

The History of Renaissance Ilikai Waikiki Hotel

Renaissance Ilikai Waikiki Hotel opened in 1964 as Hawaii's first high-rise, luxury hotel.

The year was 1959 and Hawaii became the 50th state of the United States. It was in this year, at age 57, Chinn Ho, a self-made multimillionaire, had a vision to add a contemporary classic to Waikiki—The Ilikai, a landmark hotel and residential condominium at the gateway to Waikiki.

Born in Hawai'i in 1903 (died in 1987), Chinn Ho spent his early years working in his family's rice fields, within a stone's throw of the land he would later develop.

Revealing entrepreneurial skill even as a child selling kiawe (mesquite) beans at 15 cents a bag, Ho parlayed his talents into a variety of businesses—always approaching new opportunities with energy and enthusiasm.

He began his rise to fortune at a time when Asians were excluded from plantation management, corporate boardroom and any prestigious clubs. His adult career began as a messenger for Dean Witter, but he developed into a banker and a stock-broker. From 1961 to 1971, he owned the Hawai'i newspaper, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin—a paper that he once peddled on the streets in Honolulu. He became a major force in the business community as president of Capital Investment Corporation. Ho was welcomed as the first Asian-American president of the Honolulu Stock Exchange and was first to sit on the board of one Hawaii's "Big Five" corporations, Theo H. Davies & Co.

The Hawai'i developer raised \$27 million to bring to life The Ilikai—a dream that became a reality in 1961 when the project broke ground. The monkeypod tree at the poolside courtyard was planted at the time of the groundbreaking ceremony by Ho and world famous Hawaiian surfer Duke Kahanomoku. Kahanomoku, a five-time Olympic medallist, and Ho were McKinley High School classmates and lifelong friends.

On February 29, 1964, Chinn Ho forever changed the landscape of Waikiki when **The Ilikai (translated in Hawaiian as "surface of the sea")** opened its doors as Hawaii's first high-rise luxury resort. Overlooking the recently expanded Waikiki Yacht Harbor with views of the Pacific Ocean, the project included 1,050 guest rooms and condominium apartments.



Designed by architect, John Graham, whose credits include Seattle's famous Space Needle. The three-winged Y-shaped Ilikai was an architectural landmark for Waikiki. Thirty stories high and standing at the entrance to Waikiki, it was one of Hawaii's tallest high-rise buildings in 1964. Its glass elevator, Hawaii's very first, was one of the highest-reaching in the world.

The Ilikai's angular lines, its innovative use of pre-cast, pre-stressed concrete, as well as its white and turquoise façade, defined it as distinctive for its time as were its landmark predecessors—the Victorian-era Moana Hotel and the Mission-style Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

The Ilikai's landmark status was further enhanced when Hawaii Five-O featured the hotel in its dramatic opening sequence—a sweeping panoramic shot of Jack Lord as Steve McGarrett standing on his Ilikai penthouse balcony surveying Waikiki with aerial views of the Pacific Ocean and Diamond Head. This television hit series featured a character, also a developer, named after the real life Chinn Ho. Other television series chose The Ilikai for episodes such as Magnum P.I., Raven, and Jake and the Fatman.

In the 1960s, rates for the new luxury hotel were \$12 per night for mountain-view accommodations and \$27 for prime oceanfront guest rooms. One- and two-bedroom suites with full kitchens were priced at \$35 to \$100 per night. Facilities included four restaurants, with the Top of the I (now Sarento's) offering sweeping views from Diamond Head to the distant Wai'anae Mountain Range.

Celebrity guests over the years have included presidents, ambassadors, Olympic athletes and entertainers. Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Gerald Ford have been Ilikai guests, as have Henry Winkler, Dolly Parton, Mickey Mantle, Elvis Presley and Lucille Ball.

