



Six Months in the Sandwich Islands: Among Hawaii's Palm Groves, Coral Reefs and Volcanoes

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This Victorian era travel book sold out in England in 1875, two years after author Isabella Bird made her Meticulously observed journey through Hawaii. In captivating prose, she recounted her adventures on these mountainous islands, cleft by deep chasms and ravines of cool shadow and entrancing green.

Six Months in the Sandwich Islands: Among Hawaii's Palm Groves, Coral Reefs and Volcanoes Details

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From Reader Review Six Months in the Sandwich Islands: Among Hawaii's Palm Groves, Coral Reefs and Volcanoes for online ebook

Rachel says

This is a real insight into the Hawaiian Islands and what they were like before real modernisation, globalization and tourism hit them. It displays and describe the different customs and traditions with eloquence and without mockery (as many of the travels in this time period do). It shows the authors genuine interest in the islands and its inhabitants - both native and immigrant. It was interesting to read about how the different islands and how they compared in their levels of development in relation to the amounts of investment and the landscape.

Single female travellers were not so common during the Victorian Era so it was interesting to see Isabella Bird viewpoint on this. She doesn't shy away from hiding things either and the book goes through both her positives and negatives - bad weather, illness, almost having her horse drown. It is an excellent comparison to looking at the modern day Hawaiian Islands.

Sylvester says

Isabella, Isabella, who would have thought? You beat us hands down - in your long skirts and in your early 40's - what an intrepid traveler you were! So enthusiastic, especially about volcanoes (letting the soles of your shoes melt like that, really! and your early morning worship at the altar of lava - you would do anything, wouldn't you, to experience these thrills!). I loved this book. The trip on horseback from Hilo through the gorges to Waipio was incredible, and the description of entering the harbour at Hilo - what I would do to have seen that beauty! What a paradise! Isabella is lavish with her descriptions, and had obviously fallen in love with the generous hospitality of the Hawaiians - this is back when there was only one hotel in Honolulu, and none in Hilo (the locals would greet the boat from Oahu and take home its passengers as guests!). Also the attitude of the people towards the lepers living among them was very striking. This book is well worth reading for several reasons - for her descriptions, for her grit and adventurousness, for the almost unbelievable Hawaiian way of life that she records. I am no ends curious about her other travels and will be reading more for sure.

Susan Ferguson says

This has been quite interesting so far. Isabella Bird was headed to California from New Zealand in 1873, when the leaky steamboat she and her fellow passengers had boarded nearly sank. When they stopped at Hawaii, then an independent country, most of them disembarked. She had stopped over to help a friend who's son had fallen ill on board ship. She ended up spending 6 months on the islands because she found the air and water so appealing. She was there from January through August. She was a Victorian lady born in 1831, who had a real zest for adventure abroad, but seemed to be quite prim and proper at home.

She is extremely intrepid at exploring new places - even going on her own - without even a guide. She visits the volcanoes, the various islands, visits at the plantations and with the missionaries. She buys horses to ride at the different islands and rides astride like the native women do. She goes with a travelling scientist to visit

Mauna Loa (?) which is flaring up ever brighter. She keeps telling those who say she can't go that she won't, but when she gets the chance, she jumps at it and goes, even wandering down as close as she can get to the fire pits.

Beth Cato says

Works from the 19th century can be difficult to read due to dense, repetitive prose and the repulsive attitudes of the time. Bird is a woman of her period, yes, and her biases are pretty clear up front, but she is a complex, fascinating person who would be remarkable even in our time. This is a woman who, because of her "nervous condition," was advised to indulge in open air travel. Therefore, she traveled around the world by herself multiple times. Her six months in the Sandwich Island (aka Hawaii) immediately followed an adventure in New Zealand. I found her prose surprisingly easy to read and quite enjoyable. She is a white woman of privilege, yes, but her outlook on the "heathen natives" evolves substantially in her time on the islands. She falls in love with the place and the people, and trusts them absolutely. She shocks people wherever she goes. She's a white woman, traveling by herself most of the time, sitting astride on a Mexican saddle and riding through absolute wilderness of the Big Island in 1871. She seizes various opportunities--things I sure wouldn't do. A man she just met invites her to climb up Mauna Loa to see the eruption? Off she goes! She is not averse to sleeping on the ground with her saddle as her pillow. Bird learns passable Hawaiian and eats as the locals do, mastering two-finger poi and appreciating whatever her hosts will share (though she accepts the fleas grudgingly).

