middle of the island. This road is anything but smooth – up and down with sharp turns and single lane in places. You can experience all types of weather from sun, rain, hail, snow, fog and vog.

In 1943, the United States Army built an access road for military vehicles in order to better defend the island in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Following the end of World War II, the Army gave jurisdiction to the Territory of Hawaii, and it became State Route 200. The territory, however, had little funds to maintain the road, and for several years, minimal maintenance was provided for the road.

The road is completely void of any gas stations, stores, or anywhere manned to get help. Thus, it is advised to make sure you have the number of an island tow company before you begin your journey. But be careful – because there are long portions of the road with no cell service, though call boxes have been placed along the highway.



You should never attempt to drive on this road at night. It is hard enough during the day. Besides that, Saddle Road is also considered to be haunted. Like Oahu’s “pork over the Pali story,” legend has it that if you carry pork over Saddle Road, your car will break down or you will experience something supernatural. But, if you are lucky enough to make it to the top, the views from Mauna Kea are very scenic.

KAHEKILI HIGHWAY

If you enjoyed your Saddle Road scenic drive, you need to fly over to Maui and take a drive on Kahekili Highway. This road is 10 times more dangerous and is considered to be the most deadly highway in America. Whoever named this road a highway must have had a great sense of humor. Kahekili Highway is a strip of one-lane paved road framed by rock on one side and sheer cliff drops on the other with a length of 20 miles

from Kapalua to Wailuku (See map below). It's a legendary road known for its snaking turns, narrow passages, and dangerous road conditions.



Kahekili Highway has humbled many egos. It's not for the sissies and shouldn't be attempted by novice drivers. Vans and SUVs are more difficult to navigate on this very narrow road, especially since it's just barely one lane wide but with two-way traffic. If it is raining or has been raining, skip this road due to mud and rock slides.

The road is named after the Great Chief Kahekili, who built houses from the skulls of his enemies.

There is little room for error on Kahekili Highway. It's normal for your palms to sweat just looking at those photos, imagine what it must be like to actually drive it. Don't do this drive in the dark. Start early enough so you'll reach your destination before the sun sets. Also, it's best to do this drive on a sunny day as rainfall makes the road slippery. The road isn't lit and many segments don't even have reflectors so if you do plan to do the route make sure to drive it during the daytime in nice weather conditions. It's more like a goat trail, especially around the village of Kahakuloa (between mile 14-15 and 10-12). It is mainly a narrow, curvy, cliff-hugging one-lane road without guard rails. If you hit oncoming traffic, you may be doing your traveling in reverse! There are occasional pullouts if see a car coming from the opposite direction.

I will pass on driving this road. I get nervous just backing out of my driveway!

HIKING



HAWAII'S DEADLY SECRET - Hawaii has a deadly secret that the Hawaii Visitors Bureau does not seem to want to disclose. Hiking and swimming in Hawaii take an alarming toll on life. On average, one visitor a week drowns in Hawaiian waters. But it's not just death by drowning. An appalling number of visitors also die while hiking. Hawaii Department of Health records find that there were 55 hiking related deaths from (2007-2016). 22 of those deaths occurred on the island of Oahu. In the same period, there were over 500 emergency room visits and hospitalizations. While these statistics are sobering, we can confidently continue to hike, knowing that most of these incidents could have been prevented.

As a rule, Hawaii hiking trails are safe. Outdoor enthusiasts experience a variety of challenging and beautiful trails while hiking and backpacking all over Hawaii and met a lot of interesting people along the way. There are different types of hikers - Some prefer interesting geological, or botanical characteristics, scenic vistas, or cooling waterfalls; others prefer challenging hikes with long mileage, difficult, vertical terrain, or narrow ridgelines. And then, there are those who prefer “famous” hikes with characteristics or reputations that make for good social media posts. Often these adventure-seekers aren’t always properly prepared for the challenges of the trail and find themselves in precarious, illegal, damaging, and sometimes deadly, situations.

