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GENERAL INFORMATION: HAWAII, BIG ISLAND

Driving Hawaii's Big Island

Couples, friends and family members will find adventure around every curve of Hawaii's Big Island. Create lasting memories while cruising around from Kailua-Kona to Hilo. Drive through Keahou, Waikoloa, Captain Cook, Waimea, Waipio Valley and the Volcano's National Park.

Romantic couples ignite the flames of passion by exploring the island's secret beaches and hidden waterfalls. Coast through oceanside scenic routes and enjoy star treatment befitting any romantic vacation.

In fact, an island tour offers great views of four of the five volcanoes that make up Hawaii's Big Island. While driving north from Kehou through Kailua-Kona and Waikoloa, and on to Waimea, a clear morning sky reveals the formidable heights of Mount Hualalai, Mauna Loa, Mauna Kea and the Kohala Mountains. Independent travelers driving SUVs can even make a trek up to Mauna Kea and visit the Visitor Information Station in the Onizuka Center for International Astronomy located at 9,000 feet above sea level. Then head for the top of the world's highest dormant volcano and its world class observatories, with 13 telescopes operated by nine countries. Be sure to set aside an entire day for this trek.

While driving Hawaii's Big Island, why not practice speaking Hawaiian? The Hawaiian language remains alive through the names of important historic places and street names. Just remember that vowels predominantly fill the language. Try heiau (hay-ee-ow, ancient Hawaiian temple) or Puuhonua o Honaunau (poo-hoo ho knew ah oh Ho now now, Place of Refuge). By the time you reach Hawaii Volcanoes National Park you'll be correcting each other on the right way to pronounce Hawaii's most active volcano, Kilauea (kee-la-way-ah).

Hawaii's Big Island offers several free driving tour brochures to highlight an around-the-island excursion. Enjoy the ease of using the Hilo-Hamakua Heritage Coast brochure, Heritage and Culture on Hawaii's Big Island brochure, Guide to Kona Heritage Stores brochure, and the Volcano Heritage Corridor brochure. These make it easier to explore places of interest.

To get a free copy of the Hilo-Hamakua Heritage Coast brochure, Heritage and Culture on Hawaii's Big Island brochure, and the Volcano Heritage Corridor brochure visit www.hawaii-culture.com. And to get free copies of the four agricultural tourism brochures visit www.hawaiiagtourism.com. For a free Guide to Kona Heritage Stores brochure call the Kona Historical Society at (808) 323-3222. And for a free Kona Coffee Country Driving Tour Brochure visit www.konacoffeefest.com.

The Island of Hawai'i is sometimes called the Orchid Isle or the Volcano Isle, but to its residents it's always "the Big Island of Hawaii." A Big Island vacation excites the senses and inspires the adventurer. You can hike into a volcano crater, catch marlin weighing hundreds of pounds, stare into the heavens from the snow-capped summit of Mauna Ke'a, and relax, swim, kayak, and snorkel at a black sand, white sand, or even green sand beach. The Big Island has the world's most active volcano: Kilauea has been spewing lava since January 3, 1983.

The Big Island of Hawaii is divided in half by three volcanoes, Hualalai, Mauna Kea, and Mauna Loa. To the east is the Hilo side which is the windward side of the island, and to the west is the

Kona side which is the leeward side of the island.

Kona is famous for sportfishing, snorkeling, sunsets and coffee. It means "leeward" in Hawaiian. The northern portion of the Kona side of the Big Island is also known as the Kohala district. The weather and ocean conditions can be vastly different on each side of the island depending on the time of year and the predominant trade winds. The Big Island is large and diverse, boasting 11 of the world's 13 climate zones. Because the mountains block the northeasterly trade winds, the Kona side of the island gets very little rain and enjoys more than 300 days of sunshine a year. Check out our detailed [Big Island Travel Planner](#) section with articles and resources to help you plan your next Hawaiian vacation.

Kailua-Kona is tourist hub with a small-town feeling. Although abuzz with visitors, cruise passengers, and tourists from all over the world, Kailua-Kona is not thought of as a large city. In fact, you won't find the shore lined with high-rise hotels and many of the nearby beaches are still only sparsely populated. Visitors will stay busy exploring the stores, attractions, and activities, but it is still a sleepy town with the bars and restaurants closing around 9:00PM each evening.

