

TRAVEL | HAWAII

## This unique Hawaii attraction starts in a Waikiki parking garage

By **Christine Hitt**, *Hawaii Contributing Editor*

May 2, 2025



Right on Kuhio Avenue in Waikiki, the Lucoral Museum is hidden in plain sight.

Christine Hitt/SFGATE



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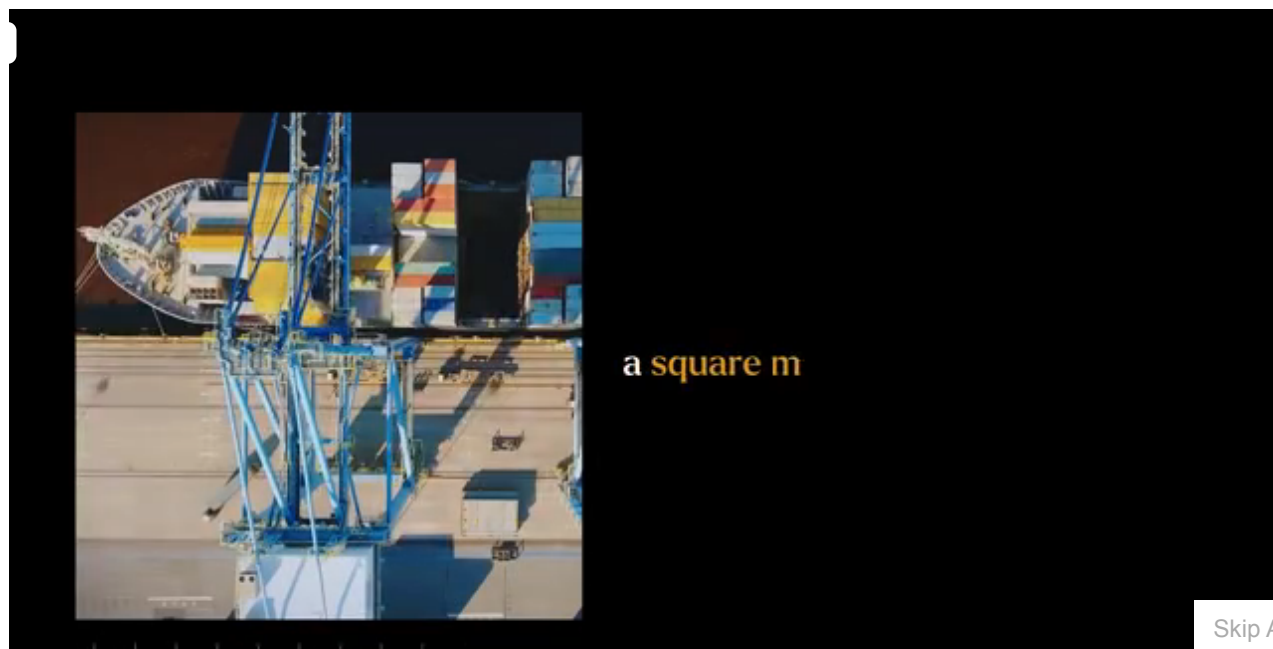
This unique Hawaii attraction starts in a Waikiki parking garage

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I didn't even know it was there, though I've walked by it multiple times, as it looks like a three-story apartment building. But on Kuhio Avenue in Waikiki, there's a little museum right on the main street that you get to by walking through a parking garage.



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As I cross Kuhio Avenue, I watch people walk past it, turning their heads inquisitively toward the garage, trying to determine what it is. There is a small "Lucoral Museum" sign above the entrance, but it doesn't explain what's there.

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Inside the garage, coral, pearl and gemstone jewelry are displayed on tables for sale. Behind it, Flora Lu, the president and jewelry designer of Lucoral Museum, is stringing jewelry. She's friendly, gives me a big smile and her face lights up, like from someone you haven't seen in years.

The free museum, which is only open on weekdays, is family owned for three generations and located on the second floor of the building, she says. It's filled with gemstones, rocks, fossils and statues. Lu is of the second generation.



Flora Lu is a second-generation owner and jewelry designer of the Lucoral Museum.  
Courtesy Flora Lu

"In '82, we moved here from Taiwan, then we don't see any gemstone museum in Hawaii," Flora Lu tells SFGATE. "Any other big city, they always have a nature museum, but we don't have in Hawaii. So we start to develop the idea to share with Hawaii community about gemstones." The museum name, Lucoral, is a combination of the family name Lu with coral.

