



Printer-Friendly Version

# Hawaiian Words and Phrases

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## Resources

The following are recommended resources for learning the Hawaiian language.

### For Adults

- [Learn Hawaiian at Home \(CD\)](#)
- [Pocket Hawaiian Dictionary](#)
- [An Easy Guide to the Hawaiian Language \(book\)](#)

### For Children

- [‘A’ is for Aloha \(book\)](#)
- [Hawaiian Kids Coloring Book](#)
- [The Story of Hawaii Coloring Book](#)
- [Kid Stuff About Hawaii \(book\)](#)



[Click here to purchase vintage Hawaiian posters](#)

## Commonly Used Words

While you are on The Big Island you are likely to read or hear lots of Hawaiian words and phrases. Here are some that you may frequently encounter.

### A

- A`A (AAH AAH) - Sharp, jagged lava rock.
- A`OLE PILIKAI (ah-OL-eh pi-li-KYE) You're welcome. No problem.
- A` HUI HOU (ah-HUI-ho) - See you later. Until we meet again.
- AINA (EYE-nah) - the land.
- ALI`I (ah-LEE-ee) - Hawaiian royalty.
- ALOHA (uh-LOW-ha) A greeting. Can mean hello, goodbye, or love.
- ALOHA OE (uh-LOW-ha OY-eh) - Goodbye
- AKAMAI (AH-kah-my) - Wise, someone who is very smart.
- ANUINUI (ah-NUEE-NUEE) - Rainbow

### E

- E`KOMO MAI (AYH koh-moh-MY) - Please come in. Welcome.

### H

- HALE (HAH-lay) - House, home.
- HANA (HAH-nuh) - Home.
- HANA HOU (HAH-nuh HO) One more time.
- HAOLE (HOW-lay) - A non-Hawaiian, usually refers to a Caucasian.
- HAPA (HAH-pah) - Mix (as in hapa haole: mixed race, half haole)
- HEIAU (HAY-ow) - A Hawaiian religious temple.
- HONU (hoh-NU) - Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle
- HOKU (HO-koo) - Star
- HULA (HOO-lah) - A rhythmic Hawaiian dance.
- HUMUHUMUNUKUNUKUAPUA`A - Picasso trigger fish (the state fish)

### K

- KAHUNA (ka-HU-nah) - Priest in Hawaiian religion.
- KALO (KAA-loh) - The Hawaiian word for the taro plant.
- KAMAAINA (kah-mah-EYE-nah) A long time resident of Hawaii.
- KANE (KAH-nay) - Man, male.
- KAPU (ka-POO) - Forbidden. Keep out. Sacred.
- KEIKI (KAY-key): - Child or children.
- KOA (KOH-uh) - Hawaiian for 'soldier'. A native tree.
- KOKUA (koh-KU-ah) - Help, Cooperation. As in, "Please, kokua".
- KUPUNA (koo-PUU-nah) - Elderly person (term of respect).

## Useful Tips

- If a local youth doesn't know you but needs to get your attention he may call you 'Uncle' or 'Auntie'. Both are terms of respect.
- The word 'haole' is a Hawaiian word that literally means "without the breath of life", a term used to describe caucasians. If you are called "haole" during your trip it is usually a local's way of distinguishing you from other races on the island. If there is an adjective starting with the letter 'f' before the word "haole", it means something else entirely!

## Words in Action

Here are some ways you will see and hear these words in use:

- 'Kane' and 'Wahine' are often used as labels on restroom doors.
- 'Road construction ahead. Please *Kokua*', means slow down and use caution. Give the workers your courtesy.
- Signs saying 'Aloha. E' *komo mai*' are often seen on shop windows. It means "Welcome, please come in and browse."
- A construction site may have signs saying 'Kapu' on the fence, which means "Keep out!" It could also mean "No Parking!", "Don't go there", "No trespassing."
- Shopkeepers may greet you with 'Aloha.' It's polite to say it back to them. When you are done with a transaction you may hear them say 'Mahalo' (Thank you).
- If someone says 'Aloha nui loa' it means you are loved a lot. What do you think 'Mahalo nui loa' means?
- 'Slow. Keiki at play.' is the same as "Slow, children at play."
- 'Mauna' means "mountain." 'Mauna Loa' means "Long Mountain." 'Mauna Kea' means "White Mountain" (referring to winter snowfall at its summit).
- Have you ever had a puka shell necklace? A 'puka' is the hole drilled in the shell to allow stringing.
- It's a sure bet that at a *lu'au*, *malahini* will eat *poi* and *ono pupus* from *koa* bowls, hear

## L

LANI (LAH-knee) Heavenly  
LEI (LAY) - A garland of flowers, leaves, nuts, or shells.  
LANAI (luh-NIIH-ee) - A porch or veranda.  
LOLO (LOH-loh) - Crazy  
LUA (LUU-ah) - Bathroom.  
LU'AU (LOO-ow) - Feast  
LUAKINI (LOO-uh-KEE-knee) - Temple for human sacrifice.

## M

MAHALO (mah-HAH-loh) - Thank you.  
MAKAI (muh-KYH) - A direction towards the sea.  
MALIHINI (mal-uh-HEE-knee) - Newcomer, visitor.  
MANA (MAH-nuh) - Spiritual power.  
MAUKA (MOW-kuh) - A direction inland or towards the mountain.  
MAUNA (MOWH-nah) - Mountain.  
MELE KALIKAMAKA (may-lay ka-leek-ee-MA-ka) Merry Christmas  
MU'UMU'U (MOO-moo) - A long flowing garment.

## N

NANI (NAH-knee) - Pretty, Beautiful.  
NENE (NAY-nay) - The native Hawaiian goose.  
NUI LOA (nu-ee-LOH-ah) - Very much

## O

OHANA (oh-HAH-nah) - Family  
ONO (OH-noh) - Good or great

## P

PAU (POW) - Done  
PAU HANA (pow HAH-nah) - To be done with work. Done and going home.  
PAHOEHOE (PUH-HO-EE-HO-EE) - Smooth, ropy lava.  
PIPI (PEE-pee) - Cow.  
POHAKU (PO-haw-koo) - Stone, rock.  
POI (POY) - Pounded Taro Root  
PUKA (POO-kah) - Hole.  
PUPU (POO-poo) - Appetizer.  
PU'U (POO-oo) - Hill or cinder cone.

## U

UKU (OO-koo) - Flea, lice.  
UKULELE (oo-koo-LAY-lay) - Four stringed musical instrument. Small guitar.  
U'I (oo-WEEE) - Beautiful, nice.

## W

WAHINE (vah-HEE-nay) - Woman. Female  
WAI (WHY) - Water.  
WIKIWIKI (WICK-ee-WICK-ee) - Fast

stories told by *kupuna* dressed in *mu'umu'us*, and see *hula* performed by nani *wahine*.

- When you visit a *heiau*, please *kokua*. It is still a place of worship for those who practice the ancient Hawaiian religion.
- 'Go *mauka* 6 miles Waikoloa Road" means 'Drive inland 6 miles on the Waikoloa road.
- 'It is 6 miles *makai* side' means 'whatever you are looking for is on the ocean side of the road about 6 miles ahead.
- When you walk on rough, clinkery lava you will know why the Hawaiians named it 'A'a'.
- 'A sign with a drawing of a turtle and the word *kapu*' below it means 'Don't bother the turtles.'
- 'Pukalani' means 'a hole in the heavens.' It is used to describe a perpetually sunny place in an otherwise cloudy sky.

Mele Kalikamaka (2.54)