

Paradise...

5,000 miles and 60 degrees away

The setting sun at dusk and a gentle island breeze outline the horizon of waving sugarcane that quickly dispels winter tourist cares as the 80-degree temperatures of Hawaii breathe a welcome.



When 101 travelers headed for Hawaii on the recent Observer & Eccentric tour, reporter-photographer Lynn Orr went along. She made the side trips, tried the beaches, ate native dishes and studied historic landmarks, taking notes and pictures as she went. Here is her first report on the adventure—a day-by-day journal.

THURSDAY, Nov. 16: The first "Aloha" to be repeated numerous times in the next two weeks, greets our ears before we leave in the 747 bound for Honolulu.

"The Buddy Holly Story" on the mini movie screen helps to pass a tedious time for some, while a lot of action at the bar works its liquid charms. Travel anxieties apparent, though, witnessed by the long lines at the too few lavatories and the studious attention paid the flight attendants' survival routine.

Louise Lessor, a 70-year-old Plymouth Township resident, making her maiden voyage takes it all in stride, however. After a 7½ hour flight and applause for the pilot when we land smoothly, we're welcomed with slightly wilted leis and a glorious warm sun that's the best Aloha yet.

We meet Dennis, our protector and tour guide to the exotic, whose looks make many of Hawaii's other scenic sites anti-climatic. Then it's on to our first of many buses as we make our way through the industrial section of Honolulu to the Hilton Hawaiian Village. The palm trees appear strangely out of place next to warehouses, but Waikiki beckons with acres of bouganvillea.

Hurray! A sliver of ocean glints as we keep to tradition and check out the balcony where we're rewarded with our first wall of salty air.

FRIDAY, Nov. 17: At the 9:30 a.m. briefing, "Hawaii Five-O" drop-out Al Harrington cautions the Michigan arrivals to slow down. "Just hang loose" is the axiom here. A trip to the garment factory supplies the necessities. Within hours, suits, ties and girdles are abandoned for neon orange and purple matching muumuu and shirts. Are these the same people who scorned matching Madras on teenage lovebirds in the '60s?

"Smile, 'cause you're not going home till the plane leaves," Harrington had warned.

First disappointment. A two-hour afternoon bus ride around the city nets a mediocre guide for those on the second bus. "Here's your McDonald's, here's your Kentucky Fried Chicken," he tells the riders eager to hear about the exploits of King Kamehameha and his 23 wives.

We whisk by the only palace on American soil with barely enough time to snap a picture.

Those on the first bus had a great guide, we hear later. Punchbowl Crater, with its awesome vista of acres of graves and the lookout at the crater rim of Honolulu, is worth the trip. The first Polynesian dinner-dance show that night brings cheers.

SATURDAY, Nov. 18: First trip to the beach. Yes, these are Mai-tais being sipped around the nearby pools. Snug faces receive the rumor that the first snow fell at home.



With pastels and sketchbook in hand, Quinn Sutton of Birmingham attempts to capture on paper the white sand beach of Maui and the misty outlines of Molokai, a neighboring island.

A trip to the International Market Place catches a woman in bikini and hair curlers crossing the main drag in Waikiki, while a walk down Kuhio verifies Hawaii's sewer problems. Shopping bags bulge as our people drift back to the hotel at dusk. It's still a surprise when the sun goes down in 80 degree weather.

At the Polynesia show that evening, Kimberly Brewer of Plymouth Township, traveling with her grandmother, celebrates her 17th birthday and nearly gets carried away by two burly islanders. Vacation settles in.

SUNDAY, Nov. 19: Up early for the Pearl Harbor cruise. The Royal Prince carries many of us and a lot of Japanese tourists, cameras on everyone, to the military port.

Narration is in both English and Japanese. An English-speaking tour guide confirms that the story is slightly different for the Japanese on board.

"Not quite so patriotic," she says. Beneath the white concrete memorial, the clear water barely covers the sunken USS Arizona, which sank in five minutes with more than 1,000 men, representing 49 states, on board. Pictures of the smoke-filled harbor 37 years ago and the narrator's quiet voice creates a hush as cameras click and a few eyes moisten.

Expecting a zealously patriotic trip, we are surprised by the quiet dignity of the day.

That evening a couple of us split for a cheap meal at Pancho Goldstein's "greatest Mexican restaurant in Hawaii." It's the only place that fails to serve a wedge of pineapple in the iced tea.

