



Mark Twain in Hawaii: Roughing It in the Sandwich Islands: Hawaii in the 1860s

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The noted humorist's account of his 1866 trip to Hawaii at a time when the island were more for the native than the tourists.

Mark Twain in Hawaii: Roughing It in the Sandwich Islands: Hawaii in the 1860s Details

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From Reader Review Mark Twain in Hawaii: Roughing It in the Sandwich Islands: Hawaii in the 1860s for online ebook

Shannan says

Entertaining to hear about Hawaii in the mid 1800's, with Twain's usual wit and humor. His description of a horseback journey off into the jungles was particularly fun. It was a little shocking, with our modern sensibilities, to hear the natives called "heathens" and the total lack of respect for their ancient customs, but not suprising given the time of the writing.

Becky says

Since I loved the audiobook for Huckleberry Finn this year and loved our 2visits to Hawaii, I decided to read this little book--84 pages of writing and 20 pages of reading. Mark Twain and the print size fooled me--it is a dense little tale of Twain's visit to Hawaii in 1866. Twain writes a good travelogue! Since these were supposed to be newspaper stories for the California paper, it a little surprising to read complicated sentences and vocabulary. If you have been to Maui or the Big island, I think you will enjoy the descriptions of places that today's tourists visit.

Beth Cato says

This book was shorter than I expected at 84 pages, with more padding after that consisting of many black and white pictures of Hawaii and important people mentioned in Twain's letters. Twain's writing still makes for an easy, witty read. His more racist observations made me wince yet they remain important within the context of his period.

Twain visited Hawaii at such an interesting time. The native population had been decimated--as he himself observes at one point, a population of 400,000 to 55,000 in 80 years, and more than enough cats for all--and foreign whites were coming in to trade. Sugarcane plantations were just being established. Most relevant to my research needs was his travel to the Big Island, where he offered blithe commentary on Captain Cook's fate and was suitably awed by Kilauea. The foreword by A. Grove Day points out that Twain padded some details--as there was no eruption of Twain's description otherwise chronicles during that time--but that was all part of Twain's storytelling verve.

Mara says

I like Heather's posted quote about travel easing bigotry by Twain, partly because it's true, but also partly because one of the most interesting things about this book is Twain's rather un-PC ruminations on what an improvement the Christian missionaries have wrought for the "savages" of Hawaii, an enthusiastic colonial endorsement that would be pretty much verboten if given by any writer today.

I picked this book up at the "international" airport in Kona, Hawaii (it is a bunch of tiki-style huts on a

runway. Seriously) and was pretty much delighted from beginning to end. Of course, Twain is hilarious (his exaggerated discussions of the various "ill-bred nags" he rides around the islands is particularly gut-busting), but he is also the pointed observer and helped me to see the islands with wider eyes when I was there. His descriptions of the lava flows beat my own petty imaginings by an overwhelming margin and hey, I have pictures!

Anyway, it's a short read, full of wit, and not a word wasted.

Erik Dabel says

Mark Twain's account and journal of his 1866 trip to Hawaii. At times hilarious, at times eye opening, at times educational, always through the ever curious mind of one of America's greatest writers.

Derek says

A Hawaiian travel book in Mark Twain's style. Excellent. The edition had quite a few misprints, but none so bad as to obscure meaning. Nice, quick read about a time and place that will never be as it was when it was written.

Brooke says

Ack. I could not finish this. Reading about Hawaii in the 1700s from the (racist) white perspective is too infuriating. I recognize it is a glimpse of a moment in time, but that perspective had dire consequences and I cannot bear to read any more of it.

Christie Bane says

I love Mark Twain. I love him so much that I forgive him almost completely for occasionally being slightly boring in his books. It's not very often, and it almost always passes quickly, and it's more than made up for by the rest of his writing, which is exquisitely funny and perceptive.

This book is the story of his venture from the eastern U.S. to the West in Gold Rush days. He ends up in Virginia City for a while. Now I grew up in a Gold Rush town in California, and was thoroughly indoctrinated with Gold Rush history, and until I read this book I had no idea what life was actually like in a Gold Rush city. Now I feel like I was there when it was happening, because of Mark Twain. That's how good he is.

This book also includes his visit to Hawaii, in more refined description than the letters from Hawaii I read a while ago. I can never read enough about Hawaii, or enough Mark Twain.

