

Day Trip to the North Coast and King Kamehameha Country (Tuesday - Sunday)



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(Note: Anna Ranch (stop #3) is open Tuesday through Friday from 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM. Bamboo Restaurant in Hawi (stop #9) is closed Mondays and stops serving lunch at 2:30PM, Lapakahi State Park (stop #11) stops admitting visitors at 3:30PM, and the Hamakua Macadamia Nut Co. closes at 5:30PM).

Background

Waimea is the meeting point of four major roads. As a result, you can get from there to just about anywhere on The Big Island and back within a day. But, one road in particular is a “don’t miss” drive, and is the start of this day trip. Highway 250, known as the Kohala Mountain Road, connects Waimea and Hawi. It has it all - dramatic climate changes, lush vegetation, and incredible vistas. And it leads to some of the most historical sites on The Big Island.

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On this day trip you will visit a quaint country store, drive the spectacular Kohala Mountain Road, ogle the statue of Hawaii's first king, peer into a Shangri La, lunch at the best restaurant on the island (in our humble opinion) and take a look at Hawaii's past.

Restrooms Along The Way

On this trip you will find restrooms at the Parker Ranch Center, the Parker Center, Anna Ranch, the park near the King Kamehameha Statue, at Bamboo Restaurant, at Lapakahi State Park, at the Hamakua Macadamia Nut Co., and at the Kawaihae Center.

1. Start the Day Trip

Waimea (also called Kamuela) is a comfortable little town located on the saddle between the Kohala Mountains and Mauna Kea. At an elevation of 2600 feet, it is naturally about 8 degrees cooler than at the coast, making it a desirable location to spend some time. The mountains to the east snag the moisture-laden trade winds and pile the clouds up as the day progresses, hence it can be rainy at times. But as they say in Waimea, if you don't like the weather, wait five minutes...

Our day trip starts at the Parker Ranch Center, in the heart of Waimea. The center has shops and restaurants and it's okay to stop at Starbucks for a mocha and dawdle for a while. Perhaps you can come back and explore it on your own at a later date.

2. On the Road

Exit the shopping center at the main entrance and turn left, then right at the stoplight onto Lindsey Road (or you can exit the shopping center at the stop light and continue straight ahead on Lindsey Road). Lindsey Road splits almost immediately to become the Kawaihae Road. Stay on Kawaihae Road at the split.

Continue past the Hawaii Preparatory Academy (HPA) on your right, one of the finest preparatory schools on the island, and turn left almost immediately into the Parker Center. Visit the Waimea General Store, which has been a Waimea fixture since 1970. If you are a cat lover, ask if Phoebe is in the store. Directly across the lawn from the General store is probably the most eclectic store on the island: The Gallery of Great Things is definitely worth a visit. Tell Martha Brick, the owner, aloha for us.

If you are in a clothing mood, stop in at Hula Moon, on the same side of the shopping center as the General Store. The owner, Kathy Keller, scours the world for unique fashions and displays them artfully in her small store.

3. To Anna Ranch (open Tues. - Fri 10 - 4)

Exit the Parker Center and turn left onto the Kawaihae Road. The streets on either side are where the residents of Waimea live. About a mile down the road look on the right for Anna Ranch (just past the Jacaranda Inn), a beautiful white house that was once the home of Anna Lindsey Perry-Fiske, "a cowgirl, jockey, licensed butcher, community leader, rancher, world traveler and humanitarian" and a beloved community leader. Hawaii has a deep history of ranching that goes back to the day that Captain George

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Vancouver presented the first cattle as a gift to King Kamehameha I. Anna Ranch embodies the history of ranching with an emphasis on Hawaiian ranch life in the early 20th Century.

The gift store and grounds are open Tuesday through Friday from 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM. There is no charge to tour the grounds, gardens and visit the gift shop. A self guided Discovery Trail will give you a history of the area, and you're welcome to chat with their blacksmith and master saddlemaker. Guided tours of the Historic Ranch Home are held between 10:00 AM and 1:00 PM (\$10.00 per person, \$5.00 Students and Seniors).

