

The Best of HAWAII

Here are 25 terrific ways to spend time in the islands

By Elizabeth Armstrong and Michelle White

Iristine stretches of beach, heavenly weather and plumeria-scented air most often come to mind when one thinks of Hawaii. Visitors to the 50th state will also find a rich and interesting history and diverse natural spectacles. Explore an old sugar town, experience Hawaii's cowboy culture or learn about its early royalty. Marvel at steep, jagged ocean cliffs, stark volcanic landscapes, lush gardens and beautiful bays.

Below, we've highlighted 25 favorite places on the Big Island (Hawaii island), Oahu, Maui, Kauai, Lanai and Molokai. Some places can be enjoyed for free, while others require a fee.

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THE BIG ISLAND

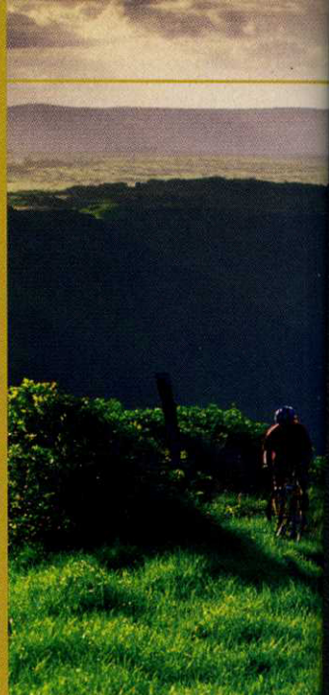
Kohala Coast: Dubbed the "Gold Coast," this is the Big Island's drier and sunnier northwestern side. Beyond the black lava rocks that edge the main highway are some of Hawaii's most beautiful beaches, as well as such world-class resorts as the Fairmont Orchid, Four Seasons Resort Hualalai and Mauna Kea Beach Hotel. The latter was built by Laurance S. Rockefeller in 1965, who knew a prime piece of real estate when he saw it: His chosen site for Mauna Kea, Kauna'oa Bay, frequently rates among the top 10 of the world's best beaches. Information: www.gohawaii.com/bigisland (click "Kohala Coast").

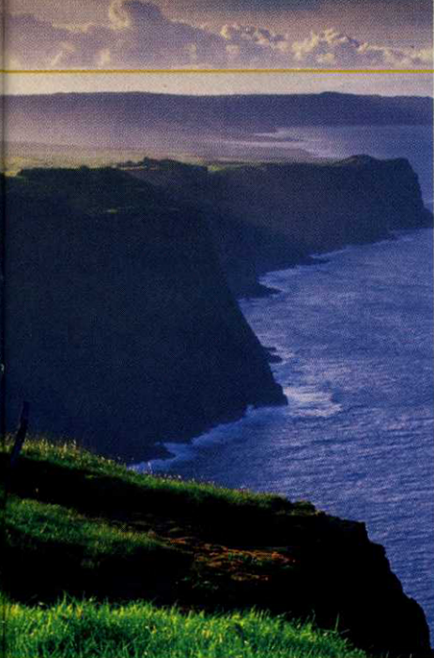
Pololu Valley Lookout: Grab your camera and follow State Highway 270 up the Kohala Coast to the literal end of the road and you'll come upon this breathtaking overlook, where vertical green cliffs rise from the blue Pacific Ocean. Make time for a couple of worthy stops along the way: Lapakahi State Historical Park, where you can roam among the remnants of an ancient Hawaiian fishing village, and the quaint town of Hawi, with a handful of shops, galleries, restaurants and a weekly farmers market. Information: www.gohawaii.com/bigisland/familyfun

(click "Pit Stops and Photo Ops").

Hilo: Go back in time to early Hawaii in Hilo, an old sugar town that houses a large collection of historic buildings. To view them, print out the map at www.downtownhilo.com/hilo/tour.htm for a one-hour self-guided walking tour, and then hit the pavement. Among treasures are the art deco Palace Theater, the Lyman Museum and Mission House, and the white clapboard Central Christian Church, built for the Portuguese-speaking community in the early 20th century. Although it's Hawaii's second-largest city, Hilo maintains an old-fashioned, small-town feel. Information: www.downtownhilo.com.

