



On the waterfront

*Where else can you play on
award-winning lava-linked fairways,
whilst the waves crash just beyond
the bunkers? If challenging courses,
stunning views and delicious cuisine
are what you're after, then head to*

*Hawaii... By Robert Kaufman, photo The Fairmont
Orchid, Four Seasons Resort and Hilton Waikoloa*

Countless times, I've listened to the Fab Four's playful tune Octopus's Garden but it wasn't until my snorkel guide, Ikaika Kanuha, took a 30-foot dive through the turquoise clear waters off the coast of Hawaii did I grasp the scope of the squiggly critter's 'little hideaway beneath the waves'.

Trying not to fog my mask, I remained fixated on Kanuha as he transported the octopus up to sea level, where it attached its sticky tentacles around my arm before being released back to its watery bed.

The waters off the island's coast provide a window to a coral-draped world and an environment that plays a major role in the allure of Hawaii. With an assist from the fiery volcanic gods transforming the geography of the Hawaiian islands (the eruption of Kīlauea volcano currently continues at two locations), this tropical destination is a hotbed for vacationers.

THE BIG ISLAND. Of all the Hawaiian islands, it is no surprise that the most diverse is the largest – and the youngest, at approximately 300,000 years – of the archipelago. In fact, with over 6,437 square kilometers of microclimatic zones, with tremendous variations in elevation and temperature lending itself to a myriad of activities, it is nearly twice as big as all of the other Hawaiian islands (Oahu, Maui, Kauai, Molokai, and Lanai) combined, which is why it's often referred to as the 'Big Island'.

If you're a first-time visitor to Hawaii, the view from the plane as it approaches the treeless, black lava landscape might have you concerned. Not to fear. Presuming you're arriving for golf, your eyes will easily target the green grassy carpets contrasted against the molten black rock. You've arrived in mid-Pacific paradise and one of the most desirable golf destinations in the world, the Kohala Coast.

RESORT HOPPING. Once stepping off the pineapple express, my mental state kicks into a higher gear faster than I can say "Humuhumunukunukuapua'a" (Hawaii's state fish). From that point on, I switch to



strict Hawaiian time, the perfect temperament to hit the links.

When it concerns golf, however, the only dilemma is where to stay and play. With seven world-class golf courses surrounded by luxurious beach resort properties, it's merely a matter of which best fits your style and the only way to decide is to go resort hopping!

After easing out of the Kona International Airport, it's a 10-minute drive along the unsnarled, two-lane Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway, which splits the moonscape expanse of volcanic bedrock, to the Four Seasons Resort Hualalai at historic Kaupulehu.

Once leaving the highway towards the beachfront luxury property, you're magically transformed into another dimension with assistance from one of the resort's serenely private 243 rooms, six swimming pools and one saltwater snorkeling pond, all set along a half-mile-long beach.

HUALALAI GOLF COURSE. As the Champions Tour pros find out every January when Hualalai hosts the Mitsubishi Electric Championship, there's more to this resort than all its pampering amenities.

The Jack Nicklaus Signature Hualalai Golf Course, a 7,117-yard layout available only to guests and members, provides wide enough fairways to deter (most) errant shots from being swallowed by the lava fields. With not a blade of grass out of place, the historic King's Trail – located on the course along with other significant cultural sites– is carefully preserved.

Every hole at Hualalai is appended by an ocean view with the best sightings saved for the last three holes. After battling the usual stiff breeze on the 440-yard, dogleg right 16th, the par-3, 164-yard, 17th sets up right alongside the crashing Pacific waves and, as such, will keep you gazing as long as possible before attempting your tee shot into a one- or two-club wind over lava rocks.

WAIKOLOA. Continuing along the highway past immense blankets of crusty rock lands you at a 546-hectare Pacific playground, Waikoloa Beach Resort, resting over the lava flow from the Mauna Loa eruption in 1859.

