

Welcome to Hawai‘i, the Big Island

Indulge your spirit of adventure on the biggest Hawaiian island. It's still a vast frontier, full of unexpected wonders.

Island Diversity

We doubt that it's possible to get 'island fever' on Hawai'i. The aptly named Big Island is fantastically diverse, with miles of highways – and, better yet, byways – to explore. Eight of the world's 13 climate zones exist here, adding sensory variety as you circumnavigate the island. Gaze at vivid emerald cliffs, swaths of black-, white- and even green-sand beaches, majestic volcanic mountains (possibly snowcapped!), stark lava desert, rolling pastureland and misty valleys, weathered by rain, waves and time. Hawai'i is twice as big as the other Hawaiian Islands combined, and its dramatic terrain is ever-fascinating.

Volcanic Wonders

Less than a million years old, Hawai'i is a baby in geological terms. Here you'll find the Hawaiian Islands' tallest, largest and only active volcanic mountains. Kilauea, on the eastern side, is the world's most active volcano. If you see glowing, red-hot lava, you are witnessing Earth in the making, a thrilling and humbling experience. At 33,000ft tall when measured from the ocean floor, Mauna Kea is the world's tallest mountain, and its significance cannot be overstated – as a sacred place to Hawaiians and a top astronomical site to scientists.

Ancient History & Modern Multiculturalism

Ancient history looms large on Hawai'i, a place of powerful mana (spiritual essence). The first Polynesians landed at Ka Lae, the windswept southern tip. Kamehameha the Great, who unified the Hawaiian Islands, was born in Kohala and died in Kailua-Kona. Hula and *oli* (chant) are deep-rooted here, and Miloli'i on the Kona Coast is perhaps the last Hawaiian fishing village. During the sugarcane era, traditional ways became intertwined with those of immigrant cultures: Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Portuguese and more. This legacy is palpable in the mix of languages, foods and festivals.

Roads Less Traveled

Thanks to its sheer size, Hawai'i has lots of legroom. Enjoy the freedom of the open road, where the journey becomes the main attraction. From east to west, the island has multiple personalities, and it's worthwhile experiencing them all. While the 'Gold Coast' caters to travelers en masse, most island towns exist primarily for residents. Even the capital seat, Hilo, is a former plantation town that's still slow-paced and populated by *kama'aina* (people born and raised here). Ultimately this down-home localness marks the real Hawai'i. Don't miss it.



Why I Love Hawai'i, the Big Island

By Luci Yamamoto, Writer

Growing up in Hilo, I took my island home for granted. Didn't everyone wake to birdsong, homegrown bananas for breakfast and the unmistakable silhouette of Mauna Kea in the distance? Didn't everyone gaze at an unobstructed blue horizon and fall asleep to the rat-a-tat of pounding rain on metal rooftops? It wasn't until I explored Hawai'i as a writer that I finally appreciated the island's uniqueness. The power of Pele and nature is phenomenal here, from fiery volcanic eruptions to otherworldly lava deserts – and the unpretentious nature of the local people is palpable. I love the Big Island for its small-town heart.

For more about our writers, see p320.

Above: View from the summit of Mauna Kea (p170)