Luminaries of Hawaii's entertainment scene have performed at The Ilikai, including Hilo Hattie, Palani Vaughn, Gabby Pahinui, Peter Moon and the Brothers Cazimero, establishing a top rank reputation for Ilikai venues like the legendary Canoe House, which opened in 1966 as one of Honolulu's most popular night spots. The location is now the site of the hotel's wedding chapel.

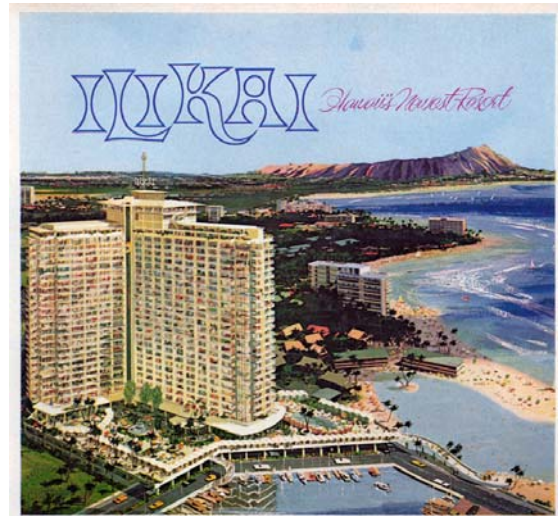
The hotel's success quickly led to plans for a \$10-million expansion that saw the addition of the elegant Pacific Ballroom. In 1974, having fulfilled his dream, Chinn Ho sold the property for \$35 million. In 2000, the hotel was reflagged as the Renaissance Ilikai Waikiki Hotel, a franchise of Marriott and managed by Interstate Hotels.

Nearly 40 years since its opening, Renaissance Ilikai Waikiki Hotel celebrated the beginning of a new era in 2002. Ho's \$27-million development received more than \$27 million in enhancements, completed in March 2002. A celebration of the renovation completion and dedication of a Wyland whale art sculpture, which graces the hotel entrance, took place on March 6, 2002.

Kalia: The Waikiki Area Where Renaissance Ilikai Waikiki Hotel Now Stands

Today's Renaissance Ilikai Waikiki Hotel is linked to a period when coconut palms towered over thatched hale (houses) and fishponds were built for Oahu's highest chiefs.

Kalia, the Hawaiian community where The Ilikai resides, was enriched by its beach-lined contact with the sea and the free-flowing waters of the Piinaio Stream. Fed by the rains falling over the lush velvet Ko'olau Mountains, the stream wove a braided course through Kalia's coastal wetlands, creating a broad, fan-shaped delta.



The Hawaiians who first settled in Kalia between the 12th and 14th centuries redesigned the landscape, draining wetlands and building the walls and irrigation channels that made the area a maze of fishponds linked by narrow footpaths. Most of these fishponds were royal preserves. It was in the 1450s that the legendary ruling chief of Oahu, Mailikukahi, established Waikiki as the royal capital of his island kingdom. There was much to justify the selection of Waikiki and Kalia as a gathering place of the high-born. Its reef-sheltered waters provided easy access to the open sea—perfect for harvesting seaweed, as well as reef and deepwater fishing.

By the start of the 20th century, Hawaii's political and economic ties to the United States created a new dynamic society. While native Hawaiian families remained in Kalia, they were now neighbors to families such as the Enas and Paoas, as well as famed Olympic swimmer and renowned surfer Duke Kahanamoku's family line. Hawaiians shared Kalia with the Hobrons, Cassidys, and Bickertons who built Victorian mansions on the coast.

While Kalia retained the pace and feel of a tightly knit, local community, the 20th century saw the opening of some of Waikiki's first guesthouses and small hotels for vacationers making the five-day cruise from California.

The 1920s brought even more dramatic changes to Polynesian Waikiki, as more wetlands were drained and Kalia's fishponds and taro patches were removed. In their place a new Waikiki would evolve, creating new opportunities for development.

Commercial jets made Hawaii more accessible to travelers, marking the beginning of a new era for Waikiki—as it transformed from a sleepy neighborhood to one of the most popular travel destinations in the world.