

A tropical sunset scene with palm trees and a beach. The sky is a mix of blue, purple, and orange, with the sun low on the horizon. The ocean is dark with some white foam from waves. Two palm trees are in the foreground, their silhouettes against the bright sky.

# Plan your Best vacation to the big Island of Hawaiï ever!

Where to stay and  
what to do on the  
big island

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# Plan Your Best Big Island Vacation Ever

## Where to Stay and What to Do On the Big Island

**Hi, I'm Lisa.** Find me here: <http://www.hawaii-lisa.com> - and find my other books here: <http://www.hawaii-lisa.com/answers/hawaii-guide-book/> There are 8 total and all are free. There's one for each island plus specialty books like getting married in Hawaii and visiting Hawaii for the first time visitors to Hawaii.

This ebooklet is an answer to many requests from people who really wanted some personal advice about their Big Island vacation.

**The book is free, you may give it away to anyone you like, but you may not change it in any way.**

**I Disclaim any Liability:** I have made every effort to ensure that this information was correct when I wrote or updated it, but I do not assume any liability to any party for any loss or damage caused by any errors or omissions, regardless of how they occurred. Nothing in this book is guaranteed.

Here's a site I like about Ocean safety in the islands:

<http://oceansafety.soest.hawaii.edu/>

Most everything in this book is **my opinion**, based on my preferences and resources and experiences. I hope my opinions help point you in the direction you most want to take based on your preferences and resources.

☺

# Aloha!

**So you're planning a vacation to the Big Island (Hawaii Island)** – congratulations! You are going to have SUCH FUN! First, you'll be flying in to either Kona International Airport at Keahole (KOA) or Hilo International Airport (ITO). You may find a direct flight, but if not, your airline will probably schedule your connecting flight from Honolulu for you. If you have to do it yourself, you can do so with either Hawaiian Airlines <http://www.hawaii-lisa.com/go/hawaiian-air.php> or Go! Airlines <http://www.iflygo.com/>

You may also want to consider checking the prices at [Hawaiian Airlines](#) for your flights to Hawaii. Sometimes they have great sales (mostly from near the west coast).

## My Favorites on the Big Island

**My favorite area:** Tough one on this really big island, but I'll say the Kohala Coast. This has two of my favorite beaches, Hapuna and the Mauna Kea Beach, and it's also got my favorite resort, the Hilton Waikoloa – a beautiful and fun place to visit whether you stay there or not!

**My favorite hotel:** This is easy – the Hilton Waikoloa. They've got Dolphin Quest, a great program for learning about dolphins – and if you want to spend the bucks, close encounters with them :-). The rooms are very nice, the pools with their slides and waterfalls are fantastic, there are several restaurants and lounges, tons to do, and you can ride around the place on the Disneyland-like free tram and boat shuttles. Also, they have a pretty lagoon and a cool art collection displayed around the pools, walkways and gardens.

**My favorite luau:** [Island Breeze](#). This is held on the historical royal grounds at King Kamehameha's Kona Beach Hotel. The pre-luau activities begin when the royal court paddles in from Kailua Bay and the conch shell is blow. You can learn fun Hawaiian crafts and get a Hawaiian "tattoo." The show features various dances of Polynesia, including hula of course, and concludes with the Samoan fire dance. The menu is traditional Hawaiian featuring the underground baked pig, fresh catch of the day and chicken.

**My favorite Activity:** Reeealy hard to choose just one, but I've narrowed it down to the [Fair Wind Snorkel Cruise](#) at Kealakekua Bay (where I got to [swim with dolphins!](#)) and the lava flow view hike when the lava's pouring over the cliff into the sea. For up to the minute lava updates, call the Kalapana Lava Viewing Hotline at (808) 961-8093 or the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park at (808) 985-6000.

For more general lava updates see here <http://www.hawaii-lisa.com/lavaupdate.html>

## Best Weather on the Big Island

Like all of Hawaii, the Big Island offers exceptionally good weather, especially on the west side.

Hawaii has two seasons: summer (May through October) and winter (November through April), and the temperatures change very little between these two seasons. Average daytime temperatures at sea level in the summer are 85°F and in the winter, 78°F. When the sun goes down temperatures at sea level rarely drop more than 5 to 10 degrees.

The weather does change quite a lot from region to region (the island has all but two of the world's eco-climates), especially when you travel upland. Bring a sweater if you go up to Volcano. You can even find snow here in the winter at the top of Mauna Kea!

