

DayTrip to the Kohala Coast Resorts



Courtesy of <http://www.bigislandvacation.com>

This day trip will take you to two magnificent resort hotels on the Kohala Coast, with a stop at a fascinating art gallery and lunch at our favorite Kohala restaurant. The return trip offers you the choice of seeing sharks and Hawaiian green sea turtles, then lazing in

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a seaside hammock as you watch the sun settle into the Pacific or shopping 'til you drop at two beautifully landscaped marketplaces. The trip covers approximately 40 miles and the route remains at or near sea level (if you are here Nov. - April, bring compact binoculars with you to whale watch).

Restrooms Along the Way

You will find public restrooms at almost every stop on this day trip.

1. Start of the Day Trip:

This day trip starts at the entrance to the Waikoloa Village Resorts on the Kohala Coast. Once bare, black lava, this resort complex is still growing. It is home to spectacular resorts, vacation condos, shopping malls, and two championship golf courses. Enter the complex and make a mental note of the location of the Queens' Marketplace on the left and the Kings' Shops on the right. You may want to stop there on the return trip.

2. Hilton Waikoloa Village

In our opinion, this is the most family-friendly resort on the Kohala Coast. You can visit for free, however there is a \$15 charge for hotel parking (\$21 for valet parking (since it is usually warm and it is a bit of an uphill hike from the parking lot, the extra \$6 might be worth it). Street parking is not allowed, but free parking is sometimes available in the shoreline access parking lot across the street from the entrance to hotel parking. (If free parking is unavailable, go back and park at the Kings' Shops and take the \$2 per person shopping shuttle to the hotel). Take your parking ticket with you. Pay the parking fee at the valet desk on the right as you exit the hotel. You'll get free parking validation if you prove you spent more than \$50 at a restaurant (not a store or gift shop) while you were there.

As you enter the hotel, look for the resident parrot. Watch other visitors trying to get it to talk (we have never succeeded). Then get oriented: straight ahead from the entrance are the tracks for the hotel's monorail-like tram and further ahead are boat landings (the landing over the bridge leads to the south wing of rooms). The bridge leads to a grand staircase that overlooks the snorkeling lagoon. If you can't do stairs, an elevator near the lobby descends to the same level.

We like to explore the south wing of the hotel first, then return to the lobby and take the tram or boat to the north end. After exploring there we walk back to the lobby.

South Wing

The south wing of the hotel has swimming pools, a suspension bridge, a water slide, a dolphin pool, (If you need a snack or a beverage, stop at the small restaurant at the dolphin pool), fancy restaurants (our favorite place to dine and watch the sunset is on the outside deck of the Kamuela Provision Company), and sweeping ocean views.

There are four ways to get to the south wing: walk, ride the tram, take the boat (they start operating at 2pm) or go across the bridge and descend the grand staircase. If you ride the tram, you'll exit at the end of the building where the tram stops into a hallway

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that leads to the pools and restaurants. If you take the stairs, turn left at the bottom and meander the pathway. Stop and look for turtles in the lagoon.

North Wing:

The north wing hosts another pool with a short water slide, miles (we are exaggerating, but it seems like miles) of landscaped paths, a wedding pavilion, and chaises situated to overlook the ocean. There are the same four ways to reach the south wing. We prefer to take the tram or boat one way and walk the other (to peruse the art and exhibits in the hallway). If you take the boat, look for exotic birds on the little islands along the way.

Note: After this visit, if you want to go back and enjoy the hotel's amenities on another day, you can often rent a day room (check availability at the front desk) for around \$160, which is not bad if you share the cost with another couple. It gives four people access to the pools, water slides, and snorkeling lagoon.

3. Café Pesto:

Exit the resort complex and turn left at the stop light. Travel north on the Queen Ka`ahumanu Highway until the road ends about ten miles later at the intersection with the Kawaihae Road. Turn left onto the Kawaihae Road and continue downhill into the harbor area. Continue straight ahead at the intersection with the Akoni Puli Highway. Look for a strip mall immediately on your right. Café Pesto is located in this lower level of the mall. The restaurant is open daily from 11AM till 9PM.

This is our favorite restaurant on the Kohala Coast. It is not much to look at from the outside, and there is nothing to look at from the window tables except storage tanks and harbor equipment, however it's the food that brings visitors and locals back time and again (their Island Seafood Risotto broke da mou). You won't be disappointed.

3. Harbor Gallery:

A small gallery just across the breezeway from Café Pesto, the Harbor Gallery sells quality art by local artists. We especially like the furniture and koa bowls. They'll ship your purchases.

4. Whale Watching (November - April)

Humpback whales frequent the area around Kawaihae (pronounced kuh-WHY-high) harbor. If you have time in your agenda, consider driving a few miles north on the Akoni Puli Highway (turn left at the intersection as you leave the harbor area) to pull-offs that overlook the ocean (our favorite is just south of Lapakahi State Park). Stop in a pullout (our favorite spot is between mile markers 11 and 12), shut off the engine, and let lunch settle as you scan the near shore area for mama humpbacks and their babies. Another option is to use your binoculars to scan the ocean near stationary boats. Sometimes the whales will put on a performance by breaching or flipper flopping.

4. Shave Ice

If whale watching leaves you parched, on the return trip stop at Anuenue Ice Cream and Shave Ice, actually a window in the top level of the strip mall just before reaching the

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gas station at the intersection with Kawaihae Road. Their shave ice is authentic and ono (Hawaiian for yummy).

5. Mauna Lani Resort

The Mauna Lani is the premier place to watch Hawaiian green sea turtles in their natural habitat, and it is the only place on the coast where you can get up close and personal with sharks and sting rays.

For a large hotel it layout is strikingly simple. Park for free in their lot and enter through the main lobby of the hotel (stop to peruse the fish and landscape at the entrance). Like most Hawaiian resorts, the lobby is huge and open-air (yes, it is warm here year-round). A grand staircase (also an elevators) leads to the lower lobby, which opens to the outdoors in two directions. Go left and walk past the pool to the large fishponds (Hawaiian royalty raised their own food in ponds like this). Look for fish, eels, and baby sea turtles (called honu in Hawaiian). The Mauna Lani raises baby honu and releases them into the ocean every July 4th. Apparently honu love the Mauna Lani because there are plenty that pull up on the sandy shore fronting the hotel (law requires that you do not touch them).

Walk along the sandy shore to the opposite side of the hotel. We like to stop and sway in the hammocks along the shoreline and watch the waves and clouds. Follow the path past the Canoe House Restaurant to the opposite entrance to the lower lobby. Along the way you will find a large pool filled with reef fish and several species of sharks. To see sting rays, reenter the hotel's lower lobby and turn right. The rays are in a fish pond at the end of the hallway.

If you are ending your day trip here you may want to have dinner at one of the restaurants in The Shops at Mauna Lani, which you passed as you circled the round-about near the entrance to the resort. If not, exit the resort complex, turn right on the Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway and right again two stop lights later, into the Waikoloa Resort Complex.

6. Kings' Shops and Queens' Marketplace

Two shopping malls are located near the entrance to the Waikoloa Resort Complex. The Queen's Marketplace on the left houses shops, a popular Japanese restaurant, and a food court with fast food and informal eateries. The King's Shops - a little ahead on the right side of the road - houses upscale shops and fancy restaurants (our favorites are Roy's and Merrimans), however we also like Island Fish and Chips, which is tucked away on the backside of the mall facing the lake. Both malls offer free entertainment and Hawaiiana classes. Check their online calendar of events from links from our web site or look for events calendars in the malls.

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