

TRIP TO HAWAII & JAPAN 2002

1 PEARL HARBOR REVISITED

The trip this year was, as the title says, to Hawaii and Japan. Originally, I had thought of going to Spain, but by the time I got round to finding out about tickets, I couldn't get any tickets on Singapore Airlines. I wanted that airline as it is a member of Star Alliance and so I would get air points. Also, the alternative airlines were not so good and also had many more intermediate stops or were much more expensive. Then I thought about going to Guam but ended up with Hawaii. As I was travelling on Japan Airlines, I decided to spend a few days in Tokyo on the way back. So, I had about 9 days in Hawaii and 4 days in Tokyo. Took just one small backpack and even with this, I took more clothes than I actually needed. As it was summer, I did not need any warm clothes. The biggest item in the backpack was the sandals. I travelled in running shoes but most of the time was spent in sandals.

The 'plane left Hong Kong for Osaka, Japan about 3 p.m. on Sunday, September 8th with a connecting flight on to Honolulu. Took about 3½ hours to Osaka. I have not been to the Osaka airport before and actually chose a connecting flight to there rather than to Tokyo just to see the terminal building. The airport is built on an artificial island. Unfortunately, according to a TV documentary I saw some time ago, it is slowly sinking into the sea. The terminal building is built on huge jacks so that as the airport sinks, it can be jacked up to keep it even! Couldn't see much of the airport itself as it was dark on arriving.

After a 3-hour wait, left for Honolulu. Had an empty seat next to me so was able to stretch out a bit and actually get some rest. Another interesting feature was a camera somewhere under the 'plane with the view shown on a screen. This was not much use at take off because of the darkness, but it was interesting when landing at Honolulu; could see the 'plane descending and touching down on the runway. The flight from Osaka to Honolulu lasted 7 – 8 hours landing about 11 a.m. At the immigration counter, I had to fill in another form as the wrong one had been given to me on the 'plane. Apparently they have one form for those with visas and another for those who, like me, do not need visas. Honolulu is the capital of the state of Hawaii and is situated on the island on Oahu, which is one of the 8 main islands making up the Hawaiian chain of islands.

The package included not only the air tickets but also 2 nights accommodation in Honolulu and a 'free' transfer from the airport to the hotel in Waikiki. Turned out that there was a US\$2 'service charge' for the trip. This unexpected charge annoyed me as it is only \$1.50 on the public bus, which stops only about 100 metres from the hotel!

After checking in, which was very quick, I went for a stroll down to the beaches which were only 4 or 5 minutes away. Quite crowded. There were a large number of young people

from Japan there. Many must come to Honolulu for their holidays. And, of course, there are many people of Japanese ancestry living in Hawaii. Then set off looking for an information centre. All I managed to find were a couple of small kiosks on the footpath, one of which was closed. Got little useful information about what to see and do. The guy in the kiosk said that there is a tourist information centre – hidden away on the 5th of a nearby building but that it was closed as it was a Sunday! (This is in contrast to most other places I have been too where it is possible to get loads of information at airports, railway stations and other places.)



Model of a Japanese aircraft carrier

Fortunately, there were leaflets and booklets in roadside boxes which were quite useful. In the evening, I went for a walk and ended up at a beach park where there was a concert being shown on a large screen in connection with the September 11th attacks of last year.



View of turret of USS Arizona from the memorial

The hotel room was rather noisy as it was on a lower floor overlooking a busy road. Up early at 6:30 a.m. the next morning for a ‘continental’ breakfast alongside the hotel pool. Nothing great – just orange juice, toast and buns though you were allowed to eat as much as you wanted. Noticed a large number of pigeons around. Apparently these were imported and have become a pest and are threatening the existence of many of the indigenous birds. After breakfast, left on a tour to the Arizona Memorial, which was included in the package. Left early to avoid the long queues that build up later in the morning. Although I have been to the memorial before, it was good to see it again. On entering, there is an open museum about the attack on Pearl Harbor on July 7th, 1941. Then there is a movie in a theatre about the events of that day. Interesting. The people exit the theatre and take a ferry for the short ride across to the Arizona memorial. (The number of people the ferry can take is controlled and is equal to the number the theatre can hold.)



