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# The Insider's Guide To Hawai'i Island: Where To Stay, Eat And Explore



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Travel

*I cover adventure, luxury and family travel.*

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The lava field coastline of Kona. GETTY

What makes the Hawai'i Island so unique is its topography You can travel through all but four of the world's different climate zones here, ranging from wet tropical to polar tundra, a result of the shielding effect and elevations of

the massive volcanoes. From the many geological features at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park to the snow-capped heights of Maunakea; from the lush valleys of the Hilo and Hamakua Coasts to the jet-black sands of Punaluu Beach, Hawai'i Island has plenty to explore.

The size of this island also makes it stand out. It's the largest island in the Hawai'i chain.

Here, a guide to explore this beautiful and magical destination.

## Activities in Hawai'i Island



The Kona Kohala coast on the Island of Hawaii. PARADISE HELICOPTERS

## Helicopter Tour

The Aloha state is known for romance and few things are more romantic than a helicopter ride with a waterfall landing. [Paradise Helicopters](#) offers a variety of options including the Kona: Kohala Coast Waterfalls & Remote Hike where guests go on a pilot-led hike through a strawberry guava forest to reach a breathtaking ocean vista overlooking Mokupuku rock formations. This helicopter ride is so popular with couples, it's often the sight of marriage proposals. During the flight you'll fly above waterfalls, sheer cliff faces as well as lava fields from the 1801 Hualalai eruption and the 1859 Mauna Loa eruption, which traveled over 31 miles before reaching the now world-famous Kohala Coast.

The landscape of Kohala is lush with a rugged coastline and home to dramatic valleys. Mid-flight the helicopter will touch down at a remote location deep in Kohala Mountains to explore and enjoy a moderate half-mile pilot-led hike through the forest. The trail takes you to a dramatic coastline vista, offering views of the Mokupuku island formations and waves crashing along the rugged north shore of Hawai'i Island.

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All the while you will learn about the culture and diverse natural habitat of this untouched serene location that most people never see. After your hike, take to the air again, to view the drastic landscape change from windward to leeward, and the world-famous white and black sand beaches and resorts of the Kohala Coast en route to back to Kona.

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Manta ray swimming in Hawaii. GETTY

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## Manta Ray Night Snorkel

Another highlight on Hawai'i Island is the manta ray night snorkel with the company [Anelakai Adventures](#). While there are several different manta ray excursions, the Anelakai Adventures is unique in several ways. Other tours have people swim with manta rays on a large boat, floating with 20-30 other people at a time. Anelakai Adventures is an intimate experience with the owners Iko and Holly at the helm. The authentic Hawaiian outrigger canoe means guests paddle out the traditional way. The group is small and the experience feels very intimate. Plus, Anelakai Adventures is super eco-

friendly—there's no motor, gas, or large crowds. It's non-invasive using paddle power. People can either snorkel with the manta rays or relax and enjoy the view from the canoe without even getting in the water.

You'll be in a small group of no more than six people and you'll be surprised just how close you'll get to these magnificent creates. Manta rays are fish; they are close relatives of both other rays and sharks and can grow up to 15 feet from wing to wing, and weigh more than 3000 pounds. They can live for 40 or 50 years. The night snorkel is one of the most unique experiences in Hawaii. Plus, you will be skipping the crowds and having a unique, local experience with Anelakai Adventures.



The crater of the Mauna Loa volcano in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. GETTY

## Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park some of the most unique geological, biological, and cherished cultural landscapes in the world. Extending from sea level to over 13,000 feet the park encompasses the summits of two of the world's most active volcanoes—Kilauea and Maunaloa—and is a designated international biosphere reserve and UNESCO World Heritage Site. There are several amazing trails worth checking out including Devastation Trail;

Crater Rim Drive; Kīlauea Iki Trail, one of the most popular trails; and Kīpukapuauolu, great for off-the-beaten-path hiking.



Hawaii is known for its spa treatments including massages, body treatments and facials. GETTY

## Wellness Spa

The Hualālai Spa at the [Four Seasons Resort Hualalai](#) utilizes locally sourced ingredients and healing Hawaiian extracts. The lush location along the Kona Kohala coast is inspired by nature itself to create a quiet, calming, and serene journey. The spa menu pays homage to the island through ancient techniques and native plants used for healing. One of the most popular treatments is the lomilomi treatment. It's a traditional treatment using long rhythmic strokes integrating the use of palms and forearms for a full-body wellness massage.





The Fairmont is located on the Kohala Coast. FAIRMONT ORCHID HAWAII

## Where to Stay

[Fairmont Orchid Hawaii](#) is a luxury, upscale property located on the Kohala Coast and has 32 oceanfront acres of lush tropical gardens, cascading waterfalls and a tranquil white sand beach and lagoon. The resort amenities feature the award-winning "Spa Without Walls"; a 10,000 square foot oceanfront pool; Hui Holokai Beach Club offering ocean and cultural activities; six restaurants; year-round children's program; plus, world-class golf, fitness center and a 10-court tennis pavilion. The family-friendly hotel has 540 guest rooms, suites and the exclusive Fairmont Gold concierge floor.

For a taste of old Hawai'i stay at the [Kilauea Lodge](#) which is just minutes away from Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. It's located at the foot of Mount Kilauea and it's the perfect jumping-off point to hike through lava tubes and volcanic slopes. After a day spend exploring, the lodge's garden jacuzzi is the perfect spot to ease muscle tension away.







Shaved ice is a popular treat on the Island of Hawaii. GETTY

## Where to Eat

In Kona, there are plenty of places to eat. Rebel Kitchen focuses on local seasonal foods (be sure to try their hot wings. Kona Grill House is a good spot for a casual plate lunch—they have fresh poke and tasty seafood. Annie's Island Fresh Burgers serves up gourmet burgers made to order. And for some comfort Japanese food head to Teshima's Restaurant.

Around Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park there's Thai Thai a casual; Cafe Ono, a yummy farm-to-table eatery; and 'Ōhelo Café, which has some of the best wood-fired pizzas and island-inspired dishes.

In Kīlauea-Kona there's Umeke's, great for poke and seafood; Magics Beach Grill, authentic, local-style food; and Huggo's, beautiful oceanfront fine dining.

*Check out my [website](#).*



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