During the eighteen year period from 1972 to 1990, I wrote a series of four books on Hawaiian beaches: *The Beaches of O'ahu*, *The Beaches of Maui County* (including Maui, Moloka'i, Lāna'i, and Kaho'olawe), *Beaches of the Big Island*, and *Beaches of Kaua'i and Ni'ihau*. Published by the University of Hawai'i Press, these books inventory every beach on all of the eight major Hawaiian Islands and provide physical descriptions, historical sketches, water safety information, and summaries of ocean recreation activities for each beach. Out of the 500 beaches that are identified in the series, I have selected fifty to be the subjects of *Hawai'i's Best Beaches*.

Selecting the best of anything is always a challenging project. All of us have our own opinions of what makes something the best in its class, and, of course, our opinions differ widely. To evaluate beaches, most of us devise some sort of informal rating system, and our rating criteria are based on features and activities that we like personally. We may want a beach that is close to home, safe for toddlers, sandy for sunbathing, rocky for fishing, or windy for windsurfing; and we may not care if it has any other features as long as it has that one special quality we desire. This may mean that the best beach for us is not necessarily the best beach for someone else. In spite of personal preferences, there are some common criteria that are used to identify a best beach. This is evident by beach attendance: the best beaches are usually the most popular, attracting the most people.

The rating system I used for *Hawai'i's Best Beaches* was developed by Dr. Stephen Leatherman, Director of the Laboratory for Coastal Research at Florida International University in Miami, Florida. An international authority on beaches, Leatherman pro-
roduces an annual list of the best beaches in the United States and is the author of *America's Best Beaches*. The common criteria in his rating system are consolidated into four categories: physical environment, amenities, water safety conditions, and aesthetics. Physical environment includes air, water, and sand quality and the presence or absence of trash, noise, crowds, and crime. Amenities include the presence or absence of ocean recreation activities, facilities such as concessions, restrooms, showers, and parking, and public access. Water safety conditions include the presence or absence of lifeguards, rocks and reefs, high surf, strong currents, and dangerous marine life. And, finally, aesthetics include scenery, uniqueness of location, and the presence of wildlife such as sea birds, fish, turtles, or whales.

While I used all of Leatherman's common criteria to evaluate Hawai'i's beaches, there were four in particular that I required for a "best" beach. The first was the presence of sand. This sounds obvious, but many beaches are composed of less desirable particulate matter finer than sand, such as silt or clay, or materials coarser than sand such as pebbles, cobbles, and boulders. For most of us, however, sand is the most important physical feature for beaches. The sand, however, did not have to be calcareous, or "white," sand as long as the grains were sand-sized.

My second requirement was that each beach had to be a good swimming site, at least during periods of no surf. Swimming is the most popular ocean recreation activity in Hawai'i and in the rest of the United States, surpassing even fishing.

My third requirement was that each beach had to be accessible to the public by land, since most of us walk, hike, ride the bus, or drive to the beach. This requirement eliminated the beaches on Kaho'olawe and Ni'ihiw, which are not accessible to the public by any means of transportation. As a matter of interest, there are beaches on both Kaho'olawe and Ni'ihiw that would otherwise have made the list. The public access requirement also eliminated several of Hawai'i's best beaches that are surrounded by private property. Examples are Kipū Kai and Donkey Beach on Kaua'i, and Kawela Bay on O'ahu, where a land development problem has deprived the public of its use since 1986.
Fourth, I gave special consideration to beaches that I believed to have unique physical features, natural resources, or recreational opportunities elevating them to “best” status even though they were lacking in other important rating criteria. Examples of these beaches are Green Sand Beach on the Big Island and Red Sand Beach on Maui, which are unique for their physical features not only among Hawaiian beaches but among all beaches in the world.

Most of Hawai’i’s best beaches are also the most popular beaches in Hawai’i. They are the beaches that rank high in all the rating criteria, and they offer the attractions that most people are seeking when they go to the beach: clean, soft, white sand; clear water; restrooms and showers; lifeguards; and some exciting ocean activities. Each of the fifty beaches is described using a five-point key that includes its name, location, description, precautions, and highlights. The information in the keys explains what makes each beach special and why it is one of the best. I think you’ll agree when you get there.