Like all of the Hawaiian Islands, the Windward side (here, that is the Hilo and Puna side) gets most of the rain. Hilo is the rainiest city on Earth in fact. The Windward side is very lush and tropical, and most of the rain falls at night and early morning, although sometimes in the winter the rain will fall for days on end. The Leeward side (Kona and Kohala) is usually sunny at sea level, and when it rains, it is usually in the late afternoon. Kohala is desert like in its dryness, which makes for lots of sunny beach days!

The ocean waters here aren't too cold either. Surface temperatures average 74° to 77°F in the winter and 78° to 83°F, with the warmer temperatures found on the Kohala Coast – at Hapuna, you'll feel like you are in a heated swimming pool.

# Best Hotels on the Big Island

These are the best hotels in all of Hawaii Island, in my opinion.

*If you consistently find higher prices than what I have found, maybe prices are up due to high season or some other reason. You find the best fares during the off-peak season, late September through the first week of June. And exception to this is fares go up around Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, as well the days closely surrounding them and Spring Break.*

*You may find lower prices by bidding at Priceline and using Hotwire.com. This is all detailed below the tables. All listed prices are based on double occupancy. If you find lower prices than I've listed here, don't question it, just book it! ☺*

## Best Overall and Beachfront Hotels on the Big Island

Note that all with the exception of the Chalet Kilauea are beach front.

Hotel	Best Overall Aspects	Best daily price I have been able to find
Chalet Kilauea featuring the Inn at Volcano	In a mountain rainforest amidst cedar trees and giant ferns on the rim of one of the world's most active volcanoes. These properties include the famous Inn at Volcano. The properties – bungalows, bed and breakfast, boutique hotel and the Inn, are located at the entrance to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.	<a href="#">At website</a> : \$107 for a room at the deluxe Inn at Volcano. Less for some of the other properties.
Fairmont Orchid	For those seeking the height of luxury and pampering. Elegantly appointed with European-Hawaiian furnishings (think rich wood and crystal chandeliers in the elevators) and impeccably sculpted landscaping. World class golf. One of the spas has a sandy beach area for the children, and there's a night program for them too if you want time alone for romance. Not all ocean view rooms provide great ocean views, but this is the only drawback I could find. Located on the sunny Kohala Coast at a mostly calm, white sand beach.	\$199 at <a href="#">Expedia</a> .
Four Seasons Resort Hualalai at Historic Ka'upulehu	The ultimate resort for classic Hawaiian beauty, the Four Seasons is located in Kailua-Kona. Features include a full-day children's program (on the house), six beach-side pools (yes six), award-winning spa, Jack Nicklaus signature golf, a fantastic Hawaiian cultural center. Lots of several	\$495 at <a href="#">Expedia</a> .

	activities and ways to relax here!	
Hilo Hawaiian	Hilo is not known for its hotels, but this is the nicest one here. Comfortable, pretty rooms, although dated (1973). Located on beautiful Banyan Drive overlooking Coconut Island and right across the street from the peaceful Japanese-style Liliuokalani Park. Just a few minutes drive from airport, Rainbow Falls, historical downtown Hilo and the highway to Volcano.	\$89 at <a href="#">Expedia</a> .
Hilton Waikoloa	Luxury for families! The pools and slides are great. There's no real beach here, but there's a nice, man-made lagoon beach on the ocean and an inland one where you can float around. Sunny Kohala beaches like Hapuna are just a few minutes away. Dolphin Quest has wonderful dolphin encounter programs. Lots of restaurants and shops, amazingly beautiful grounds and art, and a tram and boats to shuttle you around.	\$189 at <a href="#">Expedia</a> .
<a href="#">Keahou Beach Resort</a>	Right on Keahou beach with the only rooms on the island that extend over the water. Oceanview rooms offer fantastic scenery. "Breakfast with a View" rooms include a full buffet. The hotel was renovated in 2007. Very nice landscaping, pool, spas and restaurant.	\$130 at website for "Breakfast with a View" rooms.
<a href="#">Kona Nalu</a>	One of the nicest hotels on the ocean side of Alii Drive in Kailua-Kona. Huge rooms, 2 bedroom/2 bath with private laundry, full kitchens, lanai, and each one with an awesome view of the ocean. Right on a pretty white sand beach, but large rocks beyond the beach prevent safe ocean entry. There's a tiny pool but it is large enough for this 15-unit hotel.	\$190 at website.
Mauna Kea Beach Hotel	Newly renovated, this Kohala hotel fronts the prettiest white sand beach on the island where you can sail, swim or snorkel. Beautifully appointed rooms furnished with teak. Large, ocean-view swimming pool, amazing Pacific-Asian art, full-service health spa, and plentiful activities, lu'au and world class golf (Conde' Nast calls them "two of the best golf courses in the world.")	\$296 at <a href="#">Expedia</a>
Mauna Lani Bay Hotel	Paradise! Centered around an open air, tropical atrium, the resort is one of the Big Island's best. It's integrated well with the historical environment too, which includes ancient fish ponds and "Secret Pond," and it faces two white sand beaches, one that is usually calm. The spa is outdoors under thatched roofs open to the ocean breeze and is	\$274 at <a href="#">Expedia</a>