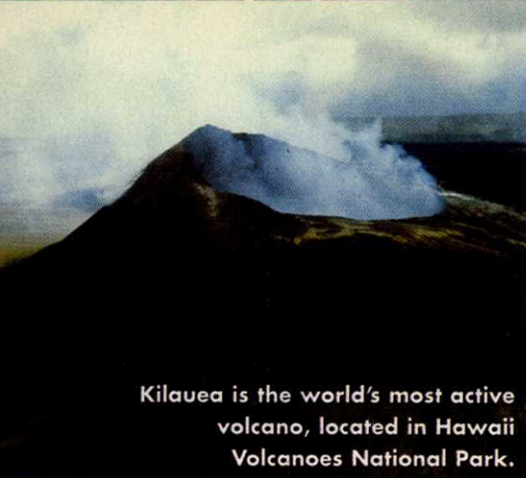
Hawaii Volcanoes National Park: Witness the wrath of Pele, the Hawaiian volcano goddess, at this site 30 miles southwest of Hilo. Kilauea, the world's most active volcano, has been erupting almost continuously for the last 23 years. Many people prefer to visit at night for the most impressive views of the red-hot lava flows; the park is open 24 hours a day, year-round. Bring a flashlight, wear sturdy, comfortable shoes and a rainproof jacket, and check out the safety tips at the National Park Service site. Information: www.nps.gov/havo.





Clockwise, from top left: Exploring Molokai's coast by bike; young aloha spirit at a Hawaiian beach; the scenic shores of Kauai; blowing a conch shell at sunset.

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: MOLOKAI RANCH (1), HAWAII (2B)



Kilauea is the world's most active volcano, located in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

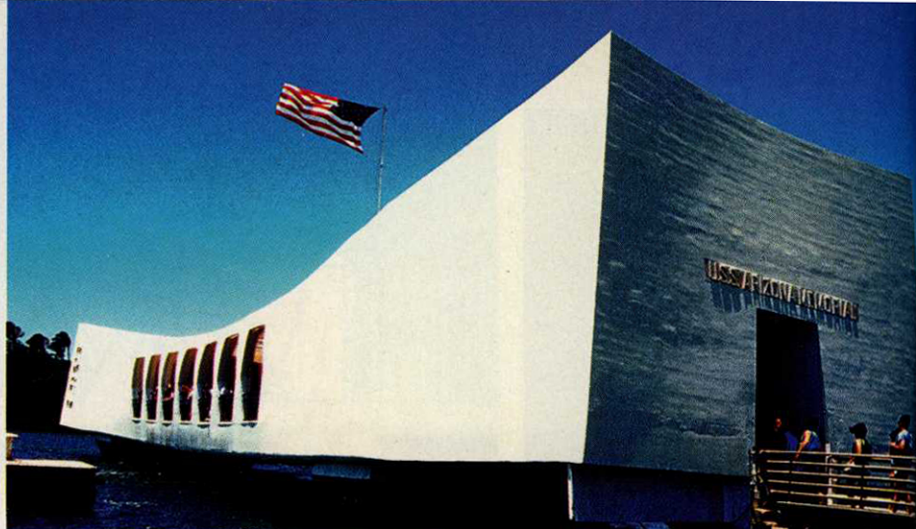
WARREN BOLSTER/HAWAII VCB

Parker Ranch: Founded in 1847 in Waimea, this 175,000-acre spread is one of the country's oldest and largest cattle ranches. Visitors can learn about the heritage of the paniolo — the Hawaiian cowboy — while exploring the visitor center, museum and historic homes on site. Equally as interesting is the story of the Parker family, whose legacy in Hawaii started when a 19-year-old sailor from Massachusetts, John Parker, jumped ship for the islands in 1809. Horseback riding, horse-drawn wagon excursions, barbecue lunches and adventures in all-terrain vehicles also are available. On July Fourth and Labor Day weekends, the ranch hosts a rodeo. Information: www.parkerranch.com.

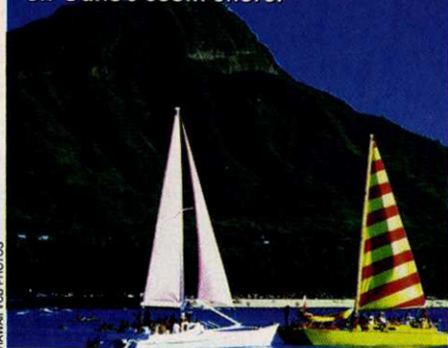
OAHU

Hanauma Bay: For a dazzling display of marine life, head to this bay on Oahu's south-east shore. Here you can swim, snorkel and scuba dive amid rainbow parrot fish, convict tangs, mullet, squid, trumpet fish and living coral reefs. The curvature of the bay protects it from large waves, allowing for a peaceful swim in the water, and there are many hiking trails along the scenic coastline. Learn more about the nature reserve at the new Marine Life Education Center. Information: www.honolulu.gov/parks/facility/hanaumabay.

