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Travel & Adventure Writing

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Hawaii; We meet again

Leisurely walking on the soft sand underneath the dark night sky I listen to the waves crashing to my right. Warm water races towards my toes splashing up my legs, dampening the bottom of my dress. To my left, towering hotels line the beach, their outdoor restaurants buzzing with tourists enjoying a late dinner or a night cap. For as long as I can remember, my family and I have always walked back from our dinners in Waikiki, Hawaii on the beach and tonight is no exception. I’m trailing my parents back to our hotel rooms, keeping my pace slow, taking in all the sights. Tomorrow, we will move from our Waikiki hotel to Ko Olina, and the Aulani Resort, where the rest of my family will meet us for a Thanksgiving week vacation.

After picking up my oldest sister Courtney and her boyfriend Jack from their house in the Manoa hills, we get back onto the Likelike highway. They live on O’ahu, Courtney attends University of Hawaii and Jack attends Hawaii Pacific University for Grad school. It feels natural to have my family living on this island since it has always felt like a second home.

My parents took me on my first vacation to Hawaii at a mere six months of age. Since then I have made the four-and-a-half-hour flight countless times. I can’t stay away from the fresh pineapple and the salty ocean breezes the islands provide. The timing of this trip is a first however, I’ve never gone on vacation for thanksgiving before. And even better my cousins will be joining us who I haven’t seen since the 4th of July; Stephanie, ten months older than me and her two younger brothers Tommy and Eric. Steph and I became extremely close, more like sisters to each other than cousins since my sisters are eight and six years older than me and since Steph has only brothers. We pull up to our new hotel and there they stand, I race towards Steph and we collide, squealing.

The Aulani resort has a full service spa my mom plans to take full advantage of. All of the girls in our group looked forward to the Swedish massages and the complimentary access to their outdoor hydrotherapy garden. My mom told me she would tell the receptionist I was 18, when I was really a year shy, to allow me to be massaged. I should’ve known something was wrong by the way the woman glared at me, I was led away from my family towards a separate section of the spa. I dreamed of the peaceful melodic music in the darkened room where I would lay face down on a soft bed inhaling calming lavender. Unfortunately, my masseuse, if you could call her that, proceeded to lightly pat my shoulders and arms over my clothes as I sat upright in a chair, next to a woman getting her hair done. I allowed the petting for a few minutes, thinking this must just be how this Spa starts their treatments and after you’re escorted to your private room. But, no I was shuttled here to the kid’s club/makeshift hair salon, only curtained off by thin white linens, to live out my 60-minute appointment. This painfully ridiculous excuse for a massage didn’t last much longer once I realized I wasn’t being punked. I blocked out my family members raving reviews of their treatments and sulked in a corner, ready to haul ass out of there.

There’s something about an included buffet breakfast at hotels that just makes people overindulge, even on Thanksgiving. After sampling everything from the tropical fruits to the malasadas, which are Hawaii style doughnuts covered in cinnamon sugar, we finished our breakfast and felt stuffed. Sadly, once breakfast commends we always hit the beach. Ready to don our bathing suits and show our full stomachs to the world, we stride self-consciously to the waterfront. The shoreline naturally curved, allowing only a small opening for the ocean giving way to a private beach for the hotels guests. The gorgeous view of light sand, turquoise water and swaying palm trees lull us into tranquility. My warm sun kissed skin relishes in the cool ocean water, kicking up to float I careen back and forth letting the waves guide me.

For our actual Thanksgiving Dinner, we decided to go to a traditional Hawaiian lu’au. The lu’au celebration, only a short walk from our hotel, but we could already smell the food floating through the breeze. The event space was extensive, a large stage, hundreds of tables and even more people milling about the space. Another buffet, provided us with fare from around the world. Pork rotated on a spit over a fire and cooked Kalua style; there sat an array of raw fish and seaweed salads, turkey with mashed potatoes and gravy, spam and so much fruit. The odd combination of foods adhered to the melting pot of nationalities present at this lu’au. For the main festivities there were hula dancers, fire dancers and at the end audience members were invited up to learn the traditional moves. My cousins and I ran up to the stage embracing the moment ready to shows off our subpar hula dancing moves to the crowd. The most unconventional thanksgiving experience contributed to our most memorable thanksgiving yet.