Arizona memorial (centre)
USS Missouri (left)

The purpose of the Japanese attack was to destroy the US fleet before it could be used to attack them. In the harbour at the time was a whole row of battleships many of which were destroyed. The USS Arizona exploded and capsized when its forward magazine was hit with only a few of the 1200 men on board surviving. However, the Japanese did not get the US aircraft carriers as unbeknown to them, were out on exercises. These carriers were decisive in the ‘Battle of Midway’ which took place some months later. The memorial is built across the sunken hull of the Arizona. The visit lasts about 15 minutes, after which the ferry takes people back again.



USS Missouri

2 THE KODAK SHOW

The visit to the Arizona memorial was followed by a tour around parts of Honolulu city. The bus went up a hill called the Punchbowl which is military cemetery. The US-Japanese crew member who perished in the Challenger space shuttle disaster is buried here. From there, we were taken down to the business part of the city look at a monument to King Kamehaha I. He was the chief, who, by military conquest, unified the different tribes of the Hawaiian Islands round about 1800, not that long after the visit there by Captain Cook in 1779 (when he was also killed). Anyway, Kamehaha made himself king. He was followed by four other Kamehaha's and several other monarchs. The monarchy period in Hawaii lasted throughout the 19th Century until they were overthrown non-violently by a group of American businessmen who wanted Hawaii to become a US territory, which after a while, did so. King Kamehaha I was also a cannibal who celebrated his victories with human sacrifices. This practice stopped with Kamehaha II who was persuaded by the early missionaries to give up the practice. The tour also included a visit to a wholesale jewellery place but of course, I did not buy anything – just watched some others buying a few things and a wife who wanted to buy something expensive being scolded by her husband!

In the afternoon, I visited the city Visitor's Center to find some accommodation for the next week once the two days of the package hotel ended. Talk about being unhelpful! On enquiring about accommodation, the lady there told me there was a booklet on a shelf – she would not even get up to get it for me. And then she would not help me at all – just said to look at the book and then try to find accommodation myself! Not like other countries, where they actually telephone and fix up accommodation for visitors. So I had to sit – outside the office – and look through the booklet. I spent the rest of the afternoon walking around looking at possible places. Was also able to actually look at the rooms in the places too. Eventually got a place also in Waikiki, which was not too expensive and gave a lower rate for a week. It also had a kitchenette which was helpful in being able to eat a bit more cheaply. The only disadvantage with the place, which I found out later, was that at about 6 a.m. every morning, a very noisy rubbish truck would go up and down the street. The hotel rooms did not have windows thick enough to keep the noise out. In looking for a place, I walked from one end of Waikiki to the other and got to know it quite well.

In the evening, walked around the “International Market Place.” A large, permanent open market on the site of a former royal residence. Bought some food at a Chinese shop. Then watched an open-air performance Polynesian cultural show. This included songs and dances from Tahiti and New Zealand. For the NZ part, the group was dressed in red clothes!

After breakfast the next morning, checked out and then walked around the corner to the new hotel. Then walked up to a park where, for about 65 years, there has been a free 1-hour Hawaiian cultural show sponsored for most of those years by Kodak. They stopped doing this a few years ago and the show was taken over by a local organisation. But lack of funds means that this is probably the last year the show will be held. A pity really as the dancing and

singing is very good. They also get audience participation and explain the actions in the Hula. Leonie has been to the show but probably doesn't remember very much as she was just 1 year old at the time! Look at the second photograph. The elderly lady has been with the show from its inception!

After the show, I walked back to town to a bank to exchange some money. Found a place with a machine that would exchange paper money from selected countries. As if would exchange UK pounds, I feed the machine with the pound notes I had. It would accept some but not others (an older style of note I think) and eventually spat out all the notes over the floor. Not a particularly nice machine! So I had to get them changed the conventional way (except that communication with the teller was by 2-way TV with the money being transferred via vacuum pipes.