heavenly. There's a children's program and jacuzzi for them too.

## Best Family Hotels on the Big Island

Hotel	Best thing about it for families	Best daily price I've been able to find
Hilton Waikoloa	The pools with the slides, waterfall and swinging bridge are a star attraction for families. So is Dolphin Quest, the kids' program with a variety of activities for various ages, including dolphin encounters for some. Rooms are nice, and the Disney-like boats and trams take you around the grounds.	\$189 at <a href="#">Expedia</a> .
Four Seasons	Complimentary full-day children's program, six beach-side pools (with waterfalls and snorkeling in one that opens to the ocean water) and numerous activities. Four Seasons caters to children with special amenities like child-size bathrobes and a "milk and cookies" welcome. They arrange babysitters so parents can have a night out.	\$495 at <a href="#">Expedia</a> .
Mauna Lani Bay Hotel	Children get their own kid-friendly jacuzzi here and an awesome children's camp. Also fish and turtle feeding, sand volleyball, snorkeling, ocean front pools.	\$274 at <a href="#">Expedia</a>
<a href="#">Keahou Beach Resort</a>	Tide pools for exploring, and if you're in one of the rooms that extend over the water, the kids can view fish and turtles right from the room. Just steps away is one of the island's very best snorkeling spots, Kahaluu Beach. Family-friendly dining.	\$130 at website for "Breakfast with a View" rooms.
Kona Coast Resort	Large rooms – kitchen, living room, bedrooms, bath – they're all huge! Deep soaking tubs with separate showers, private washer/dryer, bbq, children's pool. Supervised children's activities/child care and playground. Not at a beach though, but it's 1/2 mile to a snorkeling (rocky) beach and two miles to sandy beaches.	\$113 <a href="#">Priceline</a>
Sheraton Keauhou	While there's no beach (cliffs and rocks) this hotel is really into family, fitness and fun. Multi-level water feature includes a 200-foot waterslide, waterfalls, a sandy bottomed children's pool, more. The fitness room's state of the art, and the supervised children's center has lots of games from basketball to PlayStations), craft room, outdoor movies more. Scuba in the pool is offered to kids as young as age 5. Free trolley to Kailua and beaches.	\$159 at <a href="#">Expedia</a> .
<a href="#">Casa De Emdeko</a>	No ocean access, but there's a sandy beach and 2 pools (1 saltwater). Condos ending in 19 and 38 have lanais facing the ocean. Full kitchens, a/c, bbq.	\$105 for 1/1 unit at website.

## Best Budget-Priced Hotels on the Big Island

Many of the following hotels don't list with [Expedia](#) and [Priceline](#). If you call them directly for reservations, be sure to ask "Do you have any discounts that could bring my rate down?" You could get a "Yes" and a better rate off the bat.

I also highly recommend bidding on Priceline. Many of these smaller operations do not sell rooms to Priceline, and so if you are bidding on Priceline you will normally get something like a resort or a 2 to 4 star hotel. Remember, you can't pick your hotel if you bid, just your desired star level.

You'll have the most luck with getting low bids accepted on Priceline when the hotels are hurting for visitors, but try anytime. You could really get some good deals.

Most of the following are condos and include full kitchens, private washer/dryer, pool and barbecue. The "Best Prices" are based on Expedia, Priceline (lowest prices without bidding) and the hotel's site.

