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Ufomind Places

Report from Fantasy Island

A Brief Guide to Kauai, Hawaii

By Glenn Campbell (Las Vegas, Nov. 1998)

In October 1998, we vacationed for five days on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, which is supposed to be the most rugged and wild of the chain. It is a true "Fantasy Island" with perfect climate, pleasant ambiance and plenty to see and do. We'll definitely return someday.

On our visit, we relied on a single tourist guide, The Ultimate Kauai Guidebook, which is available from us at:

<http://www.ufomind.com/catalog/isbn/9639429/4/>

Although we had other guidebooks in our possession, we didn't use them, as this one provided everything we needed. The notes below can be considered annotations to the guidebook, providing details on things that are of special interest to us.

I consider myself a jaded traveller who has "been there, done that" all over the world, but I still found Kauai interesting

and exotic. Part of its appeal (to me) is that although the landscape and culture are interesting, you still have all of the amenities and convenience of America. Although it sounds like a cliché, we found the people friendly and felt very "at home" there.

With a population of only about 40,000 people, it is easy to be alone on Kauai. Only the coast is built up. Away from the coast, the island is very wild.

Supplies and Lodging

Since we are budget travellers, we braced for the worst, having heard that everything in Hawaii is expensive. In fact, we found prices very reasonable: We saw no major differences from mainland prices apart from gasoline (which is about 30-40% higher). The first thing that greeted us in Lihue (the main town, where the airport is located) was the huge new Wal-Mart, where we bought almost everything we needed for the week. The Wal-Mart is especially well-stocked in all the items that tourists want, most notably camping gear and snorkeling equipment, at mainland prices. There seemed no sense in renting snorkeling equipment when we could buy it for only a little more.

There are also two non-profit thrift stores in Lihue, one in the center of town and a Salvation Army store on the road from Lihue to Nawiliwili. Here you might find suitcases, blankets and kitchenware for camping.

Restaurant prices seemed reasonable, and most of the fast-food chains are represented (with the same 99-cent specials).

Of course, renting a car is essential. It would be difficult to get around the island without one. There are many roads on in the interior (mainly on the extension of Kaumoo Road/Route 580) where a jeep would be useful, but we opted for an ordinary mid-size car. We took the car on some extremely rugged roads, in violation of the rental agreement, and we don't necessarily recommend this to others. We survived and found the mid-size the best choice, but you must use your own judgement. Being stuck on one of those remote roads would have been awkward.

With hotel rooms at the resorts averaging \$150-\$250/night, we worried about finding an inexpensive place to stay. It turns out there was no problem. We stayed most of the time at the Tip Top Motel on a side street of Lihue (listed in the guidebook). This was a simple but clean cinderblock structure with chickens out front. We felt comfortable and safe there and the cost was only about \$45/day including tax. (There was no need for reservations when we were there, but you should reserve if you come during a peak period.)

We also tried camping, but we found the campgrounds disappointing. There are about a dozen campgrounds on the island, run either by the state or the county. The fee is about \$3.00 per person per night, paid at either the state or county parks office in Lihue (so you have to decide where you will camp before you get there). Since there are no RV's on the island, everyone tents. The guidebook provides reservation info, but reservations weren't necessary when we were there. We paid for a county campground, but didn't stay there. Most of the county campgrounds are little more than open fields beside the beach. They looked like the hang-out of the beach-bum crowd, with little privacy, and we didn't feel comfortable. We ended up camping off an unused dirt road, and throughout our visit, we found plenty of places inland where you can camp discreetly without being seen. (You would have to scope out your site a couple of hours before nightfall.) If we stayed longer, we would alternate between camping and the Tip Top.

We went to local garage sales on the weekend. (Wherever you are, it is always a good way to mix with the locals, learn the geography and pick up cheap souvenirs.) We found a listing of garage sales in the local newspaper. To take home the stuff we bought, we bought a extra suitcase at the Salvation Army. We also shipped some of it home by parcel post.

The climate appears to be perfect year-round, requiring neither heat nor air conditioning. Some rain is to be expected almost every day on the windward (northeast) side of the island, but it doesn't last long. The water temperature is always perfect for swimming.

Sights

The northeastern half of the Island is very wet, with the volcano in the center being the wettest place on earth. (The coast, however, gets only moderate rainfall.) The southwestern half is very dry, almost a desert, and the coast there resembles the blander parts of California. The Waimea Canyon in the west is a big tourist draw, but because we come from the mainland southwest and are used to this Grand Canyon-like terrain we found it uninteresting. We spent most of our time in the northwestern half. We especially liked the rainforests.

Once you have explored the island in general, the main activities are hiking, beachcombing and snorkling. (We didn't have the budget for either flightseeing or scuba diving, and didn't miss them.) We could have spent two more weeks doing these things without getting bored. After that, we probably would have mastered the island and been ready to move on.

We visited at the beginning of winter, which is the high-surf season. This is great for surfers, but not good for snorkling. Because of the rough water, we were unable to snorkle on the North Shore, where the best reefs are supposed to be. For this reason, we will probably want to come in the summer when we return. We did snorkle at Poipu on the south shore and found it interesting enough, with coral, sea turtles and lots of pretty fish who love to eat Quaker oatmeal (squeezed out of a hole in a plastic bag).

For desert dwellers like us, the rainforest on the eastern side of the mountains was spectacular. Unlike the Amazon, there are no snakes or other poisonous critters to worry about. There were a few mosquitos, but not enough to be annoying.

We took the "Jungle Hike" described in the guidebook, but getting there on the dirt road (extension of Route 580) was a challenge. We used all of our off-road driving skill to manuever the rental car to the trailhead. (Mr. Hertz would kill us if he knew. You can drive only part-way if you prefer.) The Jungle Hike, which is quite short, is highly recommended, and there are several more hikes we would have wanted to take in this area if we had more time. Discreet camping in this area doesn't look like a problem.

Update March 1999 - We have added [Topographic Maps of Kauai](#) to our USGS maps offered for sale. The map for the jungle hike and other potential hikes east of the volcano is [Waialeale](#), covering the rim of the highest/wettest spot and eastward. We wish we had this map when we visited. Other useful maps for hiking are [Waimea Canyon](#) and [Haena](#).

Most of the beaches are the idyllic kind you see in travel brochures and in the movies. All beaches are public, although the private property adjoining them sometimes makes it difficult to find access. You need the guidebook to tell you how to get to many of the beaches. There are plenty of beaches where you will be completely alone in Paradise, and all of the beaches are far less crowded than Oahu.

The hike up the Na Pali Coast from Haena is supposed to be spectacular, but we had time to do only a small portion of it, which was pleasant enough.

We wouldn't want to live on Kuaui -- In spite of the excellent amenities, we would still feel isolated. -- but we desperately want to go back for further escape. Just as we were getting to know the island it was time to leave, and we would have wanted a couple more weeks to explore.

For links, see our Kauai page at <http://www.ufomind.com/place/us/hi/kauai/>

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