

BY LESLIE  
FORSBERG

# Island Hopping

A Koke'e State Park outlook provides a bird's-eye view of the magnificent Kalalau Valley and Kaaalahina Ridge along Kauai's Na Pali Coast.

DAVE FLEETHAM/PACIFIC STOCK

Seen alone, they are spectacular—  
experienced together, they are Hawaii.

**Slipping into the** silky warmth of Waikoloa Bay on Hawaii's Big Island, I stroked away from the tawny beach. Pacific swells furrowed rows to the horizon, and a breeze dappled the water around me as I relaxed. Then my attention was riveted by dark saucer shapes shifting beneath me.

The sun refracted just so beneath the water, and I learned my swimming companions were a couple of Hawaiian green sea turtles, slowly rising from the reef. Breaking the surface, one of them eyed me lazily with dark, liquid eyes then lumbered back to the bottom to feed. I headed back to shore surrounded by the confetti-like colors of tropical fish.

Hawaii is like that. Renowned for their sunshine and beaches, dramatic landscapes and exotic adventures, the islands reveal yet another side with each visit, providing a new experience that resonates deep within me.

### Getting Acquainted

The Big Island's well-known Kilauea Volcano has been as active as ever recently, with one flow spilling into the ocean and another forming a lava pond inside the crater. But there are more subtle experiences than visiting volcanoes. The Big Island has the most petroglyphs in the Pacific, with thousands carved into lava flows. The largest concentration is found at 233-acre Puako Petroglyph Archaeological Preserve.

These talismans remain enigmatic signs of ancient rites. On my walk through the nearby Waikoloa Petroglyph Field's uneven lava beds, I was stunned to see a European-style sailing ship carved into the rocks. I could

only imagine the locals' astonishment when they first laid eyes on the billowing sails of a clipper ship entering their bay.



MARY VAN DE VEN/PACIFIC STOCK

The next day, my husband, Eric, and I headed north along Highway 270. Spying a sign for a macadamia nut factory, we stopped for a self-guided tour through Hamakua Plantations' roasting facility, concluding with huge scoops of the richest, creamiest macadamia nut ice cream we'd found yet, which we enjoyed outdoors overlooking the ocean.

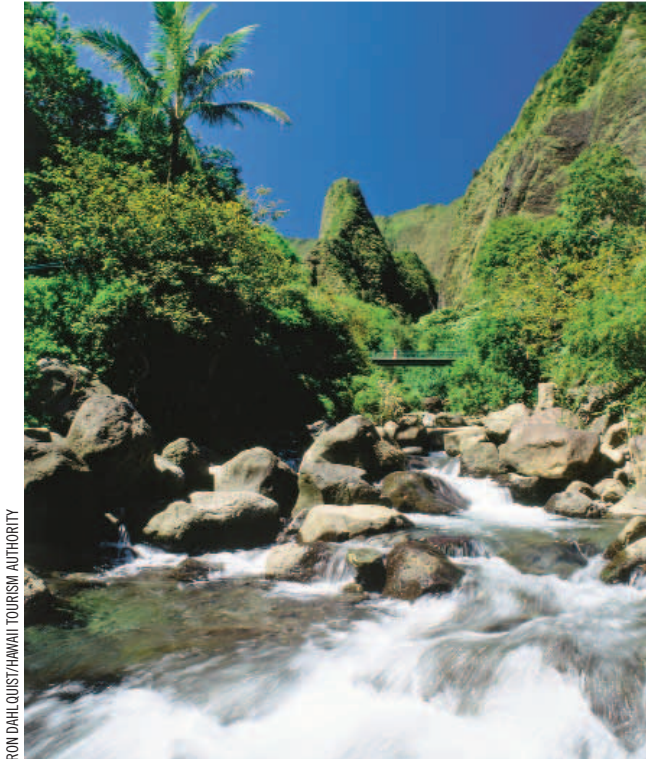
The north end of the island receives more rainfall, and foliage crowded the roadside the farther north we went. At Hawi, an immense, regal statue of King Kamehameha was an impressive sight. Climbing the Kohala Mountain Road, we topped out at rolling green hills dotted with grazing cattle. If I hadn't known better, this could have easily passed for Ireland. At the end of the drive, in Kamuela, we enjoyed platters of barbecued ribs and chicken at down-home Huli Sue's, another Hawaiian gem.

### Other Islands' Treasures

On Oahu, Waikiki continues to draw visitors to the glamour of its myriad restaurants, shopping venues and high-rise hotels. Its newest luxury boutique hotel, The Waikiki Edition, features its own private beach and lagoon, nightclub and a restaurant where none other than Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto rules the kitchen.

Whether touring Honolulu's museums, royal palaces and art galleries or taking an afternoon to catch a surf break in the gentle bay, there is plenty to do in Honolulu. Outside the city, in West Oahu, a Disney Resort & Spa—Aulani—is slated to open Aug. 29. It will offer many ways to indulge, from soaking in pools and snorkeling in a lagoon to indulging in spa treatments at its immense spa.