Ali'i Drive

Ali'i Drive is the oceanfront main thoroughfare, weaving from Kailua Pier all the way south to Keauhou Bay. It is a splendid mix of curio stores, restaurants, sidewalk cafes, art galleries, and souvenir stands. All of this on the picturesque Kona coast, where you will

find the most remarkable sunsets in the backdrop of azure-blue waters. Check out our [Ali'i Drive](#) page for more detailed information, attractions, and photos.

Kona Accomodations

Kailua-Kona is generally regarded as the tourist district and hotels here are not as extravagant as they are along the Kohala Coast. You can find bargains on hotel rooms and vacation rentals - rates as cheap as \$78 per night. Check out our [Kona](#)

[Hotels Finder](#) for a focused search of Kona Hotels, sorted by price. We also offer an extensive listing of over 100 [Big Island vacation rentals](#), most are near Kailua-Kona. From economic beachfront one bedrooms, to large condos for multiple families.

Kailua Pier

Kona is home to the Hawaiian International Billfish Tournament and Ironman Triathlon World Championship. The Ironman Championships first event is the 2.4 mile swim which begins at the Kailua Pier and stretches out into the bay.

Ocean activities, tours, and dinner cruises depart from [Kailua Pier](#). Unlike piers in other cities, the waters alongside Kailua Pier are pristine, clear, and inviting. In fact you will often see people swimming, snorkeling, and kayaking right next to the pier. A fitness-oriented town, you will find many people of all ages jogging or swimming as early as sunrise.

Restaurants

From the casual and economical deli or lunch-counter meals, to the most exquisite in fine dining, you will find a menu that will please any palate. Kona restaurants are a unique mix of traditional Hawaiian, Pan-Asian cuisine, seafood, and a motley of other ethnic blends. Check out our [Kailua-Kona Restaurants](#) guide. Of course, don't forget the one of a kind [Hawaiian Luau](#) - an experience you will never forget!

Shopping

On the Big Island, don't expect to find any sprawling shopping

malls. Chain boutiques and sprawling shopping malls are nowhere to be seen on the Big Island. Instead, you will find groups of eclectic shops, outdoor scenic shopping venues, and open-air markets. Find bargains and the best shopping venues in our [Big Island Shopping Guide](#). Don't know what to buy? Check out our [Hawaiian Souvenirs Guide](#).

Kailua-Kona is the hub for your Hawaii activities. The boating, sailing, snorkeling, scuba diving, and deep-sea fishing in Kona are among the best anywhere. You'll see dive flags sprinkled throughout town, marking the dozens of dive stores. Here you will find an assortment of full-service outfitters for [snorkeling](#), SCUBA diving, biking, and hiking. Browse our [Kona Snorkeling Guide](#) for details and underwater photos. Check out our new [Big Island Travel Planner](#) with articles and resources to help you plan your next Hawaiian vacation. Sign up in advance and save money - check out our [Kona Activities Guide](#).

Hilo, Hawaii

Hilo flows down the lower slopes of Mauna Kea. The town straddles a tranquil river with waterfalls and lush vegetation. Historic Downtown Hilo is alive and bustling. More laid back from the hustle of more touristy Hawaii, one can find great bargains in this quaint town. Its diverse shopping opportunities, small scale, and friendliness makes Hilo an enchanting town to visit and explore. Hilo's scenic bayfront is lined with renovated storefronts dating back to the early 1900s. Downtown attractions include: Hawaii Coral Reef Discovery Center (808) 933-8195, Lyman Museum and Mission Home (808) 935-5021, and the Pacific Tsunami Museum (808) 935-0926.

With lots of rain, you will find Hilo exceptionally green and fertile. The stoic banyan trees dominate much of Hilo's waterfront. On Banyan Drive you will find the tranquil [Queen Liliuokalani Gardens](#) and across a footbridge in the bay is [Coconut Island](#), both wonderful places to visit and enjoy their beauty. For suggestions on where to eat, check out our [Hilo](#)

Restaurants Guide. Check out our new Big Island Travel Planner with articles and resources to help you plan your next Hawaiian vacation. Only have one day to see Hilo? Check out our Hilo & Volcano Itinerary for a one-day trip schedule.