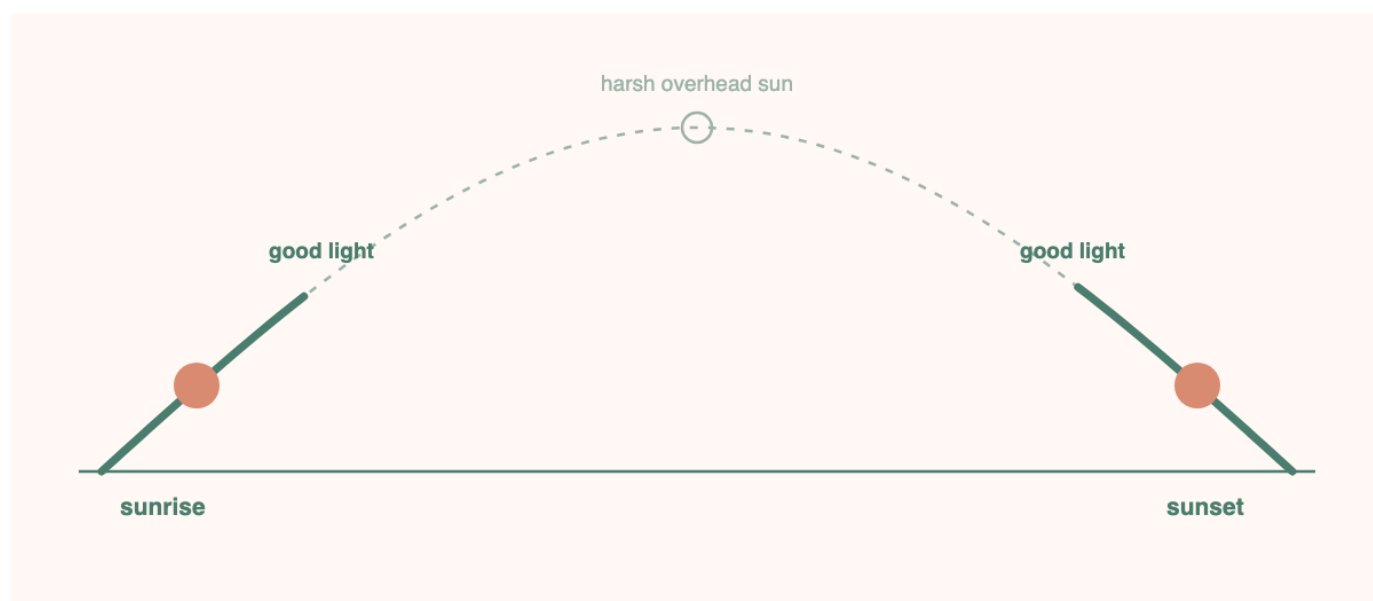


Getting the family photo you'll actually hang up.

Everything below is what I tell clients before an O'ahu session. None of it requires hiring me. If it saves one family a bad shoot, it did its job.

1. When to shoot, and why it matters more than anything else

Light decides more about your photos than clothing, location, or the camera. On O'ahu the usable window is narrower than most visitors expect, because the sun is high and hard for most of the day.



THE TWO GOOD WINDOWS

- **First 90 minutes after sunrise.** Roughly 5:50–7:20am in summer, 7:00–8:30am in winter. Beaches are nearly empty, the light is soft, and trade winds are usually calm. Best window of the day, and the hardest to get a family out of bed for.
- **Last 90 minutes before sunset.** Roughly 5:45–7:15pm in summer, 4:20–6:00pm in winter. Warm light, but expect crowds and more wind.

WHAT TO AVOID

- **10am to 3pm.** Overhead sun puts hard shadows under everyone's eyes and nose. No amount of editing fixes raccoon eyes on a whole family.
- **Booking sunset on your last evening.** Leave a spare day. If it rains, you want somewhere to move to.

Rain is not a cancellation. O'ahu showers usually pass in fifteen minutes, and the light immediately afterwards is the best light of the week. Overcast is not bad news either. A high cloud layer is the largest softbox on earth, and it is very forgiving on large groups.

2. What to wear

The single most common mistake is everyone wearing identical white shirts. It photographs as one undifferentiated blob, and on a bright beach white clips to pure paper with no texture left in it.



DO THIS INSTEAD

- **Pick two or three colours, then let everyone vary within them.** Sand, sage, dusty blue, cream, soft coral. One person can carry a pattern; not four.
- **Choose fabric that moves.** Linen, cotton, anything with drape. Wind is a feature on a beach, and stiff fabric fights it.
- **Dress the eldest person first,** then build everyone else around them. Grandparents are usually the least flexible about clothing and the most important person in the frame.
- **Long dresses and long sleeves photograph beautifully in wind.** They give the frame movement.

