

PLAYGROUNDS of Paradise

*Beautiful natural attractions, a colorful
cultural landscape and a relaxed lifestyle make
Hawai'i ideal for family vacations*



By Ilima Loomis



“Let’s race to the bridge!”

I watched my 7-year-old daughter dig her paddle blades into the cool, calm water as her kayak surged forward up the **Hanalei River**, past the tangled branches of overhanging *hau* trees and the gently clacking stands of bamboo. She had begged to share a two-person kayak with her favorite aunt, my sister-in-law, Anne. Then they left me in their wake.

“Not fair!” I laughed. “Two against one!”

Seeking a warm-weather winter destination, my Canadian in-laws had booked accommodations for the family on Kaua’i’s North Shore. For a whole glorious week in November, we walked to the beach, surfed the waves in Hanalei Bay, explored the island’s lush valleys, and spent long evenings cooking, laughing and sipping wine—three generations under one roof.

For the first few days of our Kaua’i vacation, Anne and her husband, Tim, took turns with the surfboard, while my husband and my father-in-law played on a gentle section of the shoreline with our daughter. I walked the 2-mile stretch of sandy beach with my mother-in-law. By Wednesday we were ready for something different, and renting kayaks to paddle the Hanalei River seemed like the perfect adventure we could all do together.

With Hawai’i’s breathtaking natural beauty, plethora of outdoor activities and culture that holds quality of life as a core value, the Aloha State has long been an ideal vacation destination for families. Boasting plenty of attractions that are accessible to all ages and ability levels—plus a tradition of treasuring *keiki* (children) as well as *kupuna* (elders)—it’s especially well suited to multigenerational groups.

Whether you come from a clan of adventurers eager to hike on an active volcano, culture aficionados in search of museums and historic sites, or beach lovers content to spend time in a bliss of surf, sand and sun, the diverse offerings of the Hawaiian Islands have something to offer every family.

Kayaking on the calm, verdant Hanalei River is a favorite activity of visitors to Kaua’i’s North Shore area.



MARC SCHECHTER / PHOTORESOURCEHAWAII.COM

O'ahu boasts a variety of attractions, ranging from water sports at Kailua Beach Park (top) to historic sites such as Honolulu's 'Iolani Palace (above) and the statue of King Kamehameha I (right).

O'ahu

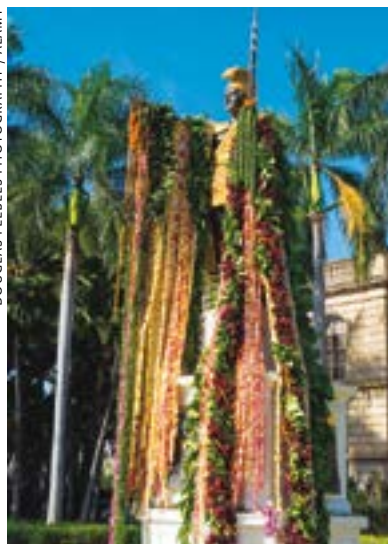
My daughter was only 3 years old when my mother and I first took her on a girls' trip back to O'ahu, the island where we both grew up. Among the museums, beaches, restaurants and cultural attractions, we found so much to do that we've since made the trip to this island an annual event.

Known as "The Gathering Place" since ancient times, O'ahu is still the most populous and developed of the Hawaiian Islands. The island may be best known for its fun Waikīkī scene of surf, sand and shopping, but there's a lot more to it than bustling beaches and towering hotels. Venture out of the Waikīkī area and you'll discover a city that's steeped in history and teeming with youthful culture.

In the **Hawai'i Capitol Historic District**, in Honolulu, you'll find some of the island's most beautiful architecture and historically important sites, all within a compact downtown. Start at '**Iolani Palace**, the home of Hawai'i's last ruling monarchs and the only royal palace in the United States. The Coronation Pavilion on the palace grounds was built for the 1883 coronation of King Kalākaua, sometimes called "The Merrie Monarch," and Queen Kapi'olani. The area near the bandstand is still used for outdoor music and hula performances. In the palace, children can imagine themselves being presented at court in the opulent throne room, check out the

royal bathtub and toilets in the private suites, and view the private rooms of Queen Lili'uokalani, Hawai'i's last monarch.