Maui, the Valley Isle, has some notably spa-like settings, too, including the Iao Valley, where lush ferns and palms blanket a needle-like spire and surrounding cliffs. Nearby, the winds at Hookipa Beach make it one of the best spots in the world to wind surf, and even non-surfers



RON DAHLQUIST/HAWAII TOURISM AUTHORITY

The iconic, 1,200-foot Iao Needle (above) is where King Kamehameha I defeated Maui's forces to unite the islands in 1790. Molokai's famous mule ride (below) descends 2.9 miles alongside the world's tallest sea cliffs to the Kalaupapa Peninsula.



FRANCO SALMOIRAGHI/PHOTORESOURCEHAWAII.COM

## Pleasant Times Thanks To Pleasant Holidays

Whether seeking relaxation on a golden beach or an action-packed trip filled with snorkeling, helicopter rides and other adventures, it's always easier to book a vacation package with a travel specialist who knows the islands.

Pleasant Holidays, a AAA Travel Partner, offers an astonishing array of Hawaii vacation options, including a Big Island Circle of Fire helicopter ride to view lava flows; a scenic catamaran cruise along Kauai's famed Na Pali coastline; whale watching off Maui (December through April); and an exclusive tour combo featuring two popular Oahu attractions: Pearl Harbor and the Polynesian Cultural Center.

In addition, Pleasant Holidays features opportunities at a lengthy roster of accommodations with a variety of styles, ranging from the simple charms of Kauai's historical Waimea Plantation Cottages to the posh luxuries of Maui's Fairmont Kea Lani to the family-friendly Disney's new Aulani resort and spa.

AAA members can receive special discounts on activities and deals on rental cars this spring, so to book your Hawaii vacation, visit your local AAA Travel agent or [AAA.com/travel](http://AAA.com/travel).



POLYNESIAN CULTURAL CENTER



On the Big Island, such figures as paddlers, dancers and animals are among the identified designs at Puako Petroglyph Archaeological Preserve (left). While Maui's Hookipa Beach is known as one of the world's prime windsurfing spots, its easternmost side—dubbed Pavilions—lures regular surfers (right).

RON DAHLQUIST/PACIFIC STOCK

enjoy watching the surfers' colorful sails mimicking the brilliant fish swimming below the surface.

While all the islands sport outstanding beaches, none are as uncrowded as underpopulated Molokai's. The most remote of the beaches, Papohaku, at the far west end of the island, offers more than 3 splendid miles of powdery white-gold sand. It's one of the largest beaches in Hawaii and also one of the most untracked.

Inland, the Halawa Valley draws visitors to ancient temples sprouting from the undergrowth and cliffs riven by waterfalls plunging hundreds of feet. A native legend helps clarify whether it's safe to swim in the pools: If you drop a ti leaf into the water and it floats, you're safe; if it sinks, it's better to swim at a local beach.

For the adventurous, and those unafraid of heights, Kalaupapa National Historical Park is the island's most popular spot. On a rugged, remote peninsula, the park was originally the setting for a colony of Hansen's disease (leprosy) sufferers. Today, the Molokai Mule Ride offers a memorable way to reach the park—by way of 26 switchbacks down nearly 2,000-foot cliffs. Survivors of old still live here, retelling their moving history to intrepid trekkers.



## Two for the Show

Just off Maui, tiny Lanai is even less inhabited than Molokai. This quiet island is known for luxury resorts and unpaved back roads that carry visitors to sites such as 2-mile-long Polihua Beach and Keahiakawelo, a lu-

nar-like high plateau dotted with boulders and rock pinnacles.

In contrast, every tree and boulder at Kauai's Koke'e State Park is covered with multiple layers of epiphytes, moss and ferns. This park, one of the wettest places on earth (with 300 inches of rain annually), affords views down the dinosaur backbone-like ridges of the Na Pali Coast. Eric and I stood at the edge of a precipice, silenced by the setting's majesty, after finishing a walk in the rain forest, where sounds are instantly absorbed by the green depths and where, even staying on the path, mud clung to our shoes.

On Kauai, time seems to slow, a sensation we also felt at Aston's Waimea Plantation Cottages. Our restored cottage, once the abode of a sugar-mill worker, felt extra homey when the resort's cats visited our porch.

Our last night on the island, we made a drive to Ke'e Beach, at the end of the road in Ha'ena State Park. We got there just in time for sunset, which is serenaded by a drum circle and celebrated by vacationers and locals with picnic baskets and champagne flutes. Celebrating in my own way, I jumped into the air at the very moment the fiery orange orb sank behind the dusky waves.

## Planning Your Trip

To learn more about Hawaii, visit [www.gohawaii.com](http://www.gohawaii.com). To plan your own island getaway, see your AAA Travel agent or [AAA.com/travel](http://AAA.com/travel).

H&A



DANA EDWARDS/PACIFIC STOCK



Aston's Waimea Plantation Cottages (inset), nestled along Kauai's western coast, provides a sugar-plantation-era experience. More than 3 miles long and 300 yards wide, Molokai's often-deserted Papohaku Beach is a romantic paradise.

HAWAII TOURISM JAPAN