Eduardo Santiago says

Uncomfortable. This is early Twain, before he found the voice we know today. His writing is rococo; his tone condescending but without the kindness he later developed. Worth reading as a contrast to his mature work, and perhaps as an exercise in learning to temper our judgment of the young.

Anita Heveron says

An awesome, quick, funny read by Twain. His point of view after visiting "The sandwich islands" is keeping me in the aloha spirit even though I'm on the mainland. When he describes the smell of the islands, I can smell plumeria and ocean spray and coconuts.

Steve says

At 31 years old and in the employ of the Sacramento Union, Mark Twain took his first trip away from the North American continent onboard the steamer Ajax bound for a four month tour of the Sandwich Islands. On Sunday, March 18, 1866, he arrived in Honolulu and fell in love with the islands that were to form his image of paradise.

Of course, one man's paradise is another's hell and Twain doesn't hold back. He sides with the H'awaiians (referred to as Kanakas) against the influences of the Europeans, Americans, and missionaries, especially the missionaries, for all the usual reasons: temperance, stuffy clothing, and crazy ideas about what makes a good life in a land that is so good to be in. He also rails against the local mosquito population and the fruits that are so sour that they can remove the enamel from your teeth.

At this time, the Sandwich Islands were an independent monarchy under King Kamehameha V pushing towards some kind of modernity. They had a legislature, of sorts, and a navy that consisted of two ships. And here, Twain begins to note the unintended consequences of the arrival of the white man in the need for cheap labor and the population decimation caused by disease.

He also notes the exported version of royalty that resides in a two-story wooden frame house a.k.a. the Royal Place, the excessive titles of the members of the legislature, and that the European idea of a noble being above the people is meaningless here when the King can walk around and be treated like a regular respectful guy and not be flanked by a fleet of hanger-ons.

Twain spends his time checking out the sites, notes the ubiquitous cat population, calls the Kanakas the most savvy horse negotiators in the world, and admires the sport of surfing, especially since most of the H'awaiians spend their time naked both in and out of the water.

Twain is pro-America in where the islands should lean and recommends that they become part of the US at some point. What is interesting is how many of the themes introduced here, such as a clash of civilizations and how little is needed to wow the locals, come full force in "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" which was written after this working vacation. In fact, it has been said that "Connecticut Yankee" was supposed to be about the state of the Sandwich Islands until Twain got a hold of the legends of King Arthur

and changed the setting accordingly.

Overall, it's not his best book (it is a collection of articles published about his time there) but it is an interesting read. You get a rather unvarnished glimpse of H'awii in the 1860's and, short of going to Bishop's Museum or the Court Museum or the I'olani Palace in H'awii, this is a great introduction into the history of the H'awaiian islands.

Renaissance says

I was hesitant that I would enjoy this book, especially when I discovered that the foreward was about 1/4 the length of the entire volume. However, in retrospect, the foreward was helpful in setting the stage and understanding the context of Twain's compositions.

Mark Twain wrote these articles for a Sacramento newspaper for which he was working. The articles were later compiled into this publication. As to be expected, Twain's colorful insights and sense of humor pervade the writing. The book is especially enjoyable if you have visited some of the sites he describes (like the City of Refuge and Honolulu). His most vivid and engaging descriptions were those of the volcanoes. Twain had a gift of being a strong descriptive writer--he points out small details that add to the color and ambience of the piece. He also takes time to place events in the context of Hawaiian history and thus also reveals some of his feelings about colonialism, treatment of native peoples, and organized religion (particularly missionary religion).

In all, an enjoyable short book and worth the read.

Kathleen Meade says

This is a short, quick, funny journal about Mark Twain's visit to Hawaii. If you have spent time in Hawaii, especially on the Big Island you will enjoy it. It is a book you I have read more than once.

Emily says

A strong start with a great sense of humor from Twain as he approaches a new culture and a new lifestyle for the first time, however, I started to lose concentration as he branched out to other islands to climb volcanoes and visit temples because my two seatmates on the plane started to bond very loudly about their travels, their shared astrological signs, their high school experiences, mutual interest in reality television and the best venues for drinking, eating ice cream, late night sandwiches or going to see a concert. It was just far more interesting than what Twain was giving me. Unfortunate.

Debra Waites says

Mark Twain's humor continues to shine. He became rather like the Jon Stewart of his era as he aged. But in

this book he is a younger man and susceptible to the beauty of these islands. So much so, the memories linger until his life was no more on this earth, providing him with a peace and calm as only cherished places can evoke. I read this while in Hawai'i and reading it potentiated my own experience here.
