

to 1/3 of their fee to activity booths, they'll sometimes give you a discount.

Here's an example: A friend of ours was coming to the island, and before he even arrived, the concierge from his hotel called him *on the mainland* to ask if there was anything they could do before his arrival to make things better. Specifically, "Are there any activities you'll want to do, such as SCUBA or helicopters we can book before you get here? The good ones tend to fill up early." My friend was so impressed at their thoughtfulness, but declined, saying he knew the person who wrote this guidebook and would use that. The concierge proceeded to badmouth the book and strongly suggested he use the concierge's advice.

Telling our friend Peter what had *really* happened was like telling a kid that there's no Santa Claus. "Peter, they weren't calling you as a *courtesy* before your trip. They were salespeople, pushing activities on you and directing you *not* to the best companies, but to the ones who give them the *highest commission*. They were hoping to collect 35% or more from everything you did on the island." By the way, our explanation is also why the concierge didn't like our books. They'd rather be perceived as helpful than as salespeople. The reality is they're a bit of both.

Many of the activity booths strewn about the island are actually forums for selling timeshares. We are not taking a shot at timeshares. It's just that you need to know the real purpose of some of these booths. They can be very aggressive. (To use a wilderness analogy—they are the hunters; you are the hunted. Don't let them see the fear in your eyes.)

Selling activities is a *big* business on O'ahu, and it's important to know *why* they're pitching a certain company. If an activity booth or desk steers you to XYZ snorkel cruise and assures you that it's the best, that's fine, but consider the source.

That's usually the company that the booth gets the *biggest commission* from. We frequently check up on these booths. Some are reputable and honest, and some are outrageous liars. Few activity sellers have ever done any of the activities unless they got it *free* and the company *knew* who they were. On the other hand, we *pay* for everything we do and review activities *anonymously*. We have no stake in *any* company we recommend, and we receive *no* commission. We just want to steer you in the best direction we can. If you know who you want to go with (because you read our reviews and decided for yourself), call them direct first.

A warning: Many of the companies listed have a 24-hour cancellation policy. Even if the weather causes you (not them) to cancel the morning of your activity, *you will be charged*. Some credit card companies will back you in a dispute if the 24-hour policy is posted, some won't. Fair? Maybe not. But that's the way it is.

Consider booking by e-mail before you come. Good companies can fill up in advance, and the Web can pave the way for your activities. Our site at www.wizardpub.com has links to *every* company listed here that has a site, even the ones we recommend *against*.

If you've read many travel books, you're familiar with the grumpy and pretentious travel writer, the kind who's impressed by very little because he's so much more advanced than peons like you and me. Well, we pride ourselves in not being like that. We're all here to have fun! But having written our neighbor island books before *O'ahu Revealed*, we've noticed that, relative to the outer islands, there's a complacency that permeates many of the Waikiki activity providers. A constant influx of potential customers has bred a less-than-hungry attitude. That doesn't mean you won't get good service—it's just that you might need to look harder for it.

ATVs

These are those four-wheeled things that look like Tonka Toys on steroids with knobby tires. They're pretty fun to ride, though at press time there was only one company giving tours on these.

Kualoa Ranch (237-7321) on the windward side north of Kane'ohe has rides on their ranch. Though the ranch is pretty, they use relatively small 400cc bikes and take up to 16 riders per group, keeping them in single file. It's \$63 for a one-hour tour, \$93 for 2 hours. You must be at least 16 years old.

BOAT TOURS

See OCEAN TOURS on page 195.

BIKING

Your choices are surprisingly limited if you want a bike tour of O'ahu. We could

only find one company, **Bike Hawai'i** (734-4214). But they do a pretty good job. They have a tour of Kualoa Ranch (a gorgeous, private valley on the windward side) for \$119 that includes lunch and pickup at your hotel. You'll see more of the valley than most other tours without the repetitive drone of a bus driver/tour guide. They have decent bikes with good components, and the guides show you how to ride them properly. If you're looking for a hardcore ride, look elsewhere. This tour is strenuous, but you make lots of stops for natural and cultural interpretation. Your guide can take you on more challenging trails if you ask. They also have a downhill trip that includes a waterfall for \$105.

Boogie Boarding

Boogie boarding (riders are derisively referred to as *spongers* by surfers) is

Catching a wave isn't the biggest challenge. The hardest part is holding onto the board and your pants at the same time.