Within easy walking distance you'll find additional historic sites, including the **bronze statue of King Kamehameha I**, famous for uniting the Hawaiian Islands in 1810; the nearly 173-year-old **Kawaiaha'o Church**, which was painstakingly constructed of coral slabs; and the **Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site**, where kids can peek into the restored homes of the 19th century Protestant missionaries—the first Christian missionaries in Hawai'i. Enjoy free admis-



DOUGLAS PEEBLES PHOTOGRAPHY / ALAMY

Mark Your Calendar

Check out these upcoming family-friendly events:

- > **'Ohana Day** (first Saturday of each month; Līhu'e, Kaua'i; kauaimuseum.org) Enjoy family-oriented demonstrations, lectures and more at Kaua'i Museum.
- > **East Maui Taro Festival** (April 25; Hāna, Maui; tarofestival.org) Learn about Hawai'i's staple food, and dare kids to taste *poi* and other delicacies at this cultural celebration in remote Hāna.
- > **Mele Mei** (May 1–31; multiple venues, O'ahu and Hawai'i Island; melemei.com) Take part in a monthlong celebration of Hawai'i's music, including the Nā Hōkū Hanohano Awards (May 23).
- > **Waikiki Spam Jam** (May 2; Waikīkī, O'ahu; spamjamhawaii.com) Enjoy Hawai'i's favorite canned meat, and meet the mascot "Spammy," at this event that benefits the Hawaii Foodbank. Alaska Airlines is an event sponsor.
- > **Hawai'i Book and Music Festival** (May 2–3; Honolulu, O'ahu; hawaiiibookandmusicfestival.com) Along with readings and author signings, experience local music, hula, food, and other family-oriented activities and entertainment for *keiki* (kids).

sion and family activities, such as games from the 1800s and candle making at the museum's open house from noon to 4 P.M. on April 18. Or stop by for an outdoor picnic and a concert honoring the district of Wai'anae from 5:30 P.M. to 8 P.M. on May 9.

A short drive or bus ride from downtown, the **Honolulu Museum of Art** features extensive collections of Asian and Pacific art in addition to Western masterpieces. Visitors under 17 get into the museum for free; they also get in free to the Doris Duke Theatre for most films and concerts.

To the northeast of Honolulu, on the far side of the Ko'olau Range, the **community of Kailua** is one of O'ahu's favorite beach towns. Order smoothies at **Lanikai Juice**, then head to **Kailua Beach Park** to build sand castles, and surf or swim in gentle waves.

For a more adventurous outing, pack a picnic and plan a day trip to O'ahu's North Shore. The **Kamehameha Highway** offers a scenic drive along the island's Windward Coast, with plenty of opportunities to stop for a dip at secluded beaches when conditions are right (note that weather and beach

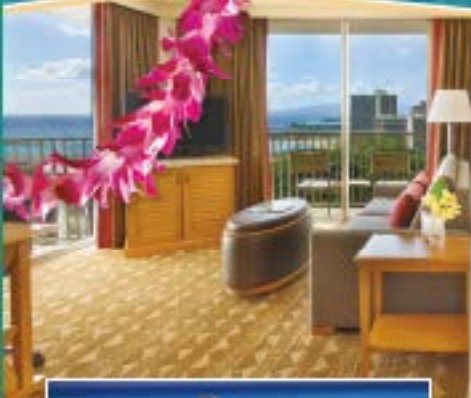


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conditions vary by time of year). Or stop in the town of Lā'ie and introduce youngsters to the diverse cultures of Hawai'i and the Pacific with a visit to the **Polynesian Cultural Center**. Here natives of island nations such as Fiji, Tonga and Aotearoa (New Zealand) share their traditions, games and dances. The center also hosts a popular lū'au and the *Hā: Breath of Life* evening show. A new selection of shops and restaurants opened at the center's renovated Hukilau Marketplace in February.

Once you arrive on the North Shore, unpack your picnic and stop to watch the action at **Sunset Beach**, **Banzai Pipeline** or **Waimea Bay**, some of the world's most iconic big-wave surfing destinations. During the calm summer months, beginners of all ages can learn to ride the waves with a lesson at one of the area's many surf schools. When you're ready to get out of the sun, spend the afternoon exploring the various shops of nearby **Hale'iwa**, where the kids will enjoy sampling shave ice, a favorite local treat that resembles a fluffy snow cone.

