

Mai Tai Daze

by Katie Norton

Some people hate Waikiki. Not me. Most hotels had lounges with live music, either inside or around the pool. Evenings were spent bar hopping up and down the strip, Kalakaua Avenue. The bars stayed open till 4:00 a.m. It was safe to walk at night in Waikiki as the place was crawling with cops, whose mission was to protect the golden goose, the tourists, from being mugged, while turning a blind eye to the selling of Maui Wowie and prostitution. The tourists must have fun, after all. I loved to stroll the beach under the moonlight, bits of music wafting and tiki torch lights playing on the water. It was splendid, fabulous, shining and fun. The people you met were all in good moods, on vacation, carefree, like being on a cruise ship.

Walking among the vacationers, the locals, the street people, the hustlers, looking in the shop windows at all the improbable things I would never buy: designer clothes from Paris sold in this tropical wonderland to vacationing Japanese tourists; an entire store devoted to items with the Budweiser logo, which for some reason was a favorite of the Japanese. Kuhio Avenue, on the back side of the International Marketplace, off the beaten path, was home to striving, second-rate businesses trying to separate the tourists from their money. There you would find a three story shopping mall, crowned at the top with an enterprise catering to Japanese male tourists, red-faced and hopped up on lavish sake and sushi dinners. The walls were bulletproof glass to reveal the action within. Hot young Japanese women wearing short-shorts, spike heels, and tight tank tops that said "SWAT," were teaching the men how to shoot guns, illegal in Japan, on an indoor shooting range. The place was packed with excited men wanting to shoot guns with the girls. Surreal to stumble upon that in a mai tai daze in the middle of the night, like a crazy dream. I headed outside to take a deep cleansing breath of plumeria scented air mixed with diesel bus fumes.