Lu is from the Penghu (or Pescadores) Islands, an archipelago of 90 islands between China and Taiwan, and is one of Taiwan's counties. She comes from a large family with 10 siblings, and her dad was a fisherman until a destructive typhoon caused the family to shift to making jewelry.

"A lot of seafood, so leftover shell, we can create into a piece of jewelry," Lu said. "That's how we started." The business grew as a jewelry wholesaler, but then the family opened the museum to the public in 1990. Lu tells me local classrooms visit the museum often, too.

I walk to the elevator and take it to the second floor. Once inside, another woman gets up from her chair, where she was also stringing jewelry, and welcomes me inside. As I watch her walk around to turn all the lights and fans on in the museum, it appears that I'm the first guest of the day. Then she leaves me to walk through it on my own with a paper information sheet describing some of the items.

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The first room featured various examples of coral and carved jade statues.  
Christine Hitt/SFGATE

The museum takes up the entire floor, connected by hallways leading into various rooms. It starts with writings and paintings by Lu's mother, Lu Hong Kui-Su, to whom the museum is dedicated. Some of them are hung up, while others are leaning against the wall. "She came to Hawaii in her 60s (1977) and learned to paint and to write (in Taiwan, women in her generation often did not learn how to write)," the paper explained.

The next room is full of different types of coral in glass cases, along with many impressive sculptures and decorative pieces carved into jade. There's also a very large, carved rose quartz, weighing 2,000 pounds.

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The giant clam shell donated by the Waikiki Aquarium. Behind it are examples of black coral.  
Christine Hitt/SFGATE

The air is musty and the items could use more signs describing what they are. It feels like a cross between an antique store and a family member's attic. However, I'm already finding it to be highly unique compared to other museums on the island, due to its focus on gems and minerals. I continue into the next hallway, which has been designed to look like a cave, as it leads to the Mining Room, where I first find an exhibit of black coral, the state's official gemstone. Next to it is a giant clam shell, donated to the museum by the Waikiki Aquarium.

Other Hawaii exhibits include an endangered native birds and plants display and one on Hawaiian calcite, presented by the Rock and Mineral Society of Hawaii. Calcite is a mineral, and various stalactites and calcite crystals from a long-gone Hawaii cave are displayed as examples.

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The Lucoral Museum's dinosaur egg is 145 million years old.  
Christine Hitt/SFGATE

The dinosaur egg catches me by surprise. It's 145 million years old and was found in Northern China.

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"My brother give to us," Lu tells me later when I ask how the museum acquired it. "At that time, it was easy, right, more than 40 years ago."