For my research purposes, her descriptions of Hilo and Kilauea are fabulous. She obviously loves plant life, and goes into detail about the plants around her, mentioning the Latin names if she can.

Bird's book is in public domain and available from various small publishers. I wish my copy had been typeset a bit differently, but it didn't strain my eyes and the binding is fine. I wouldn't mind reading more of Bird's books--she was quite a bestseller in the late 19th century--as she has really gained my respect.

Jeff says

I was lucky enough to spend a week on Hawai'i recently and encountered several quotes from Isabella Bird, an English travel writer who spent 6 months on the Hawai'ian islands (Sandwich Islands to the Brits at the time) back in 1873. I had never heard of her before, but picked up the book in a state park gift shop. I'm glad I did. She was a fascinating and incredibly adventurous person, and brave, and wonderfully meticulous in her observations. Sometimes a bit too much so - I don't need to know the name of every plant in every valley. But usually it pays off. There is, perhaps unavoidably, a certain amount of looking down on the darker skin tones and primitive culture, but less than one might expect given the time. I imagine Ms. Bird was quite progressive for the era, and she does have an abundance of respect and admiration for many aspects of Hawai'ian culture. And for volcano fans - she climbed Kilauea when Hale-mau-mau crater was a bubbling, raging lake of lava and she spends glorious pages describing it in great detail. Definitely a good read for anyone who loves Hawai'i.

Kathy says

This was one of Ms. Bird's earliest traveling adventures--and she is truly amazing. She travels because she claims to be in poor health, but honestly, she tackles adventures no invalid would dare. Even many "healthy" folk would find her itinerary daunting. She fords nearly impossible raging rivers on horse-back, tackles the heights of Mauna Loa (without getting "mountain fever"), sleeps in bitter cold huts, endures sweltering heat, all while writing lovely Victorian prose about the beauties about her, including botanical names for all she sees. Her descriptions of Kiluea and the other volcanoes she visits are amazing. This book does get a bit tedious at times with all the description, and it does go on and on, but it is a fascinating look at the Hawaiian Islands in the late 1800's. I had no idea people rode horses so much there, nor did I realize that the ancient Hawaiians practiced human sacrifice.

Bobbesse says

Amusing and insightful accounts of a quite independent adventure seeking women in the 19th century. She traveled to and throughout the Hawaiian islands experiencing situations which might challenge us modern travelers. The book is a collection of letters and is filled with lengthy prose written with a subtle but wonderful sense of sarcasm describing her experiences.

Kathy says

This is a fascinating look at the islands from the perspective of a woman traveling alone in the 1870s and who was absolutely fearless! What great adventures she experienced and all these years later her words are so very full of wonderful descriptions of the islands in all their majesty, which are thankfully still mostly intact. The occasional biases of the generation are easily forgiven and her daring adventures would rival any even by today's standards.

Jennifer says

This author was an amazing independent traveler for her times. One of my favorite parts is her description of the surfers! She has a few other books, one that I also read about her time in the Rocky Mtns, especially interesting to anyone who lives/ed on front range of Colorado. Grad school prof. introduced me to her work for a non-fiction "outdoor/environmental" writing class.

Beverly Atkinson says

I read the first several chapters and decided that this is not the time for me to finish "Six months," if at all. I was much more interested in other writings by Isabella Bird. And other books of Hawaii were much more engaging, especially "Moloka'i" (a novel by Alan Brennert) and other books that I read prior to an Elderhostel (former name) visiting five islands to learn geology, biology, and culture. Any other 19c book on the Sandwich Islands that I read will need to show sense of humor, such as Mark Twain's "Mark Twain in

Hawaii: Roughing It in the Sandwich Islands, Hawaii in the 1860's."

itpdx says

Recommended in Book Lust To Go: Recommended Reading for Travelers, Vagabonds, and Dreamers for Hawaii. The author, a single 40-something English woman, arrived in Hawaii in 1873 on a ship that barely made it from New Zealand. She was on her way to the US, but was way-laid by the beauty and friendliness of the islands and stayed for almost seven months. She was very adventurous-quickly accepting the local custom of women riding horses astride as practical. She visited all the major islands and her lively descriptions of her travels, give a snapshot of Hawaii at this time. This includes customs of the native Hawaiians--from the court in Honolulu to those tucked away in remote valleys who rarely see haole (and have to scramble to put on clothes when she appears). She is much more knowledgeable about tropical flora than I am and I had a tendency to skim her paragraphs of description of the local plants.

