

Honu Swim-Along

A Hawaiian adventure includes an up-close-and-personal encounter with one particular green sea turtle.

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Swimmers, scuba divers and snorkelers in the coastal waters surrounding the Hawaiian Islands commonly encounter green sea turtles. This honu broke the water's surface every couple of minutes for a fresh gulp of air.

Hello readers! I am back after an extended (and much-needed) vacation. A splendid wedding and honeymoon in Hawaii, to be exact. Once the vows were taken and our family and friends departed for home, our attention turned from what was happening on land to what could be found underwater.

Like many reef enthusiasts, my husband and I love snorkeling. So far, I've only had the pleasure of snorkeling in a few Caribbean spots (Saint Thomas, Grand Cayman, Antigua, Tortola and Bonaire). Experiences that ranged from decent to outstanding. Having never snorkeled in Hawaii, I was really looking forward to the beautiful creatures and reefs we might see on this trip, and I was not disappointed!

Over the next few weeks I promise to indulge you with images of the Hawaiian reef inhabitants, but I really must dedicate this first post-Hawaii post to a creature we will never keep in our tanks, what the Hawaiians call the honu, or the green sea turtle.

I've seen sea turtles before from a distance while snorkeling in the Caribbean, but never so close as I came in Hawaii. I remember looking up as I cruised along the reef and there it was, right in front of me, gliding peacefully through the water. I held my breath and froze, worried the slightest sound or movement would scare it away. The big turtle just swam right past me, looking for more seaweed to eat.

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It was such a rush to be so close to this large, graceful animal, watching it go about its business of eating, eating and more eating. It broke the surface every few minutes to breathe, poking its head above the water and exhaling with a sound that reminded me of a dolphin or whale, then opening its mouth for a big gulp of air before descending once again.

I swam along at some distance from it for a while, being mindful not to get so close as to make the turtle nervous or scared. It was unfazed by my presence, though, and at one point it even swam right up to my face. Again, I held my breath and froze as our eyes met, not 12 inches apart, each of us contemplating the curious creature looking back. My heart swelled with the beauty of this gift, a sea turtle choosing to swim beside me. After a few unforgettable moments, the turtle changed direction and slowly swam away. Not surprisingly, I fell in love with the honu. I was lucky enough to see many more sea turtles during our Hawaii trip, but I'll never forget that one magical moment.

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