4. Kohala Mountain Road

Exit the ranch and continue in the direction you were traveling. Look for a road sign near the HPA Upper Campus pointing the way to Hawi (pronounced haw-VEE). Turn right at the "Y". This is the start of the Kohala Mountain Road, which winds for 22 miles through upland forests and grasslands, reaching an altitude of 3,500 feet before descending to the coast near the town of Hawi.

The Kohala Mountains are the oldest of five volcanoes that comprise The Big Island of Hawaii. It is estimated that it last erupted nearly 130,000 years ago. The Kohala Mountain Road parallels the spine of the loaf-shaped volcano. The views from this road are breathtaking. Stop at the paved pullout on the left side of the road between mile markers 7 and 8 and enjoy the views of Hualalai, Mauna Kea, Mauna Loa in the distance, the Kohala Coast resorts, and the vast Pacific Ocean.

The weather is changeable along this route. It is not unusual to encounter rain and fog at the highest point. Look for farms and ranches along the route. Paniolo Adventures, just past mile marker 13 (blink and you will miss the entrance), offers open range horseback riding to vacationers, which is something you may want to come back and do.

I am not sure of its accuracy, but it is said that the pasture along the mountain sides are so steep that cattle develop shorter legs on the uphill side of their bodies, hence the true definition of lean beef...

5. Stop and Gawk

As you drop down into the open grasslands, stop at pullouts along the makai (ocean) side of the road between mile markers 16 and 17 to enjoy the vistas. If you are here November through April, scan the nearshore area for humpback whales. To the right you should be able to see the south coast of the island of Maui.

Towards the end of the Kohala Mountain Road there is another 'Y' intersection. Turn left and follow the sign that takes you to Hawi (and mind the speed limit).

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6. Hawi Town and Lunch

Hawi is what's left of a plantation town. When the sugar plantations pulled out of the islands 20 years ago small plantation towns like this one started disappearing. Hawi's salvation was its reputation as an artists' community.



Bamboo Restaurant and Bar is our favorite eatery on the north coast. Housed in a former general store built in 1914. The restaurant serves an eclectic menu of Hawaiian/Asian fusion food. We usually make a meal out of pupus (the Hawaiian word for appetizers), however the BBQ pork sandwich is my all time favorite. On your way out, take time to peruse the gift shop. If Bamboo is closed, try the nearby Luke's Place and the Tiki Lounge (ask for directions), which has consistently good food, a fun atmosphere, and friendly service.

Several businesses in Hawi are worth a visit. Look for Elements to the right as you exit Bamboo. To the left of Bamboo you will find L. Zeidman Gallery, with wood beautiful bowls hand-turned by the owner, Olivia Clair Boutique (tell AOlivia we said "Aloha"), and the unique artwork and gifts at Kohala Artworkorks.

7. Statue in the Park

Head east from Hawi towards Kapa`au. King Kamehameha the Great was reared in this area of The Big Island and a statue of the uniter of the Hawaiian Islands stands in front of the North Kohala Civic Center in the heart of Kapa`au. (Bathrooms are located behind the Civic Center building to the rear of the statue).

This is the original statue that was cast in Italy and lost at sea near the Falkland Islands in 1880. A replacement statue was cast and it stands in front of the Iolani Palace in Honolulu. The statue you are looking at was dredged from the sea in 1912 and placed here near Kamehameha's birthplace. Every June 11th, on Kamehameha Day, each of the statues is ceremoniously draped with flower lei to celebrate the king's birthday.

Face the statue and turn around. Look for the Ackerman Gallery and the King's View Café across the street. Café serves delicious ice cream (make mine a double scoop macadamia nut and mud pie). You may want to stop here for a break on your way back from the Pololu Valley overlook.