Maui

With its quaint small towns, pastoral countryside and expansive beaches, Maui offers a more laid-back

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Found in Translation

Locals honor the Islands' traditional culture by incorporating numerous Hawaiian words into their daily lives. Send kids on a linguistic scavenger hunt by telling them to listen for these common terms. —I.L.

- > **aloha**: love, hello, good-bye
- > **honu**: green sea turtle
- > **keiki**: child
- > **kōkua**: to help out
- > **mahalo**: thank you
- > **'ohana**: family
- > **'ono**: tasty
- > **pau**: finished
- > **pūpū**: snack



JAMIE PHAM / ALAMY

alternative to the bustle of Hawai'i's urban centers. Maui is also one of the world's top destinations for windsurfing, kiteboarding, snorkeling and other ocean sports, making it a paradise for active families.

A string of family-friendly resorts stretches along the West Maui coastline, and typically splendid beach weather, as well as plenty of safe places to swim, make this part of the island, from Lahaina to just beyond Kā'anapali, an ideal home base. Several resorts front picture-perfect Kā'anapali Beach, a 3-mile stretch of white sand with some of the best swimming on the island. Visit Black Rock, a promon-

In historic Lahaina, Maui, families enjoy shops and shave ice (above) or cool off in the shade of a 142-year-old banyan tree (left).

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tory jutting out from the beach, for spectacular snorkeling within easy swimming distance of the shore.

While on the West Side, spend a day strolling **historic Lahaina**. In the 1800s, Lahaina boomed as a whaling town, and it was the seat of the Hawaiian Kingdom from 1820 to 1845. Today, you can shop for gifts along the old-timey waterfront—and when you do, be sure to stop at the **Wo Hing Museum** for a look at how the town's earliest Chinese immigrants lived. When the kids are ready for some unstructured fun, let them play around in the shade of Lahaina's 142-year-old banyan tree.

On the way out of West Maui, make time to stop at the **Maui Ocean Center** for an up-close look at some of Hawai'i's underwater inhabitants. Little hands can gently hold sea stars and urchins at the tide pool, while the whole family can get the feeling of standing on the seafloor in the aquarium's 54-foot-long acrylic tunnel as sharks, rays and other open-ocean fish glide overhead. Check the center's online calendar for family-friendly events. Older kids might enjoy "Sleep With the Sharks," an overnight campout near the shark tank.

Outstanding resort experiences can also be enjoyed in sunny **South Maui**. From bustling Kihei

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Maui's Ho'okipa Beach Park is a top windsurfing destination for adult family members.



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to upscale Wailea, you'll find plenty of family-friendly dining options, plus some of the best beaches on the island. Try the local favorite, **Keawakapu Beach**, which offers warm water, gentle waves and public showers for rinsing off sand.

There are other interesting areas to explore while you're visiting Maui. For example, head to the surfside town of **Pā'ia** on Maui's North Shore for lunch at the **Paia Fish Market**—or, for a splurge, at the legendary **Mama's Fish House**—and then drive a few minutes up the road to watch some of the world's best wind-surfers carve the legendary waves at **Ho'okipa Beach Park**.

While the long drives might make these a no-go for younger kids, adventurous families might consider tackling the famous **Hāna Highway**, along Maui's northern coast, or making the trek to the summit of the island's dormant volcano



CAROL BARRINGTON / ALAMY

Wooden statues (*ki'i*) stand near the shoreline at Pu'uhonua o Hōnāunau National Historical Park, near Kona, on Hawai'i Island.

at **Haleakalā National Park**. The 10,023-foot peak can get chilly near the top—it even saw a bit of snow during a winter storm earlier this year—so bring enough jackets to bundle up. Ambitious travelers who make the journey will be rewarded with spectacular views of the summit basin and an opportunity to see rare native species such as the threatened silversword, which blooms once in its potentially decades-long lifetime.





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When conditions allow it, visitors to Hawai'i Island can watch from a boat or a safe place on shore as lava flows into the sea.

Hawai'i Island

It might seem surprising, but there were cowboys in Hawai'i decades before they emerged in the American West. Get the authentic *paniolo* (cowboy) experience with a trail ride in the heart of Hawai'i's cattle country. Tours at **Kahua Ranch** on the slope of the Kohala Mountains offer sweeping views of Hawai'i Island's high plains. After you've worked up an appetite, head down the hill to **Village Burger** in the town of Waimea for a grilled-to-perfection patty of local Wagyu beef.

