



Chris Paterson

Family Story

Aloha, my name is Chris. I was born and raised in the town of Roseburg, Oregon, a small timber community about an hour south of Eugene. I graduated from the University of Oregon in 2001 and a few years later, moved to Japan to become an English teaching assistant at a local junior high school. Following my two-year stint as a teacher in Japan, I moved to Hawai'i to work as a Japanese-speaking outdoor guide. I currently live in the small town of Kailua-Kona on the island of Hawai'i where I own and operate a luxury tour company.

My paternal grandparents raised their family of five kids in the military. Typical of military families was that they frequently moved making it hard to make friends, establish relationships, or connect with the community. Luckily for their entire family, they managed to stay in one location for four years. Up until then, staying less than a school year on one base was common for many military families. For my father, high school in Hawai'i was a dream come true! It was the mid-1960s and the height of beach boy surf culture that he had seen in the movies and music. He had the perfect life for a teenager. He attended Kailua High School on the windward side of O'ahu. He occasionally attended class, surfed after school, and spent weekends kayaking and fishing in the tropical waters of Lanikai Beach.

Upon graduation, he and his family moved to Roseburg where he met my mother. Although he left Hawai'i, his fond memories of O'ahu never left him. He often romanticized about returning to Hawai'i but his new career as a teacher kept him in Oregon. My father had a few friends from Hawai'i that lived nearby with whom he could even practice speaking pidgin and that always brought out a smile. As kids, I remember that he often told Hawaiian stories and shared his favorite songs with us. My sister, from a young age studied and practiced Hawaiian, Tahitian, and other Polynesian dances. She too, longed for the Hawai'i that we had learned about. We visited O'ahu as a family where I became enchanted by island life. I just knew that I had to find a way to move there myself.



Though Hawai'i was an ocean away, Oregon provided a great place to grow up. Roseburg was special because like Hawai'i, we were close to the mountains and the ocean. As a Boy Scout, I was able to follow my passion for all things outdoors such as mountaineering, hiking, fishing, and swimming. To me, summertime in the Pacific Northwest is home to the best weather on the planet, but it was always too short. Hot summer days spent swimming in the rivers and lakes of Douglas County quickly gave way to what seemed like endless months of drizzling rain and frigid winds. I wanted what every teenager craved, an endless summer!

Several years after graduating from college, I moved to Japan as part of Roseburg's sister city teacher exchange program. I thought that perhaps I was destined for a career in teaching just like my parents. As an English teacher's assistant, I discovered much more. I found out that I had talent for learning the Japanese language which fostered a desire to learn more about local culture. Teaching and sharing meant something to me and I felt that passion and drive to pursue it further. I left Japan two years later with a firm grasp of the Japanese language and a profound respect for its traditions and history. When I received a call about an opportunity to be a Japanese-speaking guide on Hawai'i Island, I knew that I had to take it.

When I arrived at the Kona Airport in September of 2007, I immediately felt a sense of familiarity. To me, Hawai'i was truly home to Oregon's endless summer. The mountains and the ocean were even closer than back home. The afternoon rain smelled like Oregon, but the warm tropical floral breezes were different. I was enchanted by the scenic and rocky coastlines, the jungles of exotic plants and the crystal-clear mountain streams that flowed back into the Pacific Ocean.

Kailua-Kona's rich history, friendly citizens and scenic topography are heaven on earth! As a guide to Mauna Kea, the highest mountain peak in all of Polynesia, I felt that Hawai'i was where I truly belonged. Respecting Hawai'i's people and traditions was my kuleana (deep sense of responsibility) which I took very seriously. My daily summit trips with Japanese guests filled me with pride in my new career. It gave me purpose and a deeper love for Hawai'i, its culture, and history. My job was to lead tours in four-wheel-drive vehicles up steep mountain slopes to the nearly 14,000 ft. summit, take in the gorgeous sunset, and then follow the stars home.



With each day, my connection to this sacred place grew stronger. I learned more and more about Hawaiian wayfarers, their ability to navigate the heavens, and their responsibility to cultivate and nurture the land. I was also impressed by Hawaiians' deep spiritual connection to ke akua (God). As an interpretive guide from the mainland to these spiritual sites, I felt that I might be received as disingenuous. After all, I was not a keiki o ka 'āina (child of the land). I do not have traditional Hawaiian roots and I was not raised on the island.

On one memorable tour several years ago, I had a long and intimate conversation with a Japanese visitor that had returned for a third trip to Mauna Kea. She too felt a deep sense of belonging in Hawai'i and helped put things in perspective for me. The guest explained that I am a bridge; a bridge to connect Japan and Hawai'i. Polynesians and Americans have a long history of bringing cultures together and I had become a small part of that connection. The opportunity and responsibility of being a steward of the land, made me grateful and connected to my new island home. Here, if you give to the land, the land will give back. Hawai'i has given me more than I ever could have ever dreamed.

My wife who I met on tour, helped start our now thriving business. Its mission is to honor the land that has been perpetuated in righteousness. For the past seven years, our company has hosted thousands of guests from around the world including some from my hometown. Hawai'i is steeped in culture and tradition and we will continue to honor those sacred customs. Our dedication is centered on connecting people with this paradise of the Pacific.

Mahalo Nui Loa,

Chris Paterson