Once entering this enormous retreat, the road leads by a variety of shops, galleries and restaurants before confronting a 25-hectare oceanfront Hilton Waikoloa Village. It offers the most rooms (1,240) of any resort on Hawaii. But thanks to its own monorail





system and canal boats that connect the three separate low-rise towers, there is never a problem getting around in comfort.

Along with entertaining activity amenities like giant-sized pools, equipped with waterslides, paddling in a 1.5-hectare lagoon and Dolphin Quest (only hotel in Hawaii with a dolphin encounter), golf is a major asset at this quintessential Hawaiian experience with two 18-hole choices – the Beach Course and the Kings' Course.

BEACH COURSE. The 6,566-yard Beach Course, designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr., weaves a colorful path through lava beds with strategically placed water features and 74 bunkers guarding the greens. It's classic Hawaiian golf with risk-reward opportunities. And if you're carrying a camera, No. 7 provides an upside as one of the most photographed holes throughout Hawaii.

The green sits on a lava peninsula, framed by a sweet curve of coconut palms, while waves crash on the rocks below to send sea spray billowing into the air. During the winter months, this may be the premier golf spot to cast your eyes on a breaching whale.

KINGS' COURSE. On the adjoining Kings' Course, golfers won't be treated to any magnificent ocean views but they will be tested

by a Tom Weiskopf/Jay Morrish layout demanding respect with its length (7,064 yards), six lakes, and 83 bunkers.

With a collection of Weiskopf-signature short par-4s (327-yard 5th and 332-yard 13th) plus the ever-present trade winds, there's enough challenge to get any golfer's attention.

Due to enormity of this resort, there is also an extensive selection of dining options but the one that got my attention was Roy's Waikoloa in the Queen's Marketplace, which came recommended by the congenial general manager, Arnie McLain.

FUSION CUISINE. Since his first Hawaii location on Oahu in 1988, chef Roy Yamaguchi has been serving Hawaiian fusion cuisine combining the island's best local ingredients and artfully composed dishes that are as pleasing to the eye as they are to the stomach. I feasted on a sampling of Roy's classics such as of spicy ahi roll, teppanyaki Szechuan shrimp and grass-fed Kulana filet mignon.

Without having to return to the main highway and just a chip down the beach, neighboring Mauna Lani Resort serves another 36 holes on an oceanfront platter. This golfer's feast doesn't disappoint, whether playing the Francis H. I'i Brown North or South, both sculpted by Robin Nelson.



NORTH AND SOUTH. The South, built on the 16th-century Kaniku lava flow, was the first to open in 1981. For a number of years during the 1990s, it played host to the Senior Skins games with the likes of Trevino, Nicklaus, Palmer and Watson taking aim at the pots of cash.

Contributing to the overload of sensory distractions while navigating the course's 6,924 yards is hole No. 15, an oceanside par-3 requiring your tee shot to rise over the surf and sometimes through treacherous winds.

The sister North Course is tucked within a myriad of lava fields and kiawe (mesquite) forests. Created in 1988, it emphasizes rolling fairways with all 18 holes inland and is somewhat sheltered from the coastal winds.

THE FAIRMONT ORCHID. For a change in accommodation atmosphere from the grandeur of Waikoloa, adjacent the Francis H. I'i Brown courses lies The Fairmont Orchid nestled in a quiet cove on the north end of the Kohala Coast.

While the 540 oceanfront rooms and suites are appointed in the luxurious Fairmont fashion, it's the exterior that makes the Orchid stand out. No matter where you roam, the 13-hectare tropical grounds are beautifully designed – all the way down to

the crescent-shaped beach, where you may be lucky enough to encounter the native green sea turtles basking on the shoreline every afternoon.

OCEANFRONT SEAT. When it's time to dine at the Fairmont Orchid, guests also get the comfort of an oceanfront seat. While sitting at tables under swaying palms surrounded by beautiful gardens and just steps from the Pacific, Brown's Beach House delivers classic Hawaiian cuisine as amazing as the open-air ambience with live music playing in the background.