If you prefer your horses much smaller—and underwater ... and not actual horses—visit the **Ocean Rider Seahorse Farm**, near Kona International Airport. Guided by biologists, the farm's tours offer an up-close introduction to baby and adult sea horses and sea dragons, including an opportunity to hold these gentle, slow-moving creatures.

The **Kona Coast** is renowned for its vibrant marine life, so to swim with sea animals in their natural environment, head to the beach for some snorkeling. Just note that federal law prohibits feeding or approaching marine mammals,



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and that state and federal authorities recommend maintaining respectful distances from other animals.

Sheltered from larger waves and easily accessible by car, Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park is a family-friendly place to explore the reef. Kids will quickly spot the area's distinctive yellow tangs, and you can offer a prize to the first person to see and name with correct pronunciation Hawai'i's state fish, the *humuhumunukunukuāpua'a* (or triggerfish).

When you're ready to get out of the water, explore the park's City of Refuge. In ancient times, when someone had broken a law, they could find sanctuary here. The site is still considered a sacred place, so remind children to be as respectful as they would be in church.

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Fun in the Sun

Kids from colder climes may love soaking up the sun, but Hawai'i's low latitude means those rays are more intense than they are back home. Protect tender skin from a sunburn with these tips:

> **Get the right SPF.** Even if you use a lighter sunscreen at home, you'll need SPF 30 or higher here.

> **Reapply, reapply, reapply.** A lotion might claim to be water-resistant, but sand, waves and towels can still wipe it off. Reapply each time kids emerge from the water, or every 2 hours.

> **Consider alternatives to aerosols.** Spray-on sunscreens may send more product into the air than onto the skin, and kids end up breathing it in.

> **Don't forget the ears.** The back of the neck and the tops of the feet are other often-overlooked spots.

> **Don't save sunscreen for beach days.** Kids and adults should wear sunscreen any time they venture out. Take extra care when you travel up a mountain such as Maui's 10,000-plus-foot Haleakalā, because UV rays are stronger at high altitudes. —J.L.

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Kona is one of the island's most popular visitor attractions, **Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park**. Hawaiians revere this place as the home of the volcano goddess Pele, and it's easy to share their awe as you gaze at the destruction and new life caused by this powerful force of nature. Active families will enjoy the chance to get out of the car and stretch their legs. The park offers a wide variety of hikes for different ability levels. If you're traveling with a stroller, try the paved **Devastation Trail** (1-mile out-and-back) into a section of forest that was buried by cinders in a 1959 eruption.

The pleasant East Hawai'i Island town of **Hilo** makes a good home base for trips into the park. Excite your favorite science geek with a visit to the town's **'Imiloa Astronomy Center**, a museum and planetarium established to educate the public about the world-renowned observatories at the summit of nearby Mauna Kea, the tallest peak in the Hawaiian Islands.

At the end of the day, your family members can stretch their legs in the 30-acre **Lili'uokalani Gardens** along Hilo's sleepy waterfront. The expansive, Japanese-style garden has koi ponds, bridges, pagodas and a teahouse to explore.

Kaua'i

Lush with greenery and overflowing with waterfalls, "The Garden Isle" of Kaua'i is the archetype of a tropical paradise. It has appeared in a long list of Hollywood blockbusters, including *Indiana Jones* and *the Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Jurassic*

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JOEL CARILLET / ISTOCK



Waimea Canyon, dubbed the “Grand Canyon of the Pacific,” has various drive-up viewpoints and hiking options.

Park (1993) and Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides (2011).

In **Lihue**—near the airport—stop in at shops such as the Koa Store for keepsakes made of Hawai‘i’s luminous native wood. Or snack on savory and sweet pastries at Hanalima Bakery.

Then visit the nearby **Kilohana Plantation** for a taste of the sweet life once enjoyed by Hawai‘i’s sugar barons. Here, visitors can also wander through a luxurious 16,000-square-foot homestead built in 1935 by the owner of the sprawling Grove Farm plantation, and youngsters will enjoy climbing aboard a replica sugar cane train to explore some of the park’s roughly 105 acres.

Driving south, stop at **Po‘ipū Beach** to enjoy the sand and swimming. This soft white beach is a favorite spot for rare

Just Try It!