USS Arizona Memorial: More than 1,100 crewmen from the USS Arizona lost their lives in the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor. This national memorial, which spans a portion of the sunken battleship, today honors all military personnel who died during the attack. According to the National Park Service, some 4,500 people visit the site each day, viewing a documentary film before boarding a shuttle boat for the ride to the Arizona. It is now a place of quiet contemplation, where oil drops rising from the ship still can be seen on the ocean's surface. Information: www.nps.gov/usar.



Diamond Head overlooks Waikiki on Oahu's south shore.



HAWAII VCB PHOTOS

Waikiki and Diamond Head: Graced with white-sand beaches, Waikiki is a bustling hub of restaurants, shopping, nightlife and hotels. Immerse yourself in all

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the action, or rise above it by hiking the 760-foot trail to the summit of Diamond Head, a world-famous volcanic crater formed more than 100,000 years ago. The landmark got its name from early sailors who, approaching the crater from a distance, assumed the glittering calcite crystals in the tuff were diamonds. Information: www.visit-oahu.com.

Bishop Museum: Founded in 1889 by Charles Reed Bishop to honor his late wife, Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop, this is Hawaii's largest museum. The princess was the last descendant of the royal Kamehameha family, and the museum began as a collection of the monarchy's heirlooms. Among the more than 76,000 Hawaiian artifacts, you'll find ancient hand-carved bowls, handmade feather cloaks and the skeleton of a 50-foot sperm whale. Information: www.bishopmuseum.org.

North Shore: This famed surfing destination boasts giant waves that reach 30 feet

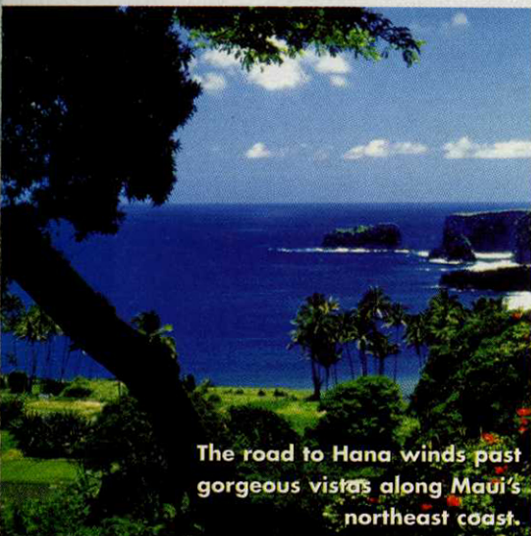
The USS Arizona Memorial commemorates lives lost during the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor.

during the winter. Visit in November or December to catch one of the world-renowned surfing contests held along this 20-plus-mile stretch of coastline. Haleiwa, the main town, is a shopper's paradise, home to clothing and jewelry stores, art galleries and, of course, surf shops, all set amid a laid-back vibe. Historic missions and the landmark Anahulu Bridge can be found nearby. Information: www.gonorthshore.org.

MAUI

Lahaina: This multicultural town is situated between the tranquil Auau Channel and the sharp slopes and deep valleys of the West Maui Mountains, known to the locals as Mauna Kahalawai. Now a national historic district, Lahaina was the largest whaling port of the Pacific during the 1800s and the one-time capital of Hawaii, before the isles were annexed by the United States. You can browse museums and restored missionary buildings, visit a whaling ship replica or shop and dine along the trendy waterfront. Information: www.visitlahaina.com.

The Road to Hana: This gorgeous drive winds along Maui's less-developed northeast coast past tropical rain forests, pineapple fields and old churches. It's an exhilarating ride on a narrow, twisting road, one that includes 600 curves and 54 bridges on the route from Paia to Hana (about 55 miles). Take your time and allow at least three hours just to drive the road — longer if you want to make stops. You'll be rewarded with views of waterfalls, lush vegetation and striking shores. The red cinder cliffs and white sands of Koki Beach and the black sands of Waianapanapa State Park are well worth a visit. Information: www.visitmaui.com.



The road to Hana winds past gorgeous vistas along Maui's northeast coast.

ROBERT COELLO/HAWAII VCB

Hawaii Nature Center: Located in Wailuku, this facility offers a twofold experience for learning about Maui's natural and cultural history — an interpretive hike and an interactive museum. On the guided Rainforest Walk, retrace the footsteps of ancient Hawaiian royalty through the verdant Iao Valley. In the Interactive Nature Museum, explore more than 30 hands-on exhibits, including a glass solarium that presents ever-changing views of the valley and aquariums that simulate the native life found in the Iao Stream. Information: www.hawaiinaturecenter.org/visiting/iao_valley.html.