the gift says

i surprised myself by so enjoying this series of descriptive letters home (with photos!), from a woman traveling for her health in 1872, from edinburgh to warmer climes. remarkable adventures, of its times, even now. if you can ignore her typical 'civilized', 'christian' prejudices, in everything from sugar plantations, missionaries, lack of clothes (!), 'sensuousness', 'heatheness', this is an interesting view of life in hawai'i about a hundred years after european contact from a privileged (white woman) visitor point of view...

this is old hawai'i, a brief monarchy, before annexation by the states, before it became world-famous and modernized. locals are often unnamed, often described as beautiful, as all having nice teeth. she travels into valleys by perilous cliffs, travels into active volcanoes and dead volcano craters, loves hilo, less honolulu, so travels mostly on the big island. when she visits kaua'i she does visit hanalei bay- but somehow manages not to see waimea canyon (!). generally gives a good idea of 'aloha' of hawaiian life, of kindness, openness, generosity...

she was here only six months but saw and did a lot. she is able to see the bad as well as good effects of europeans on the islands, mostly sailors corrupting innocence, missionaries saving souls. i recognize many of the places, i recognize many of the attitudes, i am on vacation here in waimea and found this as one of mom's books. town library is small so i brought six books... but this was unplanned. beautiful remembrances. if you like long descriptive wanderings, if you like to know exactly what this and this and the other plant is...

Robin says

This early Hawaiian travelogue is unique for several reasons. It's a first edition, published in 1875, and the first book by an author who became a well-known travel writer. Ms. Bird (later Bishop), unlike most British women in her day, chose to travel alone and to mix freely with people of different cultures. She adopted some foreign habits considered shocking by her own society, for example riding horses astride like native Hawaiian women rather than sidesaddle like a proper British woman. Many of her adventures, particularly those involving volcanoes, seem like "extreme sports" by modern standards. In fact, even the typical travel by ship that she describes, sharing bunk areas with strangers and various vermin, frequently inundated by

rain and seawater, make modern travel inconveniences pale in comparison.

Ms. Bird writes in a delightfully candid and humorous way. The book is actually a collection of letters sent to her sister while in residence in Hawaii, so it has an informal and personal tone. She's an educated woman and writes of botanical and geological excursions: alone, with native guides, and with European male contemporaries. Through her letters, we see she is a hardy, intelligent, and companionable asset to these expeditions. Her extensive descriptions of lava pools and flows at the top of various volcanoes are educational and fascinating. She approaches close enough to burn shoes and gloves, and in some cases eyebrows and eyelashes, and at times can barely breathe. Even her descriptions of the less dangerous forays contain insightful details about landscape, horsemanship, vegetation, and Hawaiian culture. And if you've visited towns on the Big Island, Maui, or Kauai, her descriptions of them in 1875 are fun to ponder. She also includes a helpful fold-out map to help us locate the areas that she describes.

The era in which Ms. Bird writes is post-missionary, and before the US subjugation of Hawaii. Native Hawaiians, now Christians, still ruled Hawaii. However, the stage is set, with many Americans, British, and other Europeans living in Hawaii and native populations dropping off drastically during the past two generations (the author gives these figures in a chart at the end of the book). Like most Brits, Ms. Bird advocates self-rule by Hawaiians, but sees hints of the inevitability of the American takeover. She makes many candid political comments throughout the book. Her willingness to state her opinion on such matters adds an editorial dimension to the book.

Anyone who has visited Hawaii and is interested in its history or geology will enjoy this book. Women who often travel alone will enjoy it too.

Debby says

I read Isabella Bird's book, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, several years ago. Now that I'm spending a lot of time in Hawaii, I was very interested in hearing her impressions of the islands in the 1860's. While her view of most of the "natives" is far from enlightened, the descriptions of her travel on horseback around the islands are fascinating. She was intrepid by today's standards, not just by the standards of her day.

Janet says

Here descriptions of volcanic activity are so vivid I can picture Mauna Loa erupting. I very much enjoyed reading about her adventures riding through the wilds of 19th century Hawaii. The chapters at the end on the economy and history of Hawaii were a little disappointing after all the exciting chapters about her adventures. Overall a great read though.