<b>Hotel</b>	<b>Best Aspect</b>	<b>Best Price I have found</b>
<a href="#">Casa De Emdeko</a>	1 bedroom/1 bath and 2/2 condos with full kitchens, bbq, sandy beach, and some with ocean views.	\$110 at website.
<a href="#">Hale Kona Kai</a>	Awesome ocean views of Kailua Bay from all units, pool, fully equipped kitchens, 1/1, bbq.	\$140 at website, \$10 extra per person after first two.
<a href="#">Keahou Beach Resort</a>	Renovated in 2007. Very nice landscaping. Pool, spas, restaurant. A few steps away from snorkeling at Kahaluu Beach. Some rooms extend over the water. Lots of tide pools.	\$130 at website for "Breakfast with a View" rooms.
<a href="#">Kona Isle</a>	Ocean front, no access but has pool and nice sandy beach with barbecues. 1 and 2 bedroom condos with full kitchens. Small. Super clean.	\$99 (2009) and many rent 5 nights get two free specials for 2010 with rates starting at \$105.
<a href="#">Kona Magic Sands</a>	Nestled between two beach parks. Small ocean view studios, some newly remodeled. Pool, bbq, full kitchens.	\$115 at website.
<a href="#">Kona Tiki</a>	Back to the 50's it is here at this vintage Kona hotel (built in 1953). All rooms have amazing ocean views as does the ocean front pool that is open 24 hrs. No tv, phones or laundry (scrub boards and clotheslines?). Barbecue with the neighbors – very, very friendly atmosphere with lots of returning visitors and great	\$72 (standard), \$96 (kitchenette). \$11 per person after first two.

	reviews in travel guides. One mile from Kailua Town.	
<a href="#">Manago Hotel</a>	Old Hawaii feel, built in 1916. Upland Captain Cook with views of Kealakekua Bay. Spotlessly clean. Friendly. TV in lobby No phones. Their restaurant and home-style cooking is very popular with locals.	\$59 (non smoking with private bath) at website.
Sea Village	Walk to Kailua Town. Ocean front (no access), pool, spa, bbq, one to two bedrooms with full kitchens. Some of the condos have a/c.	\$96 for 1 bedroom, \$112 for 2 bedrooms at <a href="#">Expedia</a> .
<a href="#">Dolphin Bay Hotel</a>	Located in a Hilo residential area. Lush botanical gardens. No ocean view but the sound of a nearby stream is soothing. Very friendly. Clean, Hawaii decorated studio and 1-2 bedroom units. Bbq, full kitchens, cable TV, coin-op laundry, lanai on some. Phone in lobby.	\$99 (one queen bed), \$149 (one bedroom) and more options. Weekly rates discussed on request.

## Best Hotels for Romance and Weddings on the Big Island

Hilton Waikoloa	Beautiful, oceanfront grounds, romantic lagoon with cabanas, waterfall, dolphins, hammocks, sunsets and nice rooms. Wedding packages and customized planning available.	\$189 at <a href="#">Expedia</a> .
Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort	A multi-level pool with waterfalls, open-air spa, Customizable wedding packages. Variety of wedding locations including chapel, garden, sunset cliff.	\$159 at <a href="#">Expedia</a> .
Mauna Kea Beach Hotel	The Mauna Kea's Romance Specialists help you plan your wedding, anniversary, renewal of vows or other romantic event. From intimate, barefoot ceremonies on the island's prettiest beach to extravagant weddings with the ambiance of Hawaiian royalty, The Mauna Kea's setting is also very romantic (detailed in Best Overall table above).	\$296 at <a href="#">Expedia</a>
Mauna Lani Bay Hotel	Private beach cabanas, open air spas under thatched roofs, Kohala sunsets, a tropical atrium with flowing, ponds, beautiful gardens, naturally heated lava rock sauna, amazing views of the Big Island's mountains and Pacific...What can I say? It's romantic! Wedding planners work with you to design your magical day. Small and intimate to large gala affairs. Beach weddings.	\$274 at <a href="#">Expedia</a>
Fairmont Orchid	Luxurious hotel with rich teak wood furnishing and gorgeous crystal chandeliers makes you feel like Hawaiian royalty. Complete wedding planning and a plethora of location choices from a beach with swaying palms and tiki torches to an elegant ballroom.	\$199 at <a href="#">Expedia</a> .

