

Hawai'i Survival Hacks for J-1 Teachers

Welcome to Hawai'i: Survival Hacks for Our Newest Heroes in the Classroom

Aloha and mabuhay, dear teachers!

First off, mahalo—thank you—for choosing to be here. Hawai'i is incredibly fortunate to have you. We know it took courage, sacrifice, and heart to leave home and take on the vital work of teaching in a place thousands of miles away. You're not just filling classrooms—you're shaping lives and uplifting communities.

This little guide, "Hawai'i Survival Hacks," is our way of saying, we've got your back. It's packed with practical tips, local know-how, and cultural tidbits to help you settle in, save a few bucks, and make the most of your island experience. Think of it as your cheat sheet for navigating life in paradise—with a few laughs and life-savers along the way.

Whether it's figuring out where to get affordable groceries, understanding local customs, or learning how to pronounce humuhumunukunukuāpua'a (yup, it's our State fish!), we hope this helps make your transition smoother.

You're now part of a vibrant community, not just as teachers, but as cultural ambassadors. And you're never alone—the University of the Philippines Alumni Association of Hawai'i (UPAAH) and our Filipino community are here to support you every step of the way.

So welcome! Enjoy the sunshine, embrace the aloha spirit, and don't forget your tsinelas.

On behalf of the UPAAH community, tara, let's do this!

1. **Slippers Are Life**

Leave your shoes at the door. Always. And invest in a solid pair of tsinelas— they're acceptable everywhere except sa classroom, formal events and maybe the DOE office.

2. **Costco = Kabayan Central**

Bulk rice? Check. Longganisa? Check. Chicharrón in a jar? Check. Split a membership with a fellow teacher and save big! But we also have our trusty Filipino stores like Seafood City. But you can always explore other grocery stores too - like HMart for korean products. [Costco Hawai'i Locations](#)

3. **Learn the Bus (TheBus!)**

Public transportation on O'ahu is reliable and teacher-budget friendly. Download TheBus app and get a Holo Card to save on daily fares.

4. **Don't Be Shy, Join a Potluck**

Locals love to eat together. Bring pancit or lumpia and you'll instantly make friends. The next UPAAH Summer Picnic potluck is Aug. 29! See upaah.org for details.

5. **Know Your "Mahalo" and "Aloha"**

These aren't just words—they're values. Use them sincerely, and you'll be embraced faster than you can say "shaka." You know what's cool - we have very similar values (Filipinos and Hawaiians), kaya it's almost natural for us to adjust. The sense of aloha is akin to our sense of kapwa and caring for each other.

[Aloha Spirit Law – Yes, It's Real!](#)

6. **Sun is Strong, Budget Sunscreen is Wrong**

Hawai'i sun hits hard. Use reef-safe sunscreen if you expect to be under the sun for long periods of time. Check local stores like Longs or Ross for good deals. Kebs mga peeps dito with your beach outfits and whether you are morena or fair (leave the colonial mentality behind!) but we care about the ocean as much as we care about your skin's health. Sunscreen is always helpful.

[Hawai'i Law on Reef-Safe Sunscreen](#)

7. **\$1.50 Hot Dogs at Costco Are a Teacher's Best Friend**

Enough said - enjoy the other cheap items too!

8. **Spam is Sacred**

If a student gives you Spam musubi, that's an act of love. Eat it with gratitude. It is often referred to as the "Hawaiian energy bar". [Here's a recipe in case you want to make your own.](#)

9. **Pidgin Is a Language**

You'll hear "da kine," "pau," and "grinds" — ask or observe, and you'll be speaking like a local in no time. Some books may help - Pidgin To the Max and similar publications, but just watch enough Youtube or Tiktoks and you'll get da kine eventually. Shoots!

10. **Weather? Yes. Wardrobe Change? Not Really.**

Leave your winter coat. Pack light, breathable clothes. Cardigan for cold classrooms is

enough.

11. Daiso, Ross, Walmart for the Win

Classroom supplies, snacks, and even decor—don't sleep on these box stores for budget teaching hacks.

12. Rice Cooker = Non-Negotiable

Get one ASAP. It's not just for rice—oatmeal, soups, boiled eggs, instant pancit canton, all possible!

13. Thrift Like a Pro

Savers, Goodwill, and Facebook Marketplace are gold mines for furniture, clothes, and island finds.