With a seasonal menu consisting of items ranging from kabocha prawns, ahi poke, Kona Kampachi, wild boar to lava flow bread pudding, every ingredient is sourced locally by chef Hubert Des Marais, an avid horticulturalist.

ROKEFELLER. At the end of the Kohala Coast golf trail is the development that gave birth to resort golf in Hawaii. Following a visit in the 1950s to a remote piece of property adjacent the crystal clear waters and white sands of Kauna'oa Bay, financier and philanthropist Laurance S. Rockefeller (grandson of American business magnate, John D. Rockefeller), fulfilled his vision to create Mauna Kea Resort.



However, lacking any golf expertise, he brought in Robert Trent Jones, Sr., to survey the terrain. As the two stood on a craggy bluff, the architect asked if he could create a golf course. Jones, Sr. replied, "Mr. Rockefeller, if you allow me to build a golf course here, this will be the most beautiful hole in the world."

That exact spot was transformed into the par-3, 272-yard, third hole and christened on December 8, 1964, with a televised match featuring golf's Big Three – Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player.

A KODAK MOMENT. This legendary hole, one of the golf world's premier Kodak spots, demands a tee shot that begs nerves of steel and confidence from both professional and amateur golfers attempting to conquer an intimidating body of water and crashing waves separating the tee box and putting surface.

Given its setting, Nicklaus claimed it was a hole that could not be manufactured. Indeed, all 18 holes are cleverly integrated into the contours of the land, a primary feature of Mauna Kea's ultimate greatness.

Since its creation and with the opening of the hotel one year later, the 7,370-yard layout (completely restored by Rees Jones in 2008) has remained the Big Kahuna by which all Hawaiian golf courses are judged.

That includes its adjoining sister course, the Arnold Palmer/Ed Seay-designed Hapuna GC (1992), 6,875-yard layout. It begins at sea level and rises to 700 feet throughout rugged desert terrain on the slopes of Mauna Kea, the world's tallest mountain (9,966 meters) when measured from the ocean floor to the peak.

While taking advantage of such an astounding variety of golf on Hawaii, I also allowed for plenty of beach time with eyes fixated on the Big Blue, preferably with a beverage in grasp. While doing so, I couldn't help but wonder if I were an octopus... "I'd ask my friends to come and see an octopus's garden with me." After all, even a multi-armed marine mollusk deserves to live the dream. **GGM**

GOOD TO KNOW

GETTING THERE

Flights from London Heathrow are available via Virgin Atlantic (www.virgin-atlantic.com), United (www.united.com), and Hawaiian Airlines (www.hawaiianairlines.com)

GOLF COURSES

- Hualalai Golf Course
Available for hotel guests and members only
www.fourseasons.com/hualalai/services_and_amenities/resort_activities/course
- Francis H. I'i Brown South and North Courses
www.maunalani.com/golf/hawaii-golf-courses
- Waikoloa Beach and Kings' Course
<http://www.waikoloabeachgolf.com>
- Mauna Kea Golf Course
www.princeresortshawaii.com/mauna-kea-golf-course/index.php
- Hapuna Golf Course
www.princeresortshawaii.com/hapuna-beach-prince-hotel/hapuna-golf.phppackages.php

HOTELS

- Hilton Waikoloa Village
www.hiltonwaikoloavillage.com
- Four Seasons Resort Hualalai at Historic Kaupulehu
www.fourseasons.com/hualalai
- The Fairmont Orchid
www.fairmont.com/orchid-hawaii
- Mauna Lani Bay Hotel & Bungalows
www.maunalani.com
- Mauna Kea Beach Resort
www.princeresortshawaii.com/mauna-kea-beach-hotel/index.php
- Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel
www.princeresortshawaii.com/hapuna-beach-prince-hotel/index.php

TOURIST INFORMATION

www.gohawaii.com/en/big-island/about

