



HAWAII



SWIMMING WITH THE FISHES

An underwater icon picks Hawaii's best snorkel spots

By BEKAH WRIGHT
Special Advertising Sections Writer

In 1955, Robert Wintner's family took a vacation, driving from Indiana to Miami. Young Robert convinced his father to let him try snorkeling. As his father stood at the shore, Robert stuck his head in the Atlantic and erupted sputtering.

"What did you see?" asked his father.

"Everything!" exclaimed Robert.

Years later, the little boy from Indiana has become known as Snorkel Bob, or SB, a legend and authority on snorkeling the islands of Hawaii. Since the '80s, he's owned snorkel shops across Hawaii, as well as designed and engineered snorkel gear to ensure snorkelers get the most out of their water time.

Visitors can plot out an underwater itinerary using "Snorkel Bob's Reality Guide to Hawaii," packed with recommendations on everything from watering holes to secret surf sites. New snorkel spots are always making Snorkel Bob's favorites list, among them the following gems:

MAUI

On the south shore of Maui, one of SB's new favorite reefs flourishes off the coast of the Maui Prince Hotel and Malu'aka Beach. "A hundred yards out, sandy bottom becomes beautiful fingers of reef," said SB. "You could spend three days there discovering eels, turtles and multitudes of fish."

Another prime snorkel site is Airport Beach on the north end of Ka'anapali Beach. "The reef in front drops to about 15 feet fairly quickly," said SB. "[The water] is usually very clear and thick with

fish and big manta rays cruising through regularly. A rare contact, indeed."

LANAI

For great snorkeling via boat, SB recommends Lighthouse Cliff, where a sheer rock wall plunges into the ocean. "I was awestruck," SB said of his experience there. "Several great reefs on Lanai are characterized by 200-foot visibility, through which snorkelers can see huge coral heads and fish." Swimming among rolling acres of coral are eels, turtles and myriad fish.

Prime reefs on Lanai are in Manele and Hulopo'e bays, the latter an underwater marine park. SB recommends the shallow break at Manele Bay where surfers hang. "In the morning, sunbeams glimmer on the coral heads," he said. "It's magic."

KAUAI

On Kauai, Snorkel Bob joins his staff for "executive snorkels" at Koloa Landing. "It's deeper and has more surge than most people would expect or enjoy," said SB. "But I get out in 30 feet of water with my buds and see a few jumbo ulua, and thousands of little colorful fish cruise by, and the world is good."

The beach in front of Brennecke's Beach Broiler restaurant also makes SB's list. "After the hurricane, the lagoon was full of appliances — washers, dryers, you name it." Since then, locals have cleaned the shallow cove, restoring it for great snorkeling.

BIG ISLAND

Big Island beaches offer clear visibility, as their coarse sand settles quickly. "Many reefs on the Big Island are still perfect because they're a bit harder to get to,"

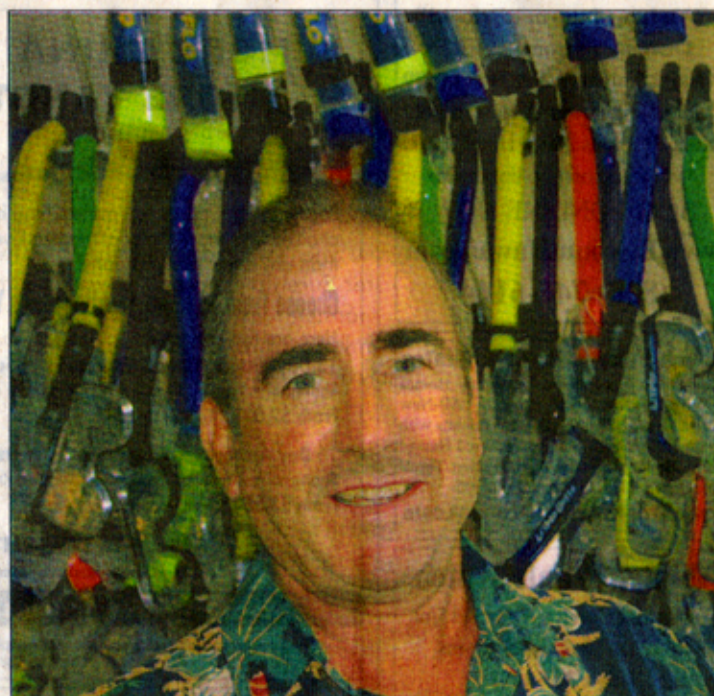


PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBERT WINTNER

Snorkel Bob is a legend and authority on snorkeling in Hawaii.

said SB. "Past Waikoloa is a place called Puako with one of the most beautiful reefs. It doesn't get any better."

At Pu'uhonua O Honaunau National Historical Park you'll find what SB calls "blue ribbon snorkeling." Dip into the calm waters to view great numbers of fish and eels. "I saw one of the most beautiful sea creatures I've ever seen there," said SB. "A newborn spotted eagle ray with a 7-inch wingspan."

OAHU

In Oahu great snorkeling is on the windward side. "It's a slice of old Hawaii," said SB. Across from Waimea Valley Audubon Center is Waimea Bay Beach Park, which offers seasonal snorkeling. "It's hurly-burly in wintertime, so don't go except May through September when it's flat."

On the Haleiwa side of the bay,

swimmers jump off what is known as "The Rock." Beneath it is a subaqueous tunnel that more experienced snorkelers can explore.

When asked about favorite snorkel spots, Snorkel Bob had a theory: "If you have a hot date, you've just lost 12 pounds, you're looking good, feeling good, the sun is shining and there's no shore break, that's a pretty nice snorkel spot, huh?" he quipped. "Every reef has its day."

For more information about Snorkel Bob locations or gear visit www.snorkelbob.com or call 808.737.2421.

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