



Na Pali coast, Kauai.
Opposite: Waialeale Falls (top); Hanalei
Valley (bottom).

On an island in the sun

The Hawaiian archipelago offers a wide variety of islands, sights, sounds, tastes and volcanoes.
By Phil Tripp.

Mark Twain said it best about Hawaii 100 years ago: "The loveliest fleet of islands that lies anchored in any ocean." Rugged volcanic peaks, layered with lush greenery, compete with postcard beaches of colorful sand that range from bone white to creams and rusts, green strands and jet black dunes. Tropical forests scream with birds. Riotous colors of endless varieties of flowers, 90% of which are indigenous to the islands, spread exotic scents, whipped by the ever-present tradewinds.

Hawaii is an isolated archipelago, boasting the world's only drive-through volcano. It is only nine hours from Australia and five hours from the west coast of the United States, with only 15-30 minute hops between islands.

The current invasion of Asian tourists means that the main island of Oahu (called "the gathering place" in local legend) and its clogged cities of Honolulu and Waikiki rival the Gold Coast, Florida's Miami Beach or any over-developed beach city in terms of tackiness, traffic and outrageous shopping opportunities for brand-conscious high spenders.

It is the other islands that hold the spirit of aloha, the magic of Hawaii's native spirituality and laidback island living. They lack the tour bus crowds and tourist traps that make Waikiki a standing-room-only beach hell and its avenues an endless array of fast-food joints, clothing franchises and souvenir shops.

To discover the real Hawaii of legend and allure, you do not need to go bush. Go for the glaringly lush Kauai (the garden island), lava wonderland Hawaii (the big island), upmarket Maui (the valley island), rural Molokai (the friendly island), laidback Lanai (the pineapple island) and tiny Niihau (the forbidden island), which is a native Hawaiian reserve where only the ancient language is spoken and visitors are generally prohibited.

For a real dose of Polynesian paralysis, a minimum of 10 days is essential. Do that and you will catch the aloha virus which will make you yearn to return.

Starting at the northernmost island of Kauai is the best way to drop out of hurry and into languor. This island, like most in the Hawaiian archipelago, should be discovered at a leisurely pace, with bicycles on back lanes, kayaks through Fern Grotto for the active, boat cruises, or a relaxing drive through the rainforests and valleys, ending at Waimea Canyon. It seems like the edge of



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the world, but at the end of the road is Kee Beach, which has an enclosed lagoon backdropped by the Pali cliffs which featured in *South Pacific*.

The north coast of Kauai, Na Pali, is accessible only by boat or hardy trail bikes. It is obvious why it was chosen as the set for *Jurassic Park*. Hanalei is a small, hideaway town just shy of a string of beaches that start at the Na Pali coast and end at Kee. Made famous by *Puff The Magic Dragon*, Hanalei is accessed by a rusty old bridge that the locals refuse to replace, figuring it will keep the tour buses away. But a visit to Hanalei is worthwhile: its cuisine ranges from exotic seafood buffets at the plush Princeville resort to the fish dishes of the Green Dolphin and the downmarket delights of the hippie-operated, roadside Tropical Taco Van.

Hawaiian food is heavily influenced by local seafood combined with Asian spices. The biggest chef, in both size and influence, is Sam Choy, whose initial warehouse-district eatery in Kona on Hawaii spawned other outlets, most notably Breakfast Lunch and Crabs near Honolulu airport. It revolves around a micro-brewery and its selection of crustacean delights is a magnet for locals and tourists. Choy's culinary magic extends also to a fine-dining restaurant bearing his name in the Kaloho district, outside Waikiki.

The middle island or Maui is popular with honeymooners and gourmands. Nestled on a sandy cove in sleepy Paia — near the windsurfing capital of the world, Hookipa Beach — is Mama's Fish House, which is one of the best restaurants on Maui and offers stunning sunset views. The restaurant also offers cottages on its private beach for rent.

Paia has the charm of a groovy, retro little town with the obligatory hippies. A short drive up the mountain is the tiny plantation town of Hallimale, perched on the sugar slopes. Its general store has been converted into a restaurant by Neil Diamond's lighting designer, Joe Gannon, with his wife and chef, Beverly, who offer a menu ranging from raw and seared sashimi to coffee-coated roast lamb and sesame-crusted Szechuan steaks. If you are looking for the hippest burger on Maui, go to the old whaling town of Lahaina, where a couple of kooky ladies with a knack for roasting flesh stole the name *Cheeseburger in Paradise* from a Jimmy Buffet song. Buffet sued, they got media mileage and still have the name, as well as the best margaritas on the island, no doubt inspired by another Buffet tune, *Margaritaville*.

Feeling stuffed? Work off all that food by hiking through the city-sized, dormant crater of Haleakala volcano. An alternative



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Clockwise from top: Na Pali coast, Kauai; Haleakala crater, Maui; Kalalau Valley, Kauai.

to walking is a dawn bike ride with Cruiser Bob — six hours down the 40-kilometre winding road on the outside of the volcano. Bob collects customers from their hotels at 3am and despoils them at the yawning, color-saturated crater as the sun rises over the Pacific.

Out of Lahaina, the best bet for a day trip is the Sailing Coon Family's Trilogy catamaran cruises, offering the chance to watch whales on the way to neighboring Lanai. A snorkel at Manele Bay's reefs, a beach meal and a sail back top off the day. Flying fish, dolphins and sea turtles surround the boat, punctuated by the breaches of mammoth humpbacks. Snorkeling and scuba are de rigeur around Maui, especially at little Molokini isle or off the cliffs at Lanai.

The most unique getaway in Hawaii is Kona Village Resort on the big island. Its thatched Polynesian-style "hales" on stilts circle a spring-fed lagoon and florid grounds, and are secluded by barren expanses of black lava. No television, no phones and no newspapers mean that the lapping of waves, the music of the luau dancing and food feasts are the main sources of entertainment.

The big island owes much of its allure to the southern area's active volcano, Puo, which has been in constant, but mild, eruption since 1983, thrilling visitors with its lava flows and fountains of fire. A hike across the rolling lava beds or a chopper flight over its active crater are essential activities.

Set aside at least one day to visit the nearby Volcanoes National Park. The central caldera is an incredible bike ride or hike of 17 kilometres, with steam vents, sulphur banks, walk-through lava tubes and ghost forests of grey stumps. The area can also be visited by car without any real danger.

The nearby town of Volcano offers many bed and breakfast options, including the best, My Island Home, run by a former park ranger and volcanologist. A quaint set of houses tucked away in an idyllic forest, My Island Home offers the most amazing morning spread, including macadamia nut pancakes with ohelo berry jam, made from berries harvested from the crater rim. Another option is Kilauea House, a former YMCA lodge that has been converted into a series of plush cabins.

There is no way to avoid Honolulu: it contains the airport. If you find yourself trapped on Oahu with a couple of days to kill, the best option is the North Shore, where 10-metre waves pound. The only major hotel is the Turtle Bay Hilton Hotel. If total pampering is your objective, head to the plush Ihilani Resort 48 kilometres from Honolulu airport, with its exquisite spa and gentle surf, far from the stacked crowds of Waikiki beach and the motor madness of the main city.