

Climbing Diamond Head to View Waikiki Beach



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Ir. Chin Mee Poon is a retired civil engineer who derives a great deal of joy and satisfaction from travelling to different parts of the globe, capturing fascinating insights of the places and people he encounters and sharing his experiences with others through his photographs and writing.

Mention Hawaii and Waikiki Beach comes to mind. Yes, Waikiki Beach is indeed the most widely known tourist attraction in Hawaii. Most visitors to Hawaii spend a lot of their time on that 530m stretch of golden sand or in the park, zoo and neighbourhood adjacent to it. Waikiki Beach is, however, only one of 6 beaches in Honolulu, the capital and largest city of Hawaii. With a population of about 360,000 people, Honolulu is situated on the southern part of O'ahu, one of the 8 major islands which, together with several atolls and numerous islets and seamounts, make up the archipelago of Hawaii. Hawaii was annexed by USA in 1898 but only became its 50th state on 21 August, 1959.

I first visited Hawaii in the early 1980s, and the only things I remembered from that trip were Waikiki Beach and Pearl Harbour. In July 2016, my wife and I spent 18 days in Hawaii to explore 4 of its major islands: O'ahu, Maui, Kaua'i and the Big Island (which is officially also known as Hawaii, but most people call it Big Island to avoid confusion with the Hawaii state).

Being in the tropics, Waikiki Beach naturally attracts 3S (sun, sea and sand) lovers, especially when the weather is good. My wife and I spent most of our time on the beach near the western end where the crowds were not so intimidating. Looking east from there, the crescent-shaped beach appeared to end at a promontory. We found out later that what appeared to be a promontory was actually the tuff crater of a dead volcano known as Diamond Head. The volcano is known



as L'ahi to the Hawaiians, but British sailors in the 19th century called it Diamond Head because they mistook the calcite crystals on the adjacent beach for diamonds.

We decided to check out Diamond Head in the following morning. From where the bus dropped us, we walked up a road and through a short tunnel. What appeared at the end of the tunnel was an open space surrounded by a continuous ring of hill – we had entered the crater!

The crater was huge and there was no lake in it. Instead there was a Visitor Centre near the northern edge of the open space, with a café, toilets and picnic tables nearby. After paying a park fee of US\$1 each, we joined a few others to walk to the observation deck about 1km away on the crater rim. The trail was practically level initially. Then it began to twist and turn up the steep inner slope of the crater rim. Steel handrails were provided here and there for safety. As many people

were on their way down as there were going up.

Then we came to another tunnel. This was much longer than the first and it sloped gently uphill. At the end of this was a spiral staircase that led us up to a former US Army lookout post. Getting out of the artificial cave chamber through a narrow opening, we found ourselves on a viewing platform with a panoramic view of the sweeping coastline, the adjacent land and sea. Another platform on a higher level gave an unobstructed all-round view. It was a beautiful, sunny morning and not only could Waikiki Beach be clearly seen but I could also see two beaches further west. The views were simply superb and it was so satisfying and fulfilling to sit atop a dead volcano to enjoy the great weather, even though there were so many other people around and it could be a bit noisy at times. After all, how often does one get to be on top of a volcano? ■