Hawai‘i’s most traditional food is *poi*, a thick, usually purple-gray paste made from the cooked root of the taro plant. Since ancient times, poi has been considered by Hawaiians to be the staff of life—similar to bread for Westerners or rice for many Asian cultures. Visitors love to joke about finding it distasteful, but if you try it with your family, you might be pleasantly surprised by the mild, refreshing taste. When served cold and prepared properly, poi makes the perfect accompaniment to a salty meat, such as the lu‘au favorite, kalua pork. —I.L.



Hawaiian monk seals to pull out and warm themselves in the sun. If you're lucky enough to see one, watch and photograph from a distance—not only is it illegal to approach these endangered marine mammals, but they've been known to nip.

Before moving on from Kaua'i's southern shore, stop at nearby

Spouting Horn Park to watch a column of seawater shoot from a natural blowhole.

About 19 miles west of **Po'ipū**, turn north at Waimea and head into **Waimea Canyon State Park**, in northwestern Kaua'i, to admire the views. Dubbed "The Grand Canyon of the Pacific,"

Waimea Canyon is a 10-mile-long gorge, up to 3,000 feet deep in places, carved by a river flowing from rainy Mount Wai'ale'ale. The short **Iliau Nature Loop trail** is an easy walk through native vegetation that affords spectacular vistas of the Waimea and Waialae canyons.

Continuing north into Kaua'i's western interior, you'll find more natural wonders in **Kōke'e State Park**, a 4,345-acre preserve of native rain forest surrounded by the dramatic cliffs of the Kalalau Valley. Outdoorsy families like to stay in the area's lodge or cabins, and even day-trippers can enjoy the park's many hiking trails. For example, try the 1.8-mile **Kawaikōi Stream Trail** for a scenic stroll alongside a babbling brook. The park also offers trout fishing and plum picking in season.

There are other adventures to be found on Kaua'i's east side and North Shore areas, which you reach by heading north from Līhu'e. One of the highlights of the east side of the island is **Wailua River State Park**, where families can take calm-water kayaking trips or standup paddleboard journeys (or get ferried) into the vibrantly green inland forest.

It's in the north that you find **Hanalei Bay** (and the Hanalei River, where my family kayaked). If the bay's light-colored sand, sparkling water and backdrop of

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dramatic cliffs look familiar, that might be because this photogenic shoreline was featured in films from the classic *South Pacific* (1958) to the George Clooney drama *The Descendants* (2011). The bay offers options for various swimming levels—you'll find children learning to surf in the protected, shallow water of the beach's west end, while strong surfers can paddle out to a challenging break.

After the beach, wander into **Hanalei town** to shop for keepsakes and to refuel. The line out the door at Bubba's Burgers might give you pause, but a juicy "Double Bubba" is worth the wait.

AS WE WAITED FOR our flight home from our trip to Kaua'i, my daughter and I talked about the best parts of our family reunion. With Anne's help, my daughter had caught a wave—and stood up—on a surfboard for the first time. Our shoulders were still pleasantly sore from paddling kayaks, and we'd followed the directions of a local friend to a swimming area where we'd jumped off a rope into the water.

In the end, we agreed that our favorite moments were the quiet times in between activities—chatting on the deck of our beach house while sheltered from a passing squall or strolling into town with Grandma in search of ice cream.

No matter what your clan loves to do, there's one must-do for any family vacation, and that's simply spending time together. Hawai'i provides the perfect settings to do this. ▲

Ilima Loomis lives on Maui with her husband, daughter and two fun-loving dogs.

Alaska Airlines offers daily service to O'ahu (Honolulu), Maui, Kaua'i and Kona/Hawai'i Island. For flight reservations, go to alaskaair.com or call 800-ALASKAAIR. To book a complete Alaska Airlines Vacations package to Hawai'i, go to alaskaair.com/vacations or call 800-468-2248.

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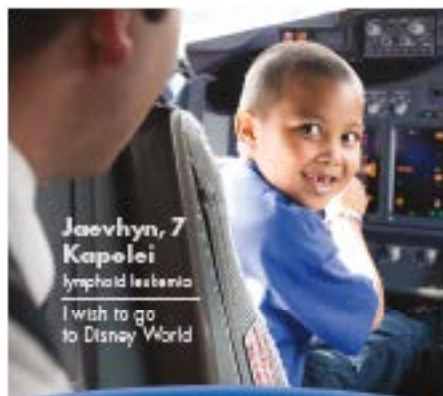
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