Later I went for the first swim. Disappointing as that part of the beach the water was very shallow and instead of sand it was just hard, sharp lava rock. Too shallow for swimming. There is a channel that can take you further out to deeper water but I did not know that. In fact, most of the beaches at Waikiki are terrible for swimming! One has to go to the opposite/Northern side of the island for good beaches. But the beaches at Waikiki are good for gentle surfing (though again for the spectacular surfing with the giant waves, the other side of the island is again used).

The fourth day in Honolulu was September 11th – the anniversary of the New World Trade Center attack. I had though it might have been a holiday, but it was still a working day. In the morning I walked to the dominant feature of one end of Waikiki – Diamond Head, former millions of years ago as the result of a volcanic eruption. It was given that name as early European explorers though that bright colourless crystals found there were diamonds. The crater is slightly higher at one end because the prevailing wind carried more the rock and ash to that end. Climbed to the rim of the crater (761 feet). Much better track now than the last time there. Good view from the top.



Dancing at the Hawaiian Cultural show



Being photographed with some of the cast after the show

3 The King's Guard



A panoramic view of Honolulu from the rim of the Diamond Head crater. Waikiki on left.

From Diamond Head, walked back to Waikiki. Bought a four-day bus pass. Honolulu has a good bus system, apparently the best in the US. Then along to the 'King's Village.' This is a shopping centre built on the site of a former king's palace. They have a drill team called the "King's Guard" who, every day at 6 p.m. put on a drill display and lower the Hawaiian flag. The drill team is one of the best in the US and has won many competitions. All the team members hold regular jobs. For the drill, they have rifles that would have been used last century, except that the bolts have been removed.

The next morning began using the bus pass by travelling to the middle of the island where there is a large pineapple plantation owned by the Dole company. When we were in Honolulu 20 years ago, May and Larry Lee took us to the Dole Canning factory for a visit which was free and you could have as much pineapple juice as you wanted to drink. I thought that this factory was at the plantation. But no, the factory was in the city but closed down a few years ago. Pineapples are no longer canned in Hawaii – too expensive. A lot still grown there (as the volcanic soil is very suitable for growing pineapples and sugar cane but not many other crops). I don't know where the pineapples are sent for canning. Anyway, decided against the plantation tour; \$20 seemed a bit steep for a ride around the pineapple fields!



The King's Guard – lowering the flag

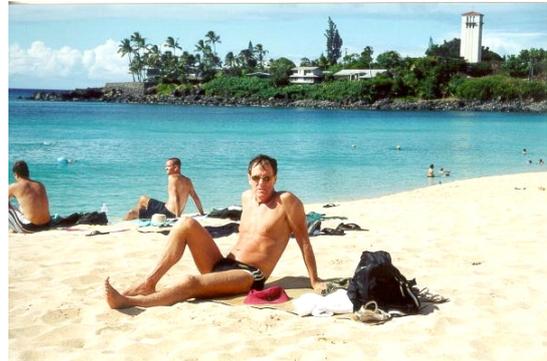


The King's Guard – drill display

So, took another bus to the beaches on the North Shore. Got off at one called Sunset Beach. Could have gone further to another called Turtle Beach where they were filming for "Baywatch Hawaii" but decided I was not interested in that. Didn't have my swimsuit so just sat on the beach and ate the sandwiches I had made before leaving. The sea was quite calm. Quite different in winter when the waves are huge and surfers come from all over the world to surf. Because the waves are so dangerous, the beaches are closed to the public and there

are no life guards on duty in the winter as there are in summer. (Apparently Hawaii *does* have a winter; temperatures get down to about 10⁰C, or so a guy in the bus told me.) Took another bus back to Honolulu. I went for an early evening swim at Waikiki and then watched the final part of a cultural show on the beach.

The next morning I set off on what I thought was a round the island bus (opposite direction to the route the day before). Turned out it only circled the southern half of the island; realised that when the bus was nearly back in Honolulu. So, got off the bus and crossed the road to wait for the bus that circled the northern part of the island (the same route as yesterday but going in the opposite



Me at Waimea Beach

direction). Was intending to get off at points of interest but there was nothing that interested me that much and ended up at Waimea beach, which is close to Sunset beach but much nicer. Before getting there, passed a Polynesian Cultural Center, the Brigham Young University (a Mormon university) and Turtle beach. Spent about 3 hours on the beach sunbathing and swimming. The water is so clear and good for swimming. Then took the same route back as the day before, except that this time had to change buses which added a lot to the travel time.

