During the Hike

Stay on the Trail
Most accidents happen when hikers leave the established trail and disregard warning signs. Staying on the trail greatly reduces your chances of having a serious fall or getting lost. Hawaiian forests are not like mainland forests—the growth is very dense, and it is easy to become disoriented. Thick overgrowth can mask dangerously steep drop-offs. Thin, sharp lava rock can crack beneath your weight above deep holes or lava tubes.

Stay Together
Hikers separated from their partners are more apt to make a wrong turn or lose the established trail. Keep track of each other, and regroup periodically, especially near junctions or when the trail gets obscure. Monitor everyone’s condition. Dehydration, sunstroke, hypothermia, and fatigue can hit even experienced hikers.

Avoid Undue Risks
Climbing waterfalls and following narrow ridgelines or gulches off the trail can place you in danger. Rock climbing is extremely dangerous due to the crumbly and porous nature of the volcanic rock. There have been fatal accidents from crumbling rock...don’t take the chance.

Monitor the Weather
Keep an eye on the sky. When hiking into valleys or crossing streams, be mindful of rain conditions along the mountain top...rushing water is very powerful. It is better to find an alternative route, or wait until the water subsides.

Watch the Time
Hawaii does not have daylight savings time, and night falls quickly in the tropics. Getting a late start increases the possibility of getting caught in the dark. Know your turnaround time and stick to it to allow enough time to return. If you’re caught by darkness, stay put unless you are very familiar with the trail and have a flashlight.

In An Emergency

Call 911: Ask for Fire/Rescue. Tell them which trail you’re on and what happened.

Be Visible: Wear or wave a brightly colored item in an open area during the day...attract attention.

Be Noisy: Use a whistle to attract attention.

Stay Calm: Objectively assess your situation before making any decision. Stay calm and positive.

Stay Put: You will be found more quickly and reduce the chances of getting into further trouble, especially after dark, by staying in one place. This is why it is important to notify someone of your hike location and destination.

Stay Warm: Wind and rain can drain your body of warmth, and be life-threatening. Get out of the wind and use your rain gear or extra clothes to stay warm.

In An Emergency

When might you need emergency assistance?
• When an injury or illness prevents walking.
• When extremely bad weather hits.
• When it’s too dark to see.
• When you’re extremely fatigued or dehydrated.
• When you’re disoriented or lost.
• When you’re stranded, scared, and unable to move.

This brochure is subject to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Title VI of the Education Amendments of 1972, and offers affirmative opportunity to participate in programs or activities regardless of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. Further, it is agreed that no individual will be denied any service or otherwise denied access or benefit from any program or activity that is directly associated with a program or the recipient on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability.
Why Should You Read This Brochure?

Because it may save your life or someone else’s, prevent an injury, or maybe just save you from significant embarrassment! Public recreational demand for trail experiences in Hawai‘i continues to increase. A trail and park survey conducted in 2000 indicated that approximately 78% of the users surveyed were out-of-state visitors. Rescue personnel are now more frequently responding to missing or injured hikers than ever before, indicating the need for trail users to be better informed and prepared. Rescuing careless or reckless hikers places others at risk and increases costs to Hawai‘i taxpayers.

This brochure will provide you with a comprehensive list of trail safety tips, fundamental equipment, appropriate behavior in an emergency situation, and other important information.

Further information is available from the State of Hawai‘i, Division of Forestry & Wildlife, Na Ala Hele (NAH) Program. NAH has an extensive informational website on features under its jurisdiction at: www.hawaiitrails.org.

If you are a novice hiker, or a visitor to Hawai‘i, you may want to consider a licensed commercial tour operator. An experienced guide can provide natural and cultural interpretive information... well as increase your safety on the trails. For a current listing of NAH permitted operators, see the Na Ala Hele website.

Hiking clubs and conservation groups also provide organized hikes and volunteer outdoor service projects. Check the newspapers for a listing of weekly activities.

Trailheads are targets for theft! Any valuables should not be left inside your vehicles, even in the trunk.

Hiking in Hawai‘i

Isolated by over 2,000 miles from the nearest landmass, Hawaiian native flora and fauna evolved into highly specialized species found nowhere else in the world.

Hiking in the Hawaiian Islands offers residents and visitors many opportunities to experience a unique natural environment. Known throughout the world for a wide variety of ecosystems, trails in Hawai‘i can take you to coastal dunes, shrublands, rainforests, and high alpine deserts. Certain historic trails provide a glimpse of the cultural heritage of Hawai‘i as they traverse past historic and archeological sites.

Remember: When you are hiking on trails in Hawai‘i, you are a guest in the home of our forest creatures and Hawaiian ancestors. Please treat these areas with respect.

Plan Your Hike

Inform Others of Your Plans
Let someone know which trail (name and location) you plan to hike on, and when you expect to return. If something should go wrong, rescuers will have accurate information on where to start searching.

Hike With a Partner
Don’t hike alone. Frequently, people who get into trouble are alone. In case of an emergency, your partner’s help can be invaluable.

Get Information About the Trail
Learn about the trail so you will know the route, where to start, and degree of difficulty. This information can be found on the website, by contacting the NAH staff, or in a trail guidebook.

Assess Your Capabilities
Compare your level of fitness, ability, and experience with the trail description. Be practical and realistic. There are a wide variety of trails in Hawai‘i, so pick one that suits your level.

Check Weather Conditions.
Sunny and clear mornings are sometimes followed by rain and wind later in the day. Flash floods are dangerous possibilities in the narrow gulches. Call the National Weather Service for the latest forecast.

Wear Proper Clothing
Dress in layers so you can protect your skin from the intense tropical sun. A hat, sunglasses and sunscreen are recommended. Hiking boots offer traction and ankle support to prevent slipping and injuries on muddy trails and slick or sharp rocks. Light rain gear is good to carry because of the quickly changing weather conditions.

Hiking Essentials

Water is a must. Carry at least 2 liters of water per person for a full-day hike; more if it’s a long hike or on a hot day. In tropical weather, dehydration can become a serious problem.

If you have a cell phone, bring it along. Though reception is not available from all points on the islands, it is a good item to have in case of emergency.

Carry a daypack or waistpack. You will need to keep your hands free and unencumbered while hiking. Pack a brightly colored article (to attract rescuer’s attention), a whistle (the sound travels farther and lasts longer than a voice), sunscreen, mosquito repellant, a small flashlight, food, and some basic first-aid (at least band-aids and antiseptic).

Protect the Native Environment
Hawai‘i has a unique natural environment with many rare native plants and animals. Unfortunately, these fragile native ecosystems are under constant threat from non-native weedy plants. One way these weeds are spread is by seeds mixed in with mud on hiking boots and gear. You can minimize this impact by scrubbing your boots after every hike, and start each hike with clean boots.

Health Warning
Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that is transmitted from animals to humans. The leptospira bacteria can survive for long periods in fresh water and mud. It can enter the human body through the eyes, nose, mouth, and broken skin. Do not drink untreated stream or lake water. If you have flu-like symptoms 2-20 days after hiking in wet or muddy areas, see your doctor immediately. Leptospirosis can be fatal if left untreated.