INTRODUCTION

RUNNING ON O'AHU  O'ahu is a terrific place to run and train. The island is blessed with a moderate tropical climate that varies little throughout the year. The months of December through February are the island’s rainy season, and the average high temperature is 78 degrees (25˚C). August and September tend to be the hottest months, when the cooling trade winds slow, and the heat and humidity builds. During this period, the average high temperature is 87 degrees (29˚C) with the potential for 90-plus percent humidity. During the hottest months, try to schedule your runs in the early morning or after sundown. Other options would be to schedule more trail runs or select higher elevations to avoid the excessive heat. Visitors to the islands will notice an increase in humidity year-round, but the prevailing trade winds usually provide refreshing off-shore breezes to make it manageable.

The windward side of O'ahu faces the prevailing trade winds and, as a result, is normally breezier and cooler than the leeward side of the island. The windward side is also much wetter. The razor-sharp Ko'olau Mountain Range splits the island in two. When the trade winds blow in off the ocean and run into the vertical cliffs of the Ko'olau, the wind is forced upward. The heavy moisture-laden clouds then build up on the ridgeline and dump a high volume of precipitation on and around the mountains.

Periodically, throughout the year, the winds will shift from the easterly trades and come in from the southwest. The southwesterly winds, also known as “Kona winds,” bring in warm, moist air from the south, but they also bring in sulfur fumes from the active volcanoes on the Big Island of Hawai‘i. Kona conditions cause a smoggy build-up, known as “vog” (volcanic smog). If you have allergies or suffer from respiratory ailments, you should avoid excessive activities during Kona wind periods.

When running in any tropical climate, be sure to take in fluids before, during, and after your run. The public parks on O‘ahu offer rest rooms and water fountains, and an abundance of 24-hour mini-marts offer a wide selection of water and sports drinks in almost every neighborhood. Plus, the tropical sun in Hawai‘i is quite strong.
The cooling trade winds can mask the burning effect, so be sure to use a waterproof sunblock while you are running to avoid burning.

O'ahu is the most heavily populated island in the Hawaiian chain, with approximately 876,000 people. In addition to the resident population, O'ahu is also the home for 34,000 active military and 50,000 military dependents, not to mention an average of 400,000 visitors a year. Most of O'ahu’s residents are concentrated in the Honolulu and central O'ahu regions. Pearl City and 'Aiea are also quite congested areas with very heavy traffic and few safe running routes. One major problem faced by runners on O'ahu is the fact that close to 800,000 registered vehicles are on the island, with a limited number of roads. This combination results in congested roadways, so the search for safe and secluded running routes can be a challenge.

Despite some crowded neighborhoods and traffic jams, O'ahu is a wonderful place to enjoy the outdoors, and much of the population is active and healthy. Road races, triathlons, bike events, and a wide range of ocean competitions are extremely well attended and available on a weekly basis throughout the entire year. As a result, O'ahu boasts the highest life expectancy in the country.

**RUNNING ON TRAILS** Trail-running provides a great change of pace from running on the roads and also helps to develop and strengthen many of the smaller muscles and tendons in your legs. Trails offer softer surfaces, reducing the pounding on your legs. Runners often prefer trail-running as a way to escape the crowds, noise, and heavy traffic. Most of O'ahu’s many trails are through dense forests, which offer a welcome break from the harsh summer sun.

However, you should choose your trails carefully. Some of the trails are simply not conducive to running, whether it is because of their slippery conditions, steep grades, or hazardous drop-offs. Many of the popular trails are located along the mountain ridges, and the rock base of O'ahu’s mountains is volcanic lava. As a result, the near-vertical cliffs are unstable, and excessively dry periods or heavy rains can cause landslides. After you choose a trail for your next run, go with someone familiar with the trail, or even plan to walk the trail first. Avoid running trails alone, and be sure to inform a friend where you will be running and when you expect to return.
Also, use trail-specific running shoes. Trail shoes have thicker soles that protect your feet from sharp stones and needles, along with reinforced bumpers on the front that will reduce the shock to your toes if you stub your foot on a rock or tree root. These shoes also have an extensive sole pattern that provides greater traction on slippery surfaces.