## Bidding on Hawaii Travel at Priceline and Shopping at Deep Discount Sites, Expedia and Hotwire

Shopping for travel reservations through [Expedia](#), [Priceline](#), and [Hotwire](#) is a great way to save money on hotels and sometimes even flights to Hawaii. You can often get even better prices than ones in the charts. I have personally bid and got \$55 at the Royal Kona Resort and \$120 at the Waikoloa Marriott. My friend got *\$110 at the Waikoloa Hilton* and \$85 at the Hapuna Prince. (All of these hotels are on the Big Island.) And I know someone who bid and received a roundtrip flight from San Francisco to Honolulu for \$250. These are good deals!

Oh, and don't forget car rentals. You can get great deals on car rentals by bidding.

The only issue with bidding for hotels is that you won't know what hotel you get until you are locked in to paying for it. You just specify a certain star level or class of hotel.

And the only issue with bidding for flights is that you won't be able to specify an exact time, but they do tell you it will be sometime between x morning hour and x evening hour, so not too bad. I have a friend who got a roundtrip flight Los Angeles to Honolulu for \$179 through Hotwire.

At Hotwire you can get their regular low rates while specifying your hotel, airline/flight time and car model, but to give you the deep discounts Hotwire gets from their partners that they're not allowed to publicize, you won't know the names until after you reserve. As mentioned above though, you can choose general times, star rating on hotels, size of car, etc.

### So How Should I Bid on Hawaii Travel?

**Hotels:** I like to decide on a hotel I like, then find out what its star level is. Then on [Priceline](#), I go directly to naming my own price, and during the process Priceline will tell you what the average price is for that star level. I then bid half of that.

The Priceline website will have a ticker of recently accepted rates in the area you are searching for that is helpful.

An awesome resource is the [bidding for travel](#) forum. If you scroll down on the home page you'll see three Hawaii forums, based on which islands you are planning to visit. People bid, and then come here and post their accepted and rejected rates.

I have heard that the posted "median retail prices" at Priceline are sometimes inaccurate. I don't worry about this in Hawaii because I am so familiar with what the hotels cost here. You, however, may want to check prices on the website of a few hotels that are the same star level as you want. You can then try to bid 50% of that.

**Rental Cars** – \$15 a day is generally a good place to start, and check the recent winning bids on Priceline.

**Flights** – I like to bid 50% of whatever the going rate is and then bid up in \$50 increments if that is refused.

## Most Fun, Must-Do, Activities and Things to Do on the Big Island

This is my personal favorites list of the most exciting and fun things to do on the Big Island:

- [Atlantis Submarine Kona](#) – Featured on National Geographic. The Big Island's tour takes you down to visit underwater gardens of coral teeming with schools of tropical fish. You may also see manta rays and sharks.
- **Take the [Fair Wind Snorkel Cruise at Kealahou Bay](#).** This is a must-do, in my opinion. You will snorkel in a pristine marine preserve and if you in the morning, chances are you will see dolphins. They also offer whale watch cruises.
- **Play with and pet a dolphin at [Dolphin Quest](#).** You do not need to be staying at the Waikoloa Hilton to enjoy this wonderful (and

educational) experience, but slots fill up fast so sign up as early as you can. They book up to a year in advance.

- **See [Waipio Valley from Horseback](#)** – Combine fun horseback riding with a tour of this legendary and beautiful valley. You might even see some of the wild horse herd!

## **My Favorite Inexpensive/Free Activities on the Big Island**

- **View the Lava!** – When it's flowing into the sea, you can, from the Kalapana Viewing area, safely view the red hot molten lava pouring over the cliffs. The view point is about 1/2 mile away from the lava, so binoculars or a camera with good telephoto for optimal viewing. This is best viewed at night so also bring a flashlight (and good walking shoes!). For lava updates, call the Kalapana Lava Viewing Hotline at (808) 961-8093 or the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park at (808) 985-6000.
- If you aren't staying at the Hilton Waikoloan, you can still tour the hotel and see the dolphins. Just park nearby, walk in through the gate and start looking around. People come in for just the restaurants and dolphin quest all the time.
- **Explore [Hawaii Volcanoes National Park](#)** – This is the island's main attraction, and there's lots to do and see up here – steaming craters, a walk-through lava tube cave, rainforests and moonscapes, a volcanic science and cultural museum, the famous Kilauea Lodge, a fantastic visitor's center, lots of hiking trails and more. Most of the National Park activities are wheelchair accessible. It can get chilly up here so bring a sweater. Warm up at the lodge's lounge with hot cocoa while you look out at the now active Halema`uma`u crater (spewing ash and steam but occasionally lava) and enjoy the big lava rock, fireplace (grab a free brochure on its history).
- **Kayak Kealakekua Bay** – Take a guided kayak tour to the pristine marine preserve and snorkel the coral reefs. [Ocean](#)

[Safari Kayak Adventures](#) offers "Early Riser Dolphin Quest Tours." Or check out the sea caves of [Keauhou Bay](#).