8. Kalahikiola Church

About a half mile further along the highway look for a road to the right that will take you to the Kalahikiola Church. It is marked with a Hawaiian warrior sign. A short detour through an arch of trees takes you to a pretty church consecrated in 1855 and nearly destroyed during the massive October 15, 2006 earthquake.

9. Pololu Valley Overlook

Return to the main road and turn right. The Akoni Puli Highway comes to an abrupt end at the Pololu Valley Overlook, about 5 twisty miles ahead. The valley is one of several that gouge into the east face of the Kohala mountains. Think twice about hike

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down to the black sand beach. The trail is a lot steeper and rougher than it looks. There are no facilities here, so I hope you used the ones at the Civic Center.

Reverse course and head back towards Kapa`au. The Ackerman Gallery across from the King Kamehameha Statue is worth a visit, and the King's View Café next door is a great place for an ice cream, or a smoothie.

10. On the Road Again

Drive back through Hawi on the Akoni Puli Highway. Just past Hawi look on the right for giant wind turbines near the coastline. The area near the turbines is the site of the first heiau (temple platform) constructed in the islands. The Tahitians who migrated here around 600AD brought their fearful religion, which included human sacrifice, and the luakini, or sacrificial heiau, saw the deaths of thousands of islanders. It is a place that gives me 'chicken skin' every time I go there.

There is no easy route to the heiau, so just make a mental note that you passed by it. It is near the supposed site of King Kamehameha's birth.

11. Lapakahi Park

The Ancient Hawaiians developed a system of land sharing called Ahupua`a, where villagers from the coast traded fish for wood and other kinds of food grown higher up on the slopes of the mountains. In that way, an area could specialize in just one aspect of survival knowing that it could trade the fruits of its labor with other specialists.



Lapakahi is the archaeological remains of an ancient fishing village that was part of the Ahupua`a system. The stone walls you see from the overlook were houses and storage bins similar to the exhibit house near the visitor center. The park is open daily (except state holidays) from 8AM - 3:30PM and admission is free. There is a portable toilet, but no drinking water at the visitor center.

By now you are probably exhausted and the trail around the remains is rough and hot, so a visit to the cultural exhibits and a look-see from the overlook is probably sufficient.

12. Whale Watching

The coastline near the park is a protected marine preserve and a hangout for humpback whales. There are several paved pullouts on the ocean side of the road. The one with the best view is between mile markers 12 and 11 south of the park (look for the shoreline access sign). If you are here between November and April, you may want to top there and wait around for a half hour. There is no guarantee whales will be there, but a pod usually cruises back and forth along the coastline and frequently breach or flipper flop in that area.

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13. Macadamia Nuts, Shave Ice, and Home

Follow the Akoni Puli Highway south towards the intersection with the Kawaihae Road. As you approach the harbor area look on the left for Maluokalani Street (If you miss it you have another chance, since it is a loop street). Turn left on Maluokalani Street, stop at the Hamakua Macadamia Nut Factory on your left, and take a self-guided tour of the facility (they are in full operation weekdays only) that includes free unlimited tastings of macadamia nut products in their visitor's center. The workers are incredibly friendly and the company buys from local growers. The facility is open daily from 9AM until 5:30PM. They will mail your purchases.

Exit the factory and continue south on the Akoni Puli Highway. If sampling macadamia nuts has left you parched, stop at Anuenue Ice Cream and Shave Ice in the Kawaihae Shopping Center on the right just before the intersection with the Kawaihae Road for a cool refreshment. The store is literally a window in the wall, but their shave ice is ono (Hawaiian for yummy).

If you are returning to Hilo, turn left at the intersection and follow the Kawaihae road into Waimea. If you are returning to Kailua-Kona or a Kohala resort, follow the Kawaihae Road uphill and turn right at its intersection with the Queen Ka`ahumanu Highway.

Finis:

This ends the day trip. If you would like to comment on it or suggest additions, please email us at theorchidisle.aol.com



Aloha.