

# The Aloha Spirit: Hawaiian Greeting with Deeper Meaning

Taking a trip to Hawaii, you'll hear "Aloha!" throughout your visit. But this word carries a much deeper meaning than perhaps you'd think. Far from the popular notion that "aloha" is just a word used to express a friendly greeting or a farewell, "aloha" has several meanings, to be used in a variety of different contexts. Dig deeper into the word and you'll find that the word embodies the aloha spirit and is full of spiritual meaning that about the Hawaiian culture and way of life.

## Culture and Etymology

The origins of this word stretch as far back as the 18th century. Official sources and research tell us that "aloha" derived from the word "qarofa", meaning "love" in a Proto-Polynesian language. You can combine "aloha" in tandem with other Hawaiian words to bring about different meanings, for instance, to address the time of day: "Aloha kakahiaka" good morning; "Aloha auinala," good afternoon; and "Aloha ahiahi," good evening. If it's your first time on the island, understanding the use of "aloha" can be a challenge at times. Make sure you pay attention to the intonation and any contextual clues surrounding it to gauge the meaning.

If you deconstruct the word "aloha", its meaning in Hawaiian culture soon becomes clear. Let's take a moment to consider some of the different parts of Hawaiian language that make up the word:

- "Alo," meaning "presence"
- "oha," meaning "to receive friendship"
- "ha," meaning "life" or "breath"

It's no wonder that "aloha" denotes a positive attitude and acts of kindness. It's no mystery either as to why the cool and laid back ways of Hawaii exist or why Hawaiians pride themselves in the "Aloha Spirit."

## The Aloha Spirit

The word "aloha" has its roots firmly grounded in the heart of Hawaiian culture. Talk of "The Aloha Spirit" and "The Way of Aloha" shows that the word points to a relaxed lifestyle and unique way of life. These concepts reference to what Hawaiians strive for in life: peace, unity, humility and kindness. Writers throughout Hawaiian culture have interpreted this code of ethics and the important lessons of the spirit have been passed down through many generations. The Aloha Spirit is even considered a state "law." This is not in any judicial sense; you won't get arrested for breach of "aloha." But it serves as a reminder for government representatives of how best to

perform their duties. Citizens should be regarded with the utmost respect and care as per the “law” of “aloha.” Reminders of this are everywhere. Just look around and you’ll see “aloha state” on Hawaiian number plates.

Who hasn’t heard of the “Aloha shirt”? It’s clear that “aloha” has a lot of history but the “Aloha Spirit” has lived on throughout the ages to become a very much present part of contemporary Hawaiian culture and society. In fact, the “Aloha Shirt” (or more commonly referred to as the Hawaiian Shirt) has been around since 1935 when it was introduced by tailor Ellery Chun to suit a variety of formal and informal situations.

### **The Aloha Spirit: Keep the Concept Alive**

While it’s certainly true that Hawaiians use “aloha” both when greeting somebody and saying goodbye, it’s not always to be taken literally. Most feel that when they come to Hawaii they need to say “aloha” each and every time they meet another person or part company. Yet many Hawaiians feel that this is not in the true spirit of things. First and foremost, aloha should come from the heart as a genuine reflection of why you’re happy to see someone. We needn’t shrug “aloha” to the man who’s delivering our mail in the morning, or worse, use it forcefully when we’re in a foul mood. It is most appreciated to keep the word’s meaning alive by saying “aloha” when one means it, so always be mindful of the concept and its use. Don’t just scream “ALOHA!” boisterously at a surfer you’re keen to acknowledge in the distance.

So the next time you’re traveling to the islands of Hawaii, hold the meaning of “Aloha” close to your heart and help preserve its cultural use. Be sure to share its true meaning with others and let’s see that the Spirit of Aloha remains untouched for many years to come.

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