LEAVE AT HOME

- **Neon and bright saturated colour.** It reflects onto faces and tints skin green or pink.
- **Big logos and slogans.** They date the photo instantly and pull the eye.
- **Brand-new shoes on sand,** and anything nobody can walk in.
- **Sunglasses on heads.** They read as clutter and hide the hairline.

3. Where to go

Location matters less than most people think, and access matters more. A twenty-minute walk with a toddler and an 80-year-old costs you the whole session.

GOOD FOR LARGE MULTI-GENERATION GROUPS

- **Ala Moana Beach Park** — flat, parking, shade, restrooms, and the Waikīkī skyline behind you. The most forgiving location on the island for a big family.
- **Kualoa Regional Park** — the Koʻolau ridge and Chinaman's Hat. Dramatic, and the grass means no sand in anyone's shoes.
- **Magic Island** — the peninsula at the Waikīkī end of Ala Moana. Calm lagoon, Diamond Head behind you, and a short flat walk from the car.

GOOD FOR COUPLES AND SMALLER GROUPS

- **China Walls** and **Lanaʻi Lookout** — lava rock and open ocean. Not suitable for small children or anyone unsteady.
- **Hoʻomaluhia Botanical Garden** — green ridgeline backdrop, no sun, no crowds. Note the gate closes at 4pm.

Permits, and one law most people have not heard of.

Commercial photography needs a permit almost everywhere on O'ahu, and **which office you apply to depends on who owns the land**. Photographers get this wrong constantly.

State land, run by DLNR. The common one is the Wiki Permit, **\$20 for a two hour window**, insurance on file, up to about 30 people. A State Parks Special Use Permit, needed for weddings in some state parks, must be filed **45 days ahead for non commercial use and 90 days ahead for commercial use**. A paid photographer or paid vendors makes it commercial.

City and County parks, run by Honolulu Parks and Recreation. This is a completely separate application with its own fees and lead times, and it covers **Ala Moana, Magic Island, Kualoa Regional Park and Ho'omaluhia**, which is most of the list above. Minimum **three weeks** ahead, and for Kualoa on a popular date, months.

Windward beaches from Waimānalo to Makapu'u are closed to commercial photography entirely. Honolulu's Bill 38, law since 2022, bans professional shoots at those city beach parks, including Waimānalo Beach Park, Hūnānāniho, Kaiona, Kaupō, Bellows and Makapu'u. There is no permit to buy. A photographer who offers to shoot your family there is offering to break the law with your family standing in the frame.

Ask any photographer you are considering which permit they carry and for which office. It is a fair question and the answer tells you a lot.

4. Getting everyone through it

CHILDREN

- **Feed them first.** Nearly every difficult session is a hungry four-year-old.
- **Do not promise them it will be quick**, then take an hour. Tell them the truth and give them an end point.
- **Let the first ten minutes be useless.** Kids need to burn off the strangeness of a stranger with a camera. The good frames come after.

GRANDPARENTS AND ELDERS

- **Bring a chair.** Standing on sand for forty minutes is harder than it sounds, and nobody will say so.
- **Shoot the elders first**, while everyone is fresh and before the light goes. If someone has to leave early, you already have the frames that matter most.
- **Ask for the combination you actually want** and say it out loud on the day. Grandmother with each grandchild individually is the picture families most often wish they had asked for.

5. After the shoot

- **Ask for full-resolution files**, not just web-sized ones. Web files will not print past about 8x10 without going soft.
- **Back them up twice, in two places**, the week you get them. External drives fail, and so do phones.
- **Print something**. A file on a phone is not an heirloom. The whole point was a picture on a wall.

Tiếng Việt: Hướng dẫn này gồm 5 phần: chụp lúc nào (sáng sớm hoặc trước hoàng hôn, tránh 10 giờ sáng đến 3 giờ chiều), mặc gì (chọn hai ba màu nhẹ, tránh áo trắng giống hệt nhau), chụp ở đâu (Ala Moana và Kualoa để cho gia đình đông người), làm sao để cả nhà thoải mái (cho trẻ ăn trước, mang ghế cho ông bà, chụp ông bà trước tiên), và sau khi chụp (xin file độ phân giải đầy đủ, sao lưu hai nơi, và in ra). Nếu cần trao đổi bằng tiếng Việt, cứ nhắn tin cho tôi.