



Hawai'i, the Big Island

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Why Go?

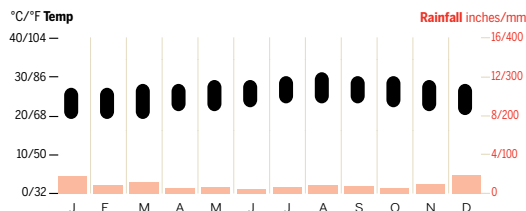
If you're lucky enough, you might see lava pouring into the ocean next to black rock cliffs as the wind howls overhead on the Big Island. Remember the four classic elements: wind, water, earth and fire? It's rare to see all four occurring naturally at once but when they do, creation – of the island itself – quite literally takes place in front of your eyes.

And yet, the Big Island, which is as large as the other Hawaiian islands combined, isn't just where raw creation occurs. It's where the fruits of that process are presented in dizzying diversity. Eight of the world's 13 climate zones exist here, encompassing Martian-like lava deserts, emerald jungle, paradisaical valleys that front black-, white- and even green-sand beaches, snowcapped mountains, coral forests and an enchanting population of locals, hippies, transplants and more.

You can easily laze away your time, but the Big Island really shines for adventurers. Its beauty is astounding, and for a little effort you'll get enormous rewards.

When to Go

Kailua-Kona



Jan Surf's up and summits are snowcapped during the Big Island 'winter.'

Late Mar–early Apr Catch the world's greatest hula at Hilo's Merrie Monarch Festival.

Oct Tenacious tri-athletes compete in the legendary swim-bike-run race born in Kailua-Kona.

History

The modern history of the Big Island is a tale of two cities – Kailua-Kona and Hilo – which represent the island's split personality: West Hawai'i and East Hawai'i. Kamehameha the Great, born in West Hawai'i, lived out the end of his life in Kailua, and throughout the 19th century Hawaiian royalty enjoyed the town as a leisure retreat, using Hulihe'e Palace as a crash pad.

Yet, during the same period, Hilo emerged as the more important commercial harbor. The Hamakua Coast railroad connected Hilo to the island's sugar plantations, and its thriving wharves became a hub for agricultural goods and immigrant workers. By the 20th century the city was the Big Island's economic and political center, and Hilo remains the official seat of island government.

On April 1, 1946 the Hamakua Coast was hit by an enormous tsunami, which crumpled the railroad and devastated coastal communities (such as Laupahoehoe). Hilo got the worst of it: its waterfront was completely destroyed and 96 people were killed. The city was rebuilt, but in 1960 it happened again: another deadly tsunami splintered the waterfront. This time Hilo did not rebuild, but left a quiet expanse of parks separating the downtown area from the bay.

After that the sugar industry steadily declined (sputtering out in the 1990s), and the Big Island's newest income source –

tourism – focused quite naturally on the sun-drenched, sandy western shores where Hawaiian monarchs once gamboled. Since the 1970s, resorts and real-estate barons have jockeyed for position and profit along the leeward coast, turning West Hawai'i into the de facto seat of power.

Today, despite escalating home prices, the Big Island is considered the most affordable island to live on (and travel around), attracting young people from across the state; and it is diversifying its economy with small farm-based agriculture and renewable energy.

In 2014, Kilauea erupted, sending lava flows within a few hundred feet of the Pahoa village road in Puna. Some 50 homes were evacuated but, despite the destruction, many Puna residents objected to suggestions that the flow be diverted, arguing that Mother Pele's fire should move unimpeded.

National, State & County Parks

The Big Island's main attraction, Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, is one of the USA's most interesting and varied national parks. More than a million visitors come annually to drive and hike this lava and rainforest wonderland.

The Big Island is also notable for its wealth of ancient Hawaiian sights, which are preserved in several national and state historical parks. The most famous is Pu'uhonua o

HAWAII, THE BIG ISLAND IN...

Two Days

If you arrive in **Kona**, spend your days leeward, starting with a swim at **Hapuna Beach**, a kayak and snorkel at **Two-Step** and a visit to ancient Hawai'i at Pu'uhonua o Honaunau. Save day two for exploring the galleries in **Holualoa**, followed by a **coffee-farm tour**.

If you arrive in **Hilo**, browse the **farmers markets** and explore **historic downtown** before visiting **'Imiloa Astronomy Center**. If the lava is flowing into the ocean, head to **Puna** at night to check it out. Then spend a day hiking **Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park**.

Four Days

If you've got double the time, double your fun by linking the leeward and windward itineraries with a twilight visit to **Mauna Kea** for sunset and stargazing, or a hike in **Waipi'o Valley**. En route you'll pass through **Waimea**, restaurant capital of the island: give casual **Pau** or powerhouse **Merriman's** a try.

One Week

To really make the most of the Big Island, you should give yourself a week. On top of our four-day itinerary, spend an extra day exploring **Kona Coast** beaches including **Kekaha Kai State Park** and **Kiholo Bay** before snorkeling or diving with manta rays at night. Bookend these experiences with a visit north to quaint **Hawi** and a hike in the **Pololu Valley**. Close out your adventures with a trip to **South Point** and **Green Sands Beach**.