The most common reasons for hiking fatalities are:

SLIPPING OFF A TRAIL OR CLIFF: Hawai’i has some of the highest rainfall totals in the world. Many trails are muddy and/or slippery. Other trails can be dry, but crumbly, or have tripping obstacles such as rocks and roots. Ridgeline trails, with sharp drop-offs on either side, leave zero room for error.

GRABBING A ROPE, AN OVERHEAD TREE ROOT OR VINE, OR A ROCK OUTCROPPING WHICH GIVES WAY: Unlike North American granite, Hawaiian rocks are basalt, i.e., volcanic in origin, and therefore brittle and crumbly. Hikers fall and die when they err in grabbing what appears to be a solid rock outcropping to hoist themselves, or vegetation which turns out to be loosely anchored.

HIKING ALONE AND NOT STAYING IN PLACE WHEN LOST: Numerous hikers have gone missing, never to be found again. By ignoring two fundamentals – never hike alone and stay put if you get lost – hikers have needlessly lost their lives.

USING NON-APPROVED TRAILS or GOING OFF A TRAIL: The State of Hawai’i maintains numerous safe hiking trails. O’ahu alone has 43 state-managed trails. The problem is that some hikers either go off the approved trail (then got lost, fall and die) or they hike popular, but non-approved, trails.

FLASH-FLOODING: This is a significant problem on Kaua’i (the wettest spot in the world), Maui and the Big Island.

LAVA FIELDS AND STEAM VENTS: Unique to the Big Island (the only Hawaiian island with active volcanoes), a handful of hikers have perished because of asphyxiation from the toxic volcanic gasses or fatal scalding (slipping into a steam vent or falling into a lava pool or lava stream).

EXPOSURE: A small number of fatalities have occurred on the Big Island – either in the vast lava fields or in the upper reaches of Mauna Kea or Mauna Loa – when a

hiker, after several days of being lost, finally expires because of exposure and/or dehydration.

Hawaii's most dangerous hiking trails



Kalalau Trail

The Kalalau Trail is known throughout the world as a beautiful, vast, remote, difficult, and dangerous. Stretching 11 miles along the coast of Kauai, the Kalalau Trail takes most hikers two days to make the round trip. However, some expert hikers are able to complete the entire trail in just one day.

Listed as one of the most dangerous hikes in the entire world, visitors are asked to acquire permits to camp in the Kalalau Valley at rate of \$20 per person per day. Access is controlled in order to maintain conservation.



Rising water levels, narrow trails, heavy rains, mudslides, and falling rock all contribute to the obvious risk of injury or death along the trail. But for those brave enough to hike the Kalalau Trail, there will be enough memories made to last a lifetime and stories to tell each night at camp. Not to mention, there are numerous spine-tingling photo opportunities just around the corner.

Here are a few more dangerous hiking trails



Olomana 3-Peaks Trail on Oahu



Lahaina Pali Trail on Maui



**Pu'u Manamana Trail
(Most dangerous hike on Oahu)**



**Haiku Stairs
(Stairway to Heaven)**

OTHER ACTIVITIES THAT'S KILLING HAWAII'S TOURISTS

Okay, I know this article is running a little long but there are a lot of different ways our visiting tourists are dying. Let's see now, there were 48 tourists who were not killed while participating in ocean activities, driving around the islands, or hiking in the mountains. How in the world did these people die?



Murder

So far in 2017 (October) there has been 4 murders in Waikiki to go along with 24 sex crimes, 71 robberies, 339 assaults, 102 burglaries, 1,787 thefts and 209 unauthorized entries into a motor vehicle. Most of these crimes were committed by Waikiki homeless street kids.

Suicide

A police news release said that the woman (a Japanese tourist) was reportedly emotionally distraught before she jumped. The Nuuanu Pali Lookout on the island of Oahu is the favorite suicide leap in Hawaii, like the Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco. It's on a sheer cliff that plunges hundreds of feet to a rocky shelf. Jumpers from all over the world show up with disturbing regularity to take the plunge.