The next day (a Saturday) there was a big parade as part of a week-long Hawaiian festival. Took about an hour to pass. A lot of the parade consisted of marching bands, most of them from schools. There was also a band from the Marines. Not many floats, but those that they did have were



Parade – US Marines band



Parade – a float



Parade – poop scoopers



Parade – a poop 'float'

very attractive. Quite a lot of horses in the parade too. As this results in a lot of 'poop', there are 'poop scoopers' in the parade and many of these had quite attractive poop containers – often like mini floats. The parade also included two busloads of contestants for the finals of the 'Mrs USA' finals as well as the current title of the title.

In the afternoon, took a bus to a waterfall. Little water though! Met a chap who had just graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

4 THE BUG STRIKES!

On the last day of the four-day bus pass, went to another beach for about 3 hours. Quite a stiff breeze, which reminded me of the breezes you get at Christchurch beaches. Rested on the beach most of the time then went for a short swim. This is not a surfing beach, but because of the wind, there was a lot of para-baording. (Not sure if this is the correct term, but it involves the use of a parachute to pull a person on a board through the water.) Interesting watching them.



Kailua beach & para-boarding

Even when the parachutes go into the water, they are able to get them into the air again. And, amazingly, with all the people involved, none of the parachutes even got tangled.

Returned to Honolulu early afternoon, and as it was very hot, actually went for another swim. Much calmer and good for swimming. Then by bus to have a look at Chinatown. Not very interesting and also quite dirty.

Early the next day, went on a free guided walking tour around a part of Waikiki. Lasted nearly 3 hours and mainly about the botany of the area! Learnt that Waikiki was once a collection of large fishponds then later used by Chinese for growing rice and raising ducks! As a result the whole area became a stinking, swampy area. Then the whole area was filled in and



US & Japanese WW II tanks



Hotel Prince Edward Honolulu

eventually became

the tourist area it is today. Stayed on the nearby beach for a couple of hours and had the last of my 6 swims!

Following this, I intended to look through the nearby Army Museum, but because it was a Monday, the museum was closed! Had to settle with looking at a couple of WW II tanks – one US and the other Japanese – outside the museum.

The next day was the flight to Tokyo for a 4-night visit. Took the local bus which goes to the airport. Takes about an hour. Check-in very quick and even the security check did not take too long. A 7½ flight to Tokyo. On arrival, the plane parked on the tarmac rather than at a terminal gate, so had to take a bus ride around the airport to the terminal. Immigration check for foreigners *very* slow (same as the last time there in 1999) with only 2 officials for the foreigners queue (compared with about 9 or 10 for the locals queue). The immigration form required the name of a hotel, but as I did not have one, just made one up! After immigration, went to the tourist information counter and got accommodation at a Japanese style inn. (Pointed out the need to fill in accommodation on the immigration card and asked

her what they did when thousands of people arrived for the world cup without accommodation. Also asked why they needed an accommodation counter id people are supposed to have pre-booked accommodation. She didn't know!)

Took the cheaper, local train into Tokyo, which is actually faster than the tourist express train! The hotel was only a 2-minute walk from the station. Arrived there at about 8 p.m. Walked around for a while and bought a loaf of raisin bread to eat. Still getting used again to the very high prices for things in Japan. In the hotel, the noise from the trains was not too bad though on the first night, I did get up and put in ear-plugs (these are now standard equipment when I go on holiday!)

The next morning, walked around the commercial side of the station. Had brunch at a very small stand-up restaurant (see picture). Not cheap either! Later, went for a walk around the more residential side of the station. Very interesting with narrow streets, shops, a Japanese cemetery and quite a large number of temples. In the early evening, dinner consisted of more raisin bread and bananas! Then took a bath. Not the typical large Japanese-style bath though. This one was a small cube with sides of about 1 metre! OK though. Breathing became rather difficult later and had to take several puffs to control it.