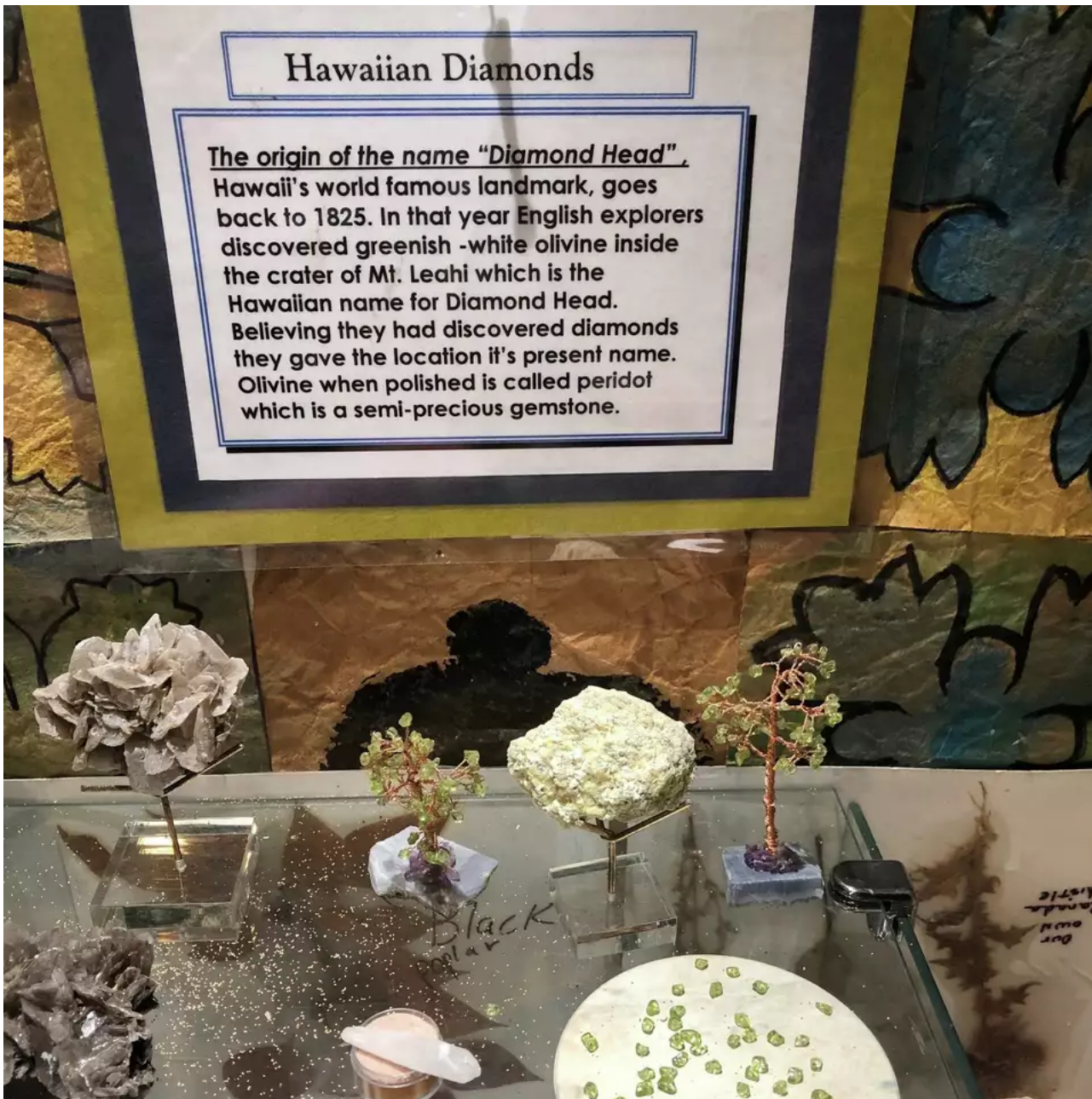


Beside it are fossilized fish and turtle shell fossils.

Continuing, the Hawaiian Diamonds exhibit interests me. "The origin of the name 'Diamond Head,' Hawaii's famous landmark, goes back to 1925," a placard says. "In that year, English explorers discovered greenish-white olivine inside the crater of Mt. Leahi, which is the Hawaiian name for Diamond Head." Below the sign are examples of olivine from its raw form to processed and cleaned little sparkling green gems.

The next room, the International Room, holds different pearls and corals. "Oysters (responsible for the creation of pearls) need clean water to grow and cultivating them requires attention to the quality of the waters in the surrounding areas," my information sheet explains.

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The display of Hawaii's "diamonds," features the gemstone olivine.  
Christine Hitt/SFGATE

The display of Hawaiian pearls is very informative, with shells and newspaper clippings referring to the pearls found at one time in Pearl Harbor. There's also a little blue box that says, "Pearl from Pearl Harbor," and there's nothing in it. The harbor used to be home to pearl-bearing oysters until around 1840, when it declined due to overharvesting and development of the harbor.

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“None of the world’s great museums, including the Bishop, Smithsonian, British, Hermitage or American Museum of Natural History have a single pearl in their collections,” a sign above the display says.

The tour takes me only about 20 minutes, and although I’ve never been into rocks or gems, I found it to be interesting and did take away knowledge of Hawaii’s gems I didn’t have before going in. It ends in a shop where there are many strands of jewelry for sale. After browsing a bit, I walk back to the garage to talk more with Lu, learning the different meanings of the gemstones. Rose quartz is for love, and turquoise is for protection, she explains. Now, with a better appreciation for the jewelry, I buy a string of purple pearls for \$20 before I leave the garage.

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May 2, 2025



**Christine Hitt**

HAWAII CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



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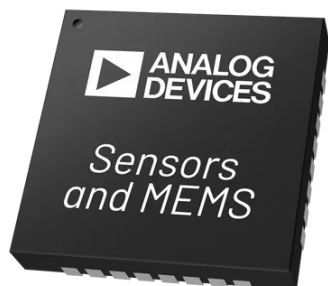
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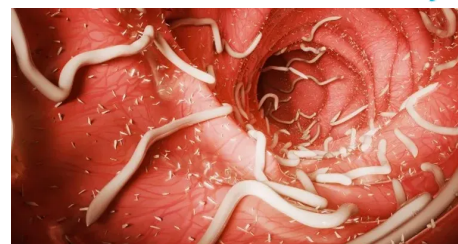
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