Sun Poisoning

If you spend too much time in the sun you are at risk for getting sun poisoning. Within 15 minutes of being outside during the day your skin can start to burn, over longer periods of time extensive damage can take place. Sun poisoning is literally an allergy to the sun, which causes your body to react in a number of different ways. In most cases, sun poisoning only requires shade, water, and rest. However, in other instances, sun poisoning can be incredibly dangerous and requires immediate urgent medical attention. Many people die from sun poisoning every year.

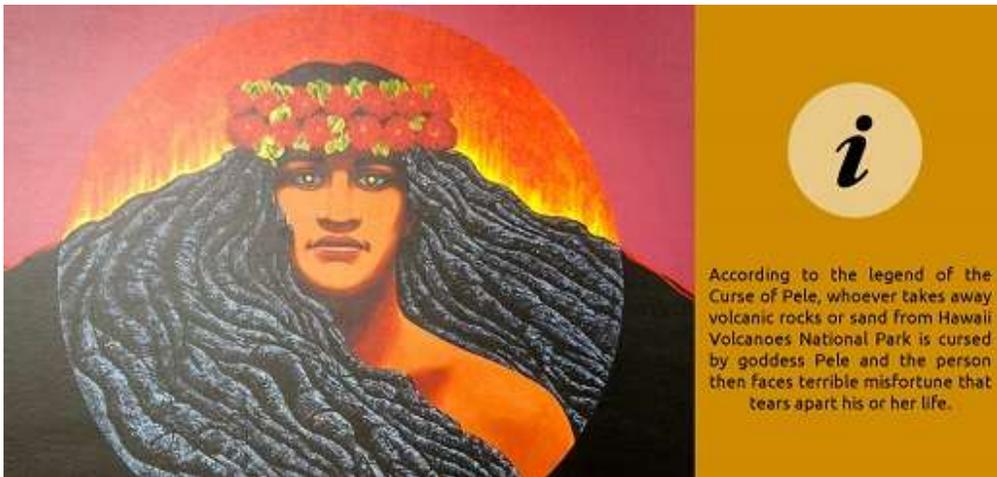
Vog is a form of air pollution that results when sulfur dioxide and other gases and particles emitted by an erupting volcano react with oxygen and moisture in the presence of sunlight. The word comes from "volcanic", "smog", and "fog". The term is common in Hawaii where the Kilauea volcano has been erupting continuously since January 3, 1983.

Vog contains chemicals that can cause headaches, watery eyes, sore throat, breathing difficulties (including inducing asthma attacks), and flu-like symptoms. It can be fatal for people with some respiratory conditions.



When there are south (or Kona) winds, the vog covers the entire state of Hawaii including Honolulu shown above

Pele's Curse



Hawaiian legend has it that Pele, goddess of fire and volcanoes, is so angered when the rocks (which she sees as her children) are taken from her that she exacts a terrible revenge on the thief. She is especially protective of volcanic rock and sand, two items tourists almost unthinkingly pocket as mementos of their vacations. After all, who would miss a few rocks or a little black sand?

Pele, apparently. Hawaii Volcanoes National Park and far too many hotels to name receive a never-ending stream of packages containing sand and rocks from guilty-minded vacationers who are intent upon reversing their sudden downpours of bad luck. Many of these returns are accompanied by notes begging forgiveness of the goddess or detailing litanies of calamities that have befallen these casual purloiners.



Volcanic Lava Rocks are Everywhere



Unlucky Visitor Sends Rocks Back

Pele's supposed curse is not a mild-mannered one. Those allegedly afflicted by it don't misplace their car keys or develop runs in their stockings — their bad luck is of the grievous variety. Jobs are lost. Houses burn down. Sudden and devastating illness strikes loved ones. Marriages break apart. Family and friends die. Pets die. You die.

Only the return of the stolen items appeases her wrath.



Well, there you have it. I think you will agree that there are a lot of fun and exciting things to do in the Hawaiian Islands. But, when you do visit Hawaii, enjoy the great beaches and ocean activities but be a little careful. Too many tourists are dying here in the islands!

Bigdrifter44@gmail.com

Bigdrifter.com