- **Visit [Rainbow Falls](#)** in Hilo – For the best chance of seeing a rainbow over the 80-foot falls, go early when the sun and morning mist make their magic.
- **Tour Kona Coffee Farms.** These two can be fun and interesting for kids also: [Mountain Thunder](#) and the Kona Coffee Living History Farm hosted by the [Kona Historical Society](#).
- **Visit [Pu`uhonua o Honaunau National Historical Park](#)** Also known as the City of Refuge, this is very peaceful, beautiful and if you're into Hawaiian history, interesting.
- **Puakō Petroglyph Archeological Preserve** – This contains over 3,000 petroglyphs. It's a short hike from Mauna Lani Resort, which also has some to view. Non-guests can also access via the resort and pick up a map and brochure.
- [Akaka Falls State Park](#) – On the Hamakua Coast (the Big Island's answer to Maui's Hana Highway), this includes a very pretty hike through lush gardens and over a stream with the famous 400-foot waterfall waiting for you at the end. Because it's a big visitor attraction with an unguarded parking lot, don't leave valuables in your car.
- [Hawaii Tropical Botanical Garden](#) Also located near Hilo on the Hamakua Coast, this well maintained nature preserve is a must see if you're into flowers and walking paths that meander among waterfalls and provide sweeping ocean vistas. Over 2,000 species including orchids (Hilo is the "orchid capital" of the world.
- [Parker Ranch](#) – One of the largest and most historical ranches in the United States, Parker is home to the paniolo, the Hawaiian cowboy, and has a variety of visitors attractions including their [Historic Homes Tour](#).

- [Hulilee Palace](#) – Large, elegant museum in Kailua-Kona that was once the vacation home of King David Kalakaua (the Merrie Monarch), Queen Liliuokalani and other Hawaiian royalty.

## Best Big Island Beaches

Many visitors who don't leave Kona are disappointed in the small pockets of sand they find there. A good deal of the island's coast is rocky. The "Volcano Island" being so much newer than its neighbor islands doesn't have as many of the kind of beaches you'd expect from Hawaii. Why? Beaches and their sand are made by *hundreds of thousands of years* of ocean surf pounding against shells, coral and rock. The Big Island is the youngest of the islands, so beaches haven't had that much time to develop. Many parts of the coast is younger than 1,000 years old, while Kilauea Volcano still adds hundreds of acres of new land a year. The Big Island has many other incredible attributes that more than make up for this lack of beaches, but hey, we have a few really nice beaches too, including ones that make national and world wide "Best Beach" lists!

Don't hit all of these unless you are really into beaches. Just pick a few and take your time ☺

**Note:** In Hawaii, all beaches are public. Anywhere that there is water, there must be public access to the shoreline. If you are in a residential neighborhood and want to check out the beach, just look for the blue signs that say "shoreline access" and follow the path, even if it's directly between two houses. Sometimes, though, residential beaches do not have restrooms or showers.

Don't worry about directions too much. You can see the ocean from almost everywhere, and there are signs designating the beaches. Here's a link to [Google's Big Island Map](#). And here's the [Hawaii Ocean Safety Map](#).

The surf conditions in Hawaii somewhat follow the seasons. During Hawaii's summer (May - October), surf from the south occasionally has high surf conditions. During Hawaii's winter, surf from the north has higher surf.

<b>Beach</b>	<b>About</b>	<b>Directions</b>
<b>Hapuna - Kohala</b>	This 1/2 mile stretch of white and golden sands is the quintessential Hawaiian beach. It's been rated the "Number 1 Beach in America" by <i>Conde Nast Traveler</i> and is a Dr. Beach national winner. You'll find here clear, turquoise waters, shade and sun, snorkeling, body boarding for little ones and experts (rentals here) a snack stand and gorgeous scenery. In the winter, the surf can get high but usually the shallows are still safe. Check with a lifeguard when in doubt.	About 30 miles north of Kona on Highway 19 just before the Hapuna Prince Hotel.
<b>Papakolea Beach (Green Sands Beach) – South Point, Kau – Green Sand</b>	I like this beach for its novelty. Dr. Beach loves it for the volcanic olivine crystals that provide the green tint. It's the only truly green sand beach in Hawaii, and its on the South Point coast where the first Polynesians landed. Currents too treacherous for swimming.	Take Highway 11 to Ka Lae (South Point) and drive about 12 miles to the end of the road. Then hike the 2 1/2 miles to the beach. For more details: <a href="#">Green Sand Beach</a>
<b>Punalu'u Black Sand Beach – Kau – Black Sand</b>	I like this one for its novelty also – and turtles. Hawaiian green sea turtles bask in the sun here, and the hawksbill turtles lay their eggs at night during nesting season. Please don't touch the turtles; it can make them sick. The sparkling black sand here is totally black, and there are lots of coves with turtles. The main beach is pristine, turtles are always basking on it. The ocean here is cold (for Hawaii) due to springs. Also a Dr. Beach fave and quite beautiful.	South of Kona near the 63 mile marker of Highway 11 (and about 20 miles south of Volcano National Park).
<b>Ahalanui Park (The Hot Pond) - Puna</b>	<p>Not really a beach, but it's on the ocean and has a sandy bottom. Naturally heated by the volcano (geothermal). Busy weekends and holidays. The pond is larger than a typical backyard in-the-ground swimming pool and is surrounded by palms trees. Very pretty! There's a lifeguard and snack stand.</p> <p>The hot ponds will always be special to me because my son taught himself to swim there at the age of 2. It was awesome to watch, and very comfortable because it was always warm.</p> <p>Some people worry that since it's warm, bacteria will grow. We never had any problems. I wouldn't go if I had big cuts in my skin, and we always washed our ears out with hydrogen peroxide afterwards, mostly because it was fun.</p>	<p>Near Kapoho. Directions are a little complicated, and there are two popular routes. Here's a Google map from <a href="#">Hilo to Ahalanui</a></p> <p>We travel the more scenic route: Take 132 and just past the Lava Tree Park where the road forks, stay to the right. This will be Pohohiki Road. Take it all the way to the ocean where it ends at Isaac Hale Park and Pohohiki Boat Ramp. Turn left and you're there in just a couple minutes.</p>

<b>Kauna'oa Beach (Mauna Kea Beach) - Kohala</b>	This white sand crescent beach is the prettiest beach on the island in my opinion, voted "The best beach in the world" twice by <i>Conde Nast</i> , and among Dr. Beach's favorites. Get to the hotel early (by 9 a.m.) because they limit the beach parking to 30 at a time. <i>Wonderful</i> snorkeling with lots of coral and tropical fish.	Take the Mauna Kea Beach hotel turnoff from Highway 19, about 31 miles north of Kona.  They may not let you in if all the spaces have filled up. Try early in the morning or later in the afternoon.
<b>Richardson's Ocean Park – Hilo – Black Sand</b>	A favorite of local families, college students and tour buses, the park consists of three black sand beaches and the best snorkeling on this side of the island with some colorful coral and loads of tropical fish. The protected reef is about 100 yards from shore. Also popular with body boarders. Look for huge sea turtles around the rocks at the middle beach. There's a small brackish water pond in the back that kids enjoy.  The Punaluu black sand beach is definitely preferred over this black sand beach, but if you are in Hilo anyway, this is worth a look.	Take Kalaniana'ola (Hwy 120) out of Hilo, heading towards Volcano Hwy and Banyan Drive. Cross Volcano Hwy and drive on about 5 miles past the fish ponds. Look for the sign just past Leleiwi Park.

While the "Volcano Island" isn't known for its beaches there are some beauties here, including some of the best in Hawaii and even the world. The beaches above are just a short list of my favorites, but you may find many more that strike your fancy as you drive along the Big Island's coastline.

## Best Big Island Guidebook

The [Big Island Revealed](#) is my favorite guidebook. Absolutely straight talk and real opinions from 2 people who have done everything they review. The aerial photos of the hotels are awesome for choosing a hotel. I love this guidebook.

## In Conclusion

So that's it – have a wonderful, wonderful vacation! The Big Island is an awesome place, and you really can't go wrong here. Drop me a line if you want to share any stories or ask any questions: [lisakleinweber@gmail.com](mailto:lisakleinweber@gmail.com)

Aloha!