Haleakala Crater: The world's largest dormant volcano, the "house of the sun" rises more than 10,000 feet above sea level. Its summit is the place to be for sunrises, sunsets and sweeping views of Maui. The crater, with a landscape said to resemble the moon, is 7.5 miles long, 2.5 miles wide, 3,000 feet deep and contains its own mini-mountain range of cinder cones. Visitors can explore Haleakala on foot, bicycle, horseback or car, passing abundant wildflowers, eucalyptus, grazing cattle and ahi-nahina — the Haleakala silversword plant. Information: www.nps.gov/hale.

Kaanapali: This popular destination on Maui's west coast contains plenty to occupy visitors of all ages, with top-rated beaches, bustling commercial areas and excellent golf. On Kaanapali Beach, the famous Black Rock site forms a reef wall, making for superb snorkeling and scuba diving, and it is also good place to spot graceful sea turtles. Whalers Village offers beachfront shopping, fine dining and live entertainment. The free Whalers Village Museum houses hundreds of artifacts and unique scrimshaw pieces. Information: www.visitmaui.com.

KAUAI

Na Pali Coast: Sharp and jagged green cliffs drop into the sea on this stretch of coast on Kauai's northwest side. View the 3,000-foot cliffs from a catamaran, kayak or Zodiac raft, or from the air — most helicopter sightseeing excursions soar over the Na Pali Coast. The hardy can backpack

Information: www.kauaidiscovery.com.

Kilauea Lighthouse: Perched on a narrow peninsula, this red-capped lighthouse was built in 1913 and safely guided sailors for 62 years. It's the northernmost point of the Hawaiian islands. There are breathtaking views of the Pacific — keep an eye out for humpback whales, monk seals and dol-

Waimea Canyon on Kauai has been dubbed the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific."



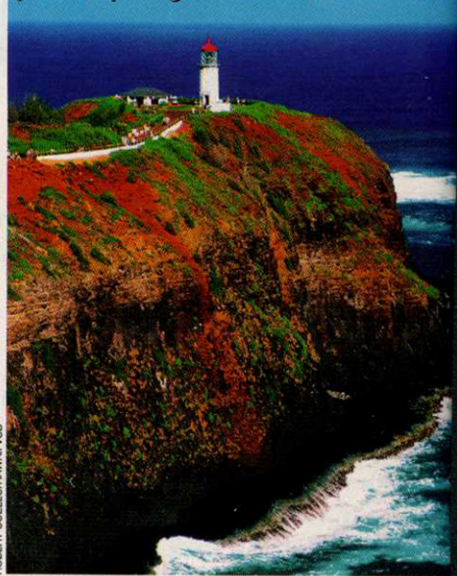
along the challenging 11-mile Kalalau Trail for up-close views of the streams and waterfalls that lace the cliffs. Less experienced hikers can try the two-mile trail to Hanakapiai Beach. Information: www.kauaidiscovery.com.

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Na'Aina Kai Botanical Gardens: The natural beauty of the "Garden Isle" is superbly showcased at Na'Aina Botanical Gardens, a 240-acre preserve in Kilauea. A true labor of love from founders Joyce and Ed Doty, it features 13 distinct gardens, including formal and wild gardens, meadows, a hedge maze, desert garden and a children's garden. Just as delightful are the 70-plus bronze statues placed throughout the property. They depict enchanting scenes, such as children rescuing a kitten from a tree and a young boy striding along on stilts. Information: www.naainakai.com.

Waimea Canyon: Called the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific," this wonder measures 10 miles long, 1 mile wide and more than 3,500 feet deep. Its vibrant colors change throughout the day and are at their best at sunrise and sunset. You can view the deep, multihued gorge from lookout points along the road, or hike into the canyon.

The 1913 Kilauea Point Lighthouse is a picturesque sight on Kauai's north shore.



ROBERT COELLO/HAWAII VCB

phins. The adjacent Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge is home to nesting seabirds, including red-footed boobies, albatross and frigate birds. Information: www.fws.gov/pacificislands/wnwr/kkilaueanwr.html.

Fern Grotto: Lush tropical green ferns cascade down the walls of this cool lava rock grotto, reached via a boat ride up the Wailua River. Once accessible only to Hawaiian royalty, today it is one of Kauai's most popular attractions. Smith's Kauai is a boat tour operator that has been taking visitors to the grotto since the late 1940s.