14. Island Time is Real, But You Shouldn't Be Late

Others may be relaxed about time. But Filipino time + Hawaiian time can be dangerous! We need to show our employers that we mean business! As a teacher — be early, be reliable, and build trust.

15. Catch the Deals at Farmers Markets

Support local and eat fresh. Plus, aunties will give you free samples if you smile. IF YOU FORGET someone's name - just call them Aunty or Uncle. It's a bit sosyal version of our Tito and Tita, Ate and Kuya. Filipino kids here may recognize "ading" also as a term of endearment.

16. Bring a Reusable Water Bottle and Grocery Bags

Hawai'i charges for bags. Be eco-smart and BYO-everything. Plus, take advantage of drinking fountains! Buying water bottles do add up, so invest in a good tumbler or similar.

17. Don't Just Work. Explore!

Every beach, hike, or sunrise is a reward. You're not just here to teach—you're here to live. If you have KJ friends, join some events we have at UPAAH - we do hikings, potlucks, games, etc. The island is soooo beautiful to waste indoors!

18. Filipino Stores = Taste of Home

Search for Seafood City, Pacific Supermarket, or small mom-and-pop sari-sari stores. Get your bagoong fix when needed. LOTS of Filipino stores in Hawaii. In fact, did you know that Filipinos are the LARGEST Asian ethnic group in Hawaii? As in! No cap!

19. Join a Local Church or Community Group

Great way to meet kababayans and get invited to events with free food and warm

company. But real talk, do your research first. There are many questionable groups in Hawaii also, just use good judgment to stay safe!

20. Aloha Means Taking Care of Each Other

Look out for fellow teachers. Share resources. Laugh together. Cry together. Celebrate the little wins. We will celebrate them with you.

HOUSING & UTILITIES

Housing

- Finding affordable housing in Hawai'i can be challenging but not impossible.
- Most landlords require you to fill out an application form. Some would ask for an application fee (around \$10-20) for each renter applicant. You can use your Philippine passport as a form of identification if you don't have anything else.
 - Look for landlords who do not require credit reports, which most people have only when they have existing financial accounts in the US.
- Where you can look for available housing units:
 - [Rent.com](https://www.rent.com)
 - [Zillow](https://www.zillow.com)
 - [Facebook Marketplace](https://www.facebook.com/marketplace)
- Things to consider when looking for housing:
 - Proximity to bus stops or Biki stations
 - Proximity to your workplace
 - Deposit amount required
 - Parking (usually bundled with the rent, but if you don't have a car, tell the landlord or agent that you don't need parking so they can lower the rent)

Home internet

- [Spectrum](https://www.spectrum.net) = 300 mbps for \$49.99 plus free phone service for 12 months
- [Hawaiian Telcom](https://www.hawaiiantelcom.com) = 400 mbs for \$39.99 for 1 year with e-bill

Electricity

- Some apartments require renters to set up their own electric service
- [Request to start service under your name](#)

- [Request a payment plan for when you're unable to pay your bill on time](#)
- [FAQs](#)

Phone service

- Popular carriers like Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile can be expensive.
- Some cheaper alternatives include:
 - [Mint Mobile](#) = promo ongoing: \$45 for 3 months, unlimited data.
 - [TextNow](#) = Free unlimited call and text, free data for maps and email; Add on data options for an hour or a day. If you have wifi at home and work and very rarely need cellular data, this may be a good, very cheap option.
- Family plans may also provide additional savings, but the savings are usually only worth it at 3 or more lines

FINANCES

Banking

- Opening a checking account as soon as possible can help you receive your first paycheck faster
- Federal credit unions usually have fewer requirements to open a checking account compared to other banking institutions.
 - [University of Hawaii Federal Credit Union](#)
 - [Pearl Hawaii Federal Credit Union](#)
 - Hawaii State Federal Credit Union

Valid Identification

- Many services in the US strictly require valid identification. While your Philippine passport is generally considered a valid ID, consider applying for the following US government IDs.
 - [State ID](#)
 - [Driver License](#)
- Having a State ID or a driver license ID means you don't have to bring your passport around.

Money transfers

- G-Cash = you can set up G-Cash using your US phone number
- Western Union = if sending money from your US bank account to a Philippine bank account, there is no transfer fee, and funds are available in your recipient's bank account within 3 business days.

Healthcare

- Healthcare insurance is provided by your employer.
- It can be challenging to get an appointment when you need to consult with your doctor right away. Whenever possible, plan and request appointments at least two weeks in advance.
- Most hospitals can help you make a payment plan to pay your hospital bill. Call the billing department whenever you need help.

Transportation

- Public buses in Hawai'i, especially on O'ahu, have regular service by the hour at most bus stops.
- You can check route schedules and information on tickets and passes using these links:
 - Oahu: [TheBus](#)
 - Maui: [Maui Bus](#)
 - Big Island: [Hele-On](#)
 - Kauai: [Kauai Bus](#)
- There is no bus service in Lana'i, Moloka'i, and Ni'ihau, where the only options for transportation would be to drive, carpool, bike, or walk.
- Carshare services like Uber and Lyft can be very expensive, especially during rush hour.
- If you need a car for a day or two, cheap rentals include:
 - [Turo](#)
 - [Hui](#)

FOOD & SUPPLIES

Food assistance

- Food assistance is available to anyone who needs it. Food distributed through the Hawaii Food Bank network may include canned goods, rice, pasta, beans, and fresh produce.
- [Find a food assistance location near you.](#)

Groceries

- Corner stores and convenience stores usually have higher prices than grocery stores.
- If you can afford to get a [Costco membership](#) for \$60 a year, the discounts you can get out of it make it worth it, especially if you shop for groceries with friends and split the cost of the membership fee.

Household & Clothing

- Thrift stores are a good place to shop for clothing and household items, like cutlery and furniture

HISTORY & CULTURE

History

- Hawai'i has a network of public state and city libraries that provide great resources on the history of the Hawai'i as a colonized and occupied land.
 - When you get a State ID, use it to sign up for a free library account [here](#).
- Recommended readings:
 - [Detours: A Decolonial Guide to Hawai'i](#)
 - [From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii](#)
 - [Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands](#)

Culture

- The written Hawaiian language uses [diacritical marks](#). These marks are essential components and should not be omitted.
- Learn how to use the Hawaiian diacritics using these resources.
 - [Hawaiian diacritics on your computer](#)
 - [Hawaiian language support on Apple devices](#)
 - [Using the Swiftkey Keyboard on both Apple and Android devices](#)

IMMIGRATION SAFETY

From our friends at the Hawaii Filipinos for Truth Justice and Democracy, here's a practical guide for migrants in this highly charged political era in the US.

[Isang praktikal at personal na](#)

[GABAY SA KALIGTASAN 6/12/2025](#)

[PARA SA MGA NAG-OORGANISA AT NAGTATANGGOL](#)

[SA MGA MIGRANTE SA ILALIM NG ADMINISTRASYONG TRUMP](#)

GABAY SA KALIGTASAN

6/12/2025

PARA SA MGA NAG-OORGANISA AT NAGTATANGGOL
SA MGA MIGRANTE SA ILALIM NG ADMINISTRASYONG TRUMP

INTRODUKSYON

Nakakataktak ang panahon ngayon. Ginagamit ni Trump ang isang napakalumang batas para depensahan ang paghuli at pagpapadala ng mga tao sa mega-prison sa El Salvador. Nilalantad ang pagkatakot ng mga organisador (doxing). Ang mga Plainclothes agents ay ginagawang political prison-er ang mga aktibista sa ilalim ng "immigration enforcement". Dinadakip sila habang pinapa-kawala ang mga militar sa mga sibilyan, at ginagamit ng rehimen ang detensyon at deportasyon upang parusahan ang mga tumututol dito o nagtatanggol sa mga karapatan nila, at mga tutol sa genocide. Ang mga takila na ito ay naglalayon na patahimikin tayo at plitin tayong sumang-ayon na lamang.

Ang positibo rito, alam nating kailangan nating lumaban.

Marunong tayo maging disiplinado, depensahan ang ating mga karapatan, ipagtanggol ang isa't isa at magplano sa mga emergency. Ang gabay na ito ay para suportahan kang gawin ito. Pinaga-sama-sama at pinasi-simplihan nito ang mga mabubuting rekurso (resource) na nakapalaganap na.

Nakapaloob do dito ang mga konsepto ng pakikipagtulugan (mutual aid), community care, pag-oorganisa sa community. Ang gabay na ito ay naka-pokus sa kaligtasan ng indibidwal at mga maaaring gawin ng bawat isa.