Small 'stand-up' restaurant

The next day, took a train to Tokyo Central station. Walked around the Imperial Palace. Part of the palace gardens is open to the public but on this day, they were closed. Walked past the Diet (parliament buildings) and down to a park where a lunchtime concert by the Tokyo Fire Department bands was in progress. Sat down and for the rest of the performance. Not the best band in the world, but still very enjoyable. After the concert, bought an ice-cream from a hawker. Big mistake! I think it was the cause of severe tummy pains I got a couple of hours later while walking along the Ginza. Luckily, managed to find a toilet in a department store! Didn't need to ask for directions, as they had "Toilet for men" signs printed along the floor. Then I walked to the railway station and returned to the hotel where I immediately went to bed and slept for a couple of hours. In the early evening, went out and had something to eat. Then started to get severe pain again. Made it back to the hotel but unfortunately made a bit of a mess on the toilet seat!! Spent some time cleaning it up!



Lunchtime music in the open-air, Tokyo

5 AN OPEN-DAY VISIT

Had a good sleep that night following the diarrhoea. The next day had some bread rolls in the room for breakfast. Then set off – minus the map of Tokyo which I had left on the bed. I managed to pick up another later on. Got a one-day rail pass and went first to a museum where they have recreated a Tokyo street of the pre-WWII era. Very interesting.

Then down to the Imperial Palace for a walk around the gardens that I had missed out on the previous day. Very nice, with open areas, wild areas and Japanese-type gardens. Signs on walls told of some of the history of the area. Felt rather weak though because of the previous day's tummy trouble. Then back to Tokyo station for a lunch in a small restaurant followed by a train ride to an electronic city where they have



Part of the Imperial Palace gardens

the very latest gadgets on sale. The area is rather like Mongkok in Hong Kong. While looking in one shop, I had one foot on a cardboard box placed in the aisle in order to look at something on a shelf. Well, a guy came along and scolded me, in Japanese, and told me to take my foot off the box! A helpful shop assistant would have moved the boxes, but not him! So I scolded him (in English) and showed him what he should have done by moving the box myself!

Then off to a Toyota Company exhibition building in another part of Tokyo. On arrival at the station, briefly watched an open-air cultural show that was in progress. Bought a sweet bread bun to eat and headed off for the building; seemed to be the only one going in that direction, with thousands heading the other way, for the festival I suppose. Eventually found the building and looked around until it closed at 7 p.m. Many new models of cars and other vehicles on display. Also, had displays related to the Toyota Formula-1 racing team. There were also free video car races. Tried one but it was frustrating as I was always crashing; it didn't feel anything like really sitting in a car and driving.

The next day was the last. After a breakfast of raisin buns – again – checked out and left the bags at the hotel. Spent the morning walking around the district. There was a Japanese festival on later that day in which they were inviting foreign visitors to participate. This would have involved helping to carry portable shrines in a procession. Ran into some children who were carrying one such shrine around some streets. I guess they would also



Shop and house in
the Tokyo Street Museum

have been part of the big procession in the afternoon. Bought some potato salad which turned out to be curried! Along the road back towards the hotel, came across an ‘open day’ at a secondary school. Decided to go in a have a look around. Very interesting and spent quite a lot of time there. A Japanese couple, who spoke English very well, told me that the school is one of the top private secondary schools in the country. You wouldn’t think so by looking at the building and facilities. But it is evident that they do have some very bright students. Watched a juggling display and stuck my head into a room only to find out it was actually a very noisy disco! In a display by some sort of ancient culture club, a boy carved a character for me and made a letter chop. A good souvenir. I also looked in the Chemistry, Physics and Biology laboratories. In the Chemist laboratory, a student was demonstrating the ‘thermite’ reaction.



A picture of a *modern* Japanese temple – not sure if it is Shinto or Buddhist. Most of the temples one sees are old ones.

After the school visit, had to hurry back to the hotel to pick up the stuff and head for the airport. Took a limited express from the nearby railway station at about 2 p.m. Took about 70 minutes to get to the airport and actually arrived in plenty of time. A quick check-in, as I had just carry-on baggage, and the security and immigration processing was quite fast. Just before takeoff, it started to rain very hard – the first rain of the trip! An uneventful trip back to Hong Kong.

THE END