This book lists only a few trail courses that are recommended due to their compatibility with runners and high level of maintenance. The State Department of Land and Natural Resources maintains a series of approximately forty trails that are free and open to the public. You can obtain maps and descriptions of these trails through the department’s Forestry and Wildlife Division, or on their web site at www.hawaiitrails.org. When selecting a trail, be sure it is open to the public. Some excellent trails are located on private property and require special permission. Check with the landowners before using their trails.

Wildlife that you may encounter on trails is limited primarily to wild pigs and mongoose. Neither of these is much of a threat, as they will try to avoid humans as much as possible. On a rare occasion when a wild pig feels cornered or is protecting its young, it has been known to charge a human. O‘ahu is free of poisonous snakes and other dangerous reptiles, but centipedes and a variety of bees will sting and can cause problems to those who suffer from allergic reactions.

A variety of tropical plants thrive throughout O‘ahu’s rain forests, but the islands are thankfully free of those nasty poisonous ivies, oaks, and sumac that can cause so much discomfort to the unobservant runner on the mainland. Many kinds of edible fruit grow in the wild along the trails and can provide a nice treat. Strawberry guavas and mountain apples are quite common, but do not try any fruit that is unfamiliar.

Finally, trail preservation is a big concern. O‘ahu’s trail system is quite fragile. Heavy rains and the porous lava rock base make for brittle surfaces susceptible to erosion. Stay on the marked trail at all times to avoid damaging the environment.

**RUNNING ROUTES** When planning this book, I wanted to identify a variety of routes that would incorporate short, medium, and long runs, as well as specialty routes designed for hill training or speed
work. I also felt a need to include some trail runs for a change of pace. The challenge was limiting the number of courses to a manageable amount while trying to include all geographic regions of O’ahu. For my final selection, I created a basic formula of what specific requirements each route had to meet in order to be included.

First, each route needed to have accessible parking. Second, the routes had to cross very few, if any, major intersections. Third, public rest rooms and water fountains had to be accessible either at the start and finish or at least somewhere along the route. I did include some trail runs and very easily could have listed quite a few more, but I selected these particular routes because these trails allow you to maintain a steady pace throughout, are quite safe, and are extremely well maintained. The St. Louis Heights Trail is an exception. It is very steep and not especially safe thanks to the number of downhill bikers who frequent this trail. However, I included this particular trail because it offers a great hill-training run for advanced runners only. For a more complete guide to the trails of O’ahu, I recommend Mountain Biking the Hawaiian Islands, by John Alford, The Hikers Guide to O’ahu, by Stuart M. Ball, and the State Department of Land and Natural Resources’ web site at www.hawaiitrails.org.

For each course described in this book, I have provided a personal rating chart that grades the courses in the following areas: course quality, parking, amenities, and safety. The explanation of my ratings is as follows (the “standards” used are based on my own personal opinion):

- 📣 📣 📣 📣 Exceptional. The highest level. Exceeds all standards.
- 📣 📣 📣 Very good. Generally exceeds standards.
- 📣 📣 Satisfactory. Acceptable. Meets the high standards one expects to find in Hawai‘i.
- 📣 Fair. Adequate. Meets some, but not all, standards.
- 📣 📣 📣 Unsatisfactory. Inadequate and substandard. Generally fails to meet the standards.
For the Overall Course Rating, the following descriptions should be added to the explanations listed above.

Exceptional. Heaven on earth.
So wonderful you will remember it well 15 years later.

Very good. After completing your run,
you will feel that the experience made your day. And, 10 years later, you will still feel the same way.

Satisfactory. You will probably return to the course every so often when you are looking for variation.

Fair. Pretty good, but a few things make the experience less than you would hope for.

Unsatisfactory. At least you were able to exercise. Let’s face it, how bad can it be? You are in Hawai’i!