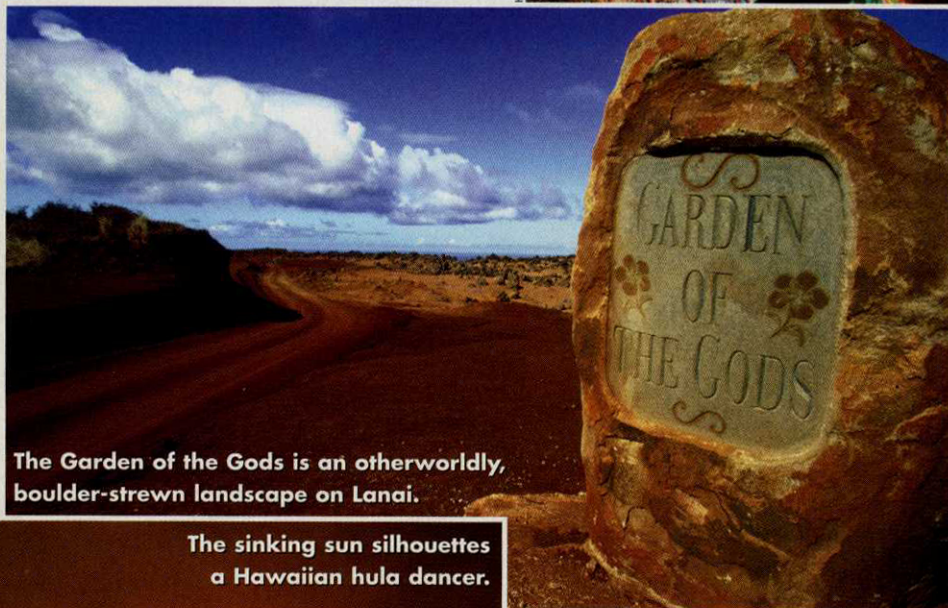
Once you arrive, you'll be serenaded by Hawaiian singers and musicians, as the natural amphitheater makes for great acoustics. Information: www.smithskauai.com/cruise.html.

LANAI & MOLOKAI

Shipwreck Beach: Known to locals as Kaiolohia Beach, this section of shore along northeastern Lanai faces Molokai and the Kalohi Channel, known for its powerful currents and numerous coral reefs. Swimming isn't recommended here, but beachcombers delight in the assorted shells, driftwood and beach glass that wash ashore. This stretch of sand earned its name from the many ships that ran aground in the



Hawaiian singers and musicians greet visitors to the lush Fern Grotto on Kauai.



The Garden of the Gods is an otherworldly, boulder-strewn landscape on Lanai.

The sinking sun silhouettes a Hawaiian hula dancer.



rough channel, although a World War II Liberty Ship, its concrete wreck still visible from the shore, was intentionally disposed of here more than 50 years ago. Information: www.visitlanai.net.

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Garden of the Gods: Upon this stark, crimson landscape stand imposing, unusual boulder formations, creating an otherworldly sculpture garden on Lanai. See it firsthand and decide for yourself whether ancient island legends or scientific theories of erosion best explain this remarkable landscape, also known as Keahikawelo. You can bike or take a four-wheel-drive vehicle through the area, or hike an adjacent nature trail through the Kanepuu Preserve, a rare dryland forest home to many endemic species. Information: www.visitlanai.net.

Lanai Art Center: At this multipurpose community arts center on Lanai, you can take advantage of a ceramics studio, darkroom, woodshop and a wide variety of classes and workshops. Programs include children's acrylic painting, beading, ukulele lessons and photography. A gallery and gift shop feature original works by many local artists, inspired by the natural beauty of the island. Information: www.lanaiart.org.

Papohaku Beach Park: With no highways or traffic lights, the island of Molokai is just about as laid-back as you can get in Hawaii. For secluded serenity, head to remote Papohaku Beach Park on the west end. Three miles long and hundreds of feet wide, it is one of Hawaii's largest beaches. Take advantage of the peaceful expanse of shoreline for picnicking, camping, kite flying, surfing and snorkeling. Swimming, however, can be hazardous here due to riptides, especially in winter. Information: www.molokai-hawaii.com.

Kalaupapa National Historical Park: At the base of soaring sea cliffs on Molokai lies the remote Kalaupapa Peninsula, where patients struck with Hansen's disease, also known as leprosy, were isolated for more than a century. Established in 1980, the park commemorates their history and the humanity of the Belgian priest who cared for them, Father Damien. He is associated with St. Philomena Catholic Church, one of two churches in Kalawao, on the windward side of the peninsula. On the leeward side, the community of Kalaupapa is still home to surviving patients. The park can be accessed by guests ages 16 and up via a mule ride down the mountain. Information: www.nps.gov/kala.