MONDAY, Nov. 20: As many opt for the day-long trip to the Polynesian Cultural Center, operated by the Mormon Church, we get a rental car for a sea-Dahu-for-yourself notion. A bonanza when we stop for lunch at the Waoli Tea Room in the lush Mauna Valley.

At the nearby chapel, a 10-minute mist of rain holds Japanese newlyweds in the doorway. While marriage in Japan is a matter of signing papers, the ceremony is expensive. Thousands of couples a year, we're told, choose a wedding-honeymoon in Hawaii as an alternative. Hibiscus spotted vegetation and the quaint chapel are thrown into the bargain.

A trip to the outer suburbs locates government rehabilitation signs and crowded neighborhoods. Expensive, fertile land is reserved for pineapples and sugar cane, not people. A Honolulu traffic jam on return makes us feel right at home.

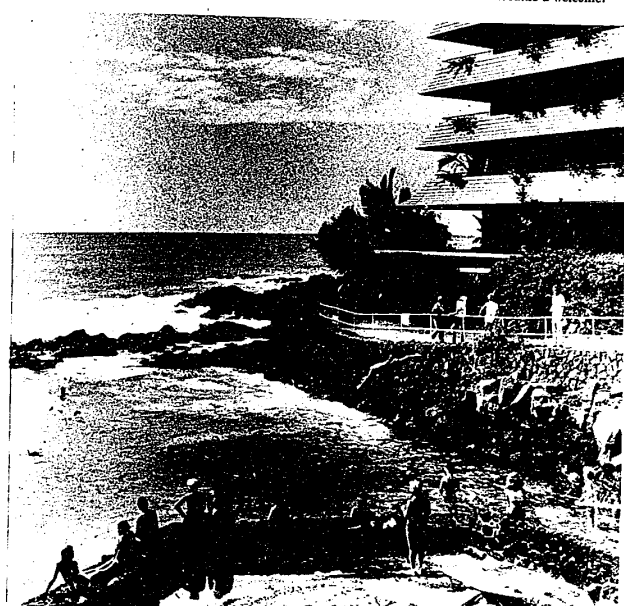
TUESDAY, Nov. 21: One last coffee on the balcony before a 10 a.m. departure to Kauai, the "Garden Isle" and the oldest in the chain. Jean Scarlett, a 31-year Livonia resident, celebrates her birthday on the Waialae river tour upon arrival after a 20-minute flight. The boat briefly stops for a visit to the enchanting Fern Grotto, where married couples are remarried Hawaiian-style to the graceful strains of the Hawaiian Wedding Song.

Any accommodation complainers are silenced by the arrival at the Coco Palms Resort. Early Zsa Zsa Gabor, the hotel was the setting for Liza Hayworth's "Sadie Thompson" and retains its movie star allure.

Tony and Pat Urbatz of Livonia end up in the honey-moon suite, which keeps Tony up all night wondering when they'll discover the error. No problem. The Urbatzes retain the 25x27 foot room with 17 windows overlooking two pools, an lagoon, and the largest coconut grove on the island. They never used the kitchenette or phone in the commodore, but staved off a lot of teasing from friends about the gigantic bed flanked by gold-embossed smoked glass and overhanging green glass chandelier. The significance of the preserved lei in a glass curio cabinet remains a mystery.

WEDNESDAY, Nov. 22: A trip across the road to the beach catches a wild surf today. Swimming is cautioned here—too many rip tides and undertows keep many of us near the pools, replete with mini waterfalls of their own.

Darrell and Carol Underwood of Southfield make a trip to the Slippery Slide, built for the movie "South Pacific," but forego the slide itself, surrounded by danger signs. The 40-foot waterfall drop at the end of the slide backs all but intrepid troupers.



Although diving and jumping are taboo, one guest at the Kona Hilton on the "Big Island" of Hawaii chose to break the rules in favor of a splash into the tidal pool.

After a miniature tree lizard drops from the light onto the phone in one room (thankfully the shrieks fail to draw attention), we rush to catch the torch-lighting ceremony on the grounds of the resort.

With a Missionary's Downfall (rum and creme de menthe guaranteed to dispel lizardy fears) on the table and the ceiling fans lazily spinning overhead in the open-air cocktail lounge, we watch and listen as the drum beats. Blowing of the conch shell hushes the audience.

THURSDAY, Nov. 23: After getting tossed in the salty surf all afternoon, we make our way over the river and through the woods to Paradise Pacifica. Poi (mashed taro root) and susutani (raw fish) are ignored by many in favor of some rather dry turkey amid the buffet display. A mosquito bite on Thanksgiving Day is the result for many at the outdoor dance extravaganza following dinner. The Philippine fan dance and traditional stick dance sparkle in the jungle setting, while some of the routines recall studio recitals. After all, this isn't Broadway, we rationalize.

FRIDAY, Nov. 24: Going through security to leave for Maui, one member of our tour turns as red as the poinsettias gracing the highways when the guard discovers a fistful of Coco Palms sterling silver in her handbag. Since security, rather than theft, is the purpose, she gets through unscathed though mortified.

SATURDAY, Nov. 25: Shopping addicts add to their boodle at the old whaling port of Lahaina, now jammed with tourist traps.

The scenic lovers split for Haleakala Crater, large enough to hold the island of Manhattan, and a breath-absorbing visit at 10,000 feet elevation. The "House of the Sun" fills yet more celluloid.

SUNDAY, Nov. 26: The all-day trip to the other side of the island and Hana, the village Charles Lindbergh called home at the end of his life, promises waterfalls and jungles, rather than the white sand beaches of Lahaina. The harrowing, hairpin turns on the bumpy road are worth the trip. So says tour member Dick Pyle of Washington DC, and we follow for a glimpse of "the closest thing to Paradise I've ever seen." Dick is the son-in-law of Stanley and Helen Bankett of Redford Township, other members of the party.

MONDAY, Nov. 27: With four days left, vacationers pick up the pace at Kona, the resort area of Hawaii, "The Big Island." A bus trip from the airport through lava-encrusted terrain surprises the tour members who have come to expect flowering vegetation everywhere. Built on the rocks next to the ocean, the Kona Hilton's flower-bedecked balconies are a welcome sight as we lunch while the waves crash on the rocks a few feet below.

A catamaran dinner cruise at dusk along the coast begins with another entertainment round of "Tiny Bubbles" as servers continuously fill glasses from the open bar. Crowded on the 65-foot vessel, we roll with the rock of the boat, as a few merry souls brave the pitching dance floor for an easier-said-than-done rumba.

Navigating the narrow catwalk back onto shore, however, some found the rumba followed without the music.

TUESDAY, Nov. 28: Another early rise for another Kona coast cruise to Kealahou Bay, where the boat anchors to allow swimmers in the waters where Captain James Cook first landed. Snorkeling equipment provides a first-hand view of sea life at the base of the bluffs which prevent land access to the historic bay.

Two young islanders, Peter and Richard, demonstrate the ancient (and dying, they inform us) art of coconut palm weaving. We entertain the sneaking suspicion that the Farmington Community Center may latch on to this one.

Following an afternoon in the hotel's tidal pool, where high surf crashes over the black lava rocks, nearly everyone prepares for the Hilton luau and the splendid roast pig, cooked underground beneath coconut fronds in an imu (earth oven lined with hot rocks).

WEDNESDAY, Nov. 29: The last tour, circling the island, takes in Volcano National Park, the site of Hawaii's most recent eruptions (September, 1977), the black sand beaches where lava is pounded into fine grains by the surf, and a fabulous orchid nursery.

Newlyweds Carole and Mike Conklin of Garden City discover that the 420-foot drop of Akaka Falls one-ups Niagara in much the same way Hawaiian coconut cream pie does Big Boy's.

THURSDAY, Nov. 30: With more luggage and less cash, departure is imminent. One woman is hauling a bagful of Maui potato chips as the plane departs at 5:30 p.m. with a scheduled arrival in Detroit for 9:30 a.m. (A five-hour time difference and one-hour Chicago Jayveer consume the night).

A dreary arrival in the Windy City prompts one woman to comment: "Well, gang, we've given up our color TV—it's back to black and white."

Heien Tabaka of Farmington Hills manages to load 11 cases of pineapples into her sons' vans (the record, we've heard, is 32 cases or 256 pineapples!).

Snug in our beds that evening, we discover that a winter storm has closed O'Hare, missing us by about 12 hours. With film to the labs and souvenirs unpacked, we realize that Paradise is about 5,000 miles and 60 degrees away.



Bill Hammer (right) of Farmington Hills tries to catch up on some reading, as his wife Lori (left)

and Linda Woll of Royal Oak enjoy the sun pool-side at the Coco Palms Resort in Kauai.