Hawaii

Are the winter blues getting you down? Leave your troubles behind and take a break from reality -- paradise is closer than you think. In a word, Aloha.

There's never been a better time to go to Hawaii. Not only are there great package deals to be had, February through May is thought to be the best time to go. The weather is warm and sunny, the rainy season is history, and beaches aren't overrun with travelers. If you are wondering what to do when you get there, we have the goods to help you get the most out of your Polynesian adventure.

Who doesn't think of hitting the beach when pondering the luscious temptations of Hawaii? If your sojourn begins in Honolulu, Waikiki Beach is a great place to get your first taste of Hawaii's tropical splendor. One of the most famous beaches in the world, Waikiki consists of a two mile stretch of white sand situated right next to hotels and tourist facilities. Whether you want to work on the tan you've lost while hibernating indoors, or try your hand at surfing, boogie-boarding, or snorkeling, Waikiki is the ticket.

Maybe quiet seclusion on a remote, idyllic beach is what you have in mind. If so, Hideaway Beach is one of Hawaii's best-kept secrets. Located on Kauai's lush north shore, it's possible to have this hidden gem all to yourself, save for the occasional passing turtle. Getting to Hideaway Beach takes some doing, but no one said paradise was going to be easy. Find the Princeville Hotel in the town of Princeville, and look for the trail head at the far corner of the hotel's public parking lot. After taking in the unforgettable view, carefully descend down the trail where turquoise water, coral reefs, and nary another living soul await you.

If snorkeling is your bag, think big -- as in Hawaii's Big Island, which is home to some of Hawaii's most breathtaking underwater treasures. Discover what lies beneath, including coral reefs, dolphins, an eye-popping assortment of colorful fish, and even Manta Rays. Kahaluu Beach Park, located in the middle of Kona, is easily accessible and ideal for first time snorkelers and small children. Experts say the crown jewel, however, is Captain Cook Monument of Kelakeau Bay, which is accessible only by rented kayak or commercial catamaran tour.

Catching waves is the sport du jour on Oahu's north shore, which features some of the world's best surfing. Uniquely situated to attract ocean swells from storms in the north Pacific, the north shore of Oahu draws surfers from around the globe, including professionals who surf in competitions here.

Hookipa Beach, on Maui's north shore, lays claim to the title of windsurfing capital of the world. Too dangerous for beginners, waves at Hookipa can reach 30 feet from top to bottom, making it a great place for outrageous aerial maneuvers, as well as second-to-none spectating.

Last but not least, what would a visit to the Islands be without donning a lei and shaking your hips in a Hawaiian luau? If it's authenticity you're after, the Luau at the Polynesian Cultural Center is considered a cut above the rest. Situated on Oahu near Waikiki, the luau site comes complete with a 15-foot high waterfall leading into a tropical lagoon, as well as an "imu" (Hawaiian word for underground oven) for the traditional pig roast.

These are but a few of the Polynesian pleasures at your beck and call in Hawaii. Treat yourself to